



Drylands management for addressing poverty

Arjumand Nizami ¹

Sahibzada Irfanullah ²

Intercooperation organized a National workshop on “Sharing Experiences on Dryland Management and Rehabilitation in Pakistan” from 21st – 23rd June 2005 in Peshawar. The participants included researchers, development workers, policy makers and community members from government, non-governmental and local grassroots organizations working in dry areas of the country. The purpose of the workshop was to stimulate discussion and knowledge sharing, contribute to formulation of adequate policies and put into practice new innovative approaches and technologies for improvement of the livelihood of the poor. This article reflects on major discussions held in the workshop. A detailed workshop report is available with IC on request.



In a remote village of Thal, Ghafoor lives with his four children and wife. Ghafoor had seen his father making a living from crops on a small piece of land and rearing of sheep and goats. However, Ghafoor is not fortunate enough to avail two sources of living i.e. agriculture and livestock. He is now only left with the second option as frequent droughts have made it quite uncertain to crop on rainfed land. This is unfortunate, as the pastures used by the entire

community since long are going through a rapid degradation process due to increasing population of livestock. He is struggling with his silvo-pastoral way of life, as the range vegetation is insufficient to support livestock kept by the village community. It is quite predictable that he will soon be losing this resource, which in return would jeopardize the living of his family. Taking Ghafoor’s case, it is not difficult to understand the people’s dependency on dry lands resources and consequently the effect of resource degradation upon their livelihoods. Like Ghafoor, there are more than 3 billion people globally, living in drylands that cover 40% of earth’s surface in the form of hyper arid, arid and semiarid areas (Source: FAO-IIASA, 2003). Although the geophysical and socio-economic conditions may vary between dry zones, it is a common fact that the people living in these zones are poorer as compared to other areas and their livelihoods depend mostly on extremely limited resources.



Arid and semi-arid region is the biggest climatic region that covers 53% of the country’s total area (Source: National Conservation Strategy of Pakistan-IUCN). Most parts of Sind and

¹Programme, Programme Coordinator Pakistan-Intercooperation
²NRM Coordinator, FFSP Intercooperation

Balochistan, and Southern parts of Punjab and NWFP are falling within this climatic belt. The annual rainfall in most parts of the country is less than 250mm (Source: Annual Normal Rainfall Map – Pakistan Meteorological Department). Major land-uses in this region include rangelands (48%) and subsistence rainfed agriculture (5%).



The land in dry areas becomes a basic production unit under severe climatic conditions where other options seldom exist. The productive potential of the dryland is restricted by extreme hot and cold weathers, shortage of water and loss of soil fertility. Due to low production and regeneration potential, the land is not able to support ever-increasing



population of human beings and livestock in terms of their daily food requirements. Rangelands in Pakistan are usually degraded due to overstocking beyond their carrying capacity, whereas rainfed croplands are increasingly being abandoned due to prolonged drought periods. These adverse factors continuously undermine the livelihoods of poor families. Hence there is a need to understand the complexity of resource management options in drylands and its interface with livelihoods of the dependent communities.



The focus on poverty reduction in Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Pakistan has given new urgency to our policies. The dryland communities are now receiving more attention than in the past, as poverty is very prominent in these areas. For many years, governments have debated the merits of investing resources in areas on low agricultural potential such as drylands. Dryland communities are often portrayed as victims of drought but at the same time guilty of causing environmental damage. Dryland farmers are often seen as unavoidably poor and with a low capacity for production. This does not always reflect their true image. Policy makers must be convinced that dryland agriculture and ecosystems have some unique features, which are worthy of investment.



Interactive debates through local and national partners in Pakistan from village to national levels have provided the following reflections:

- * There is hardly any emphasis on drylands in the current sector policies.

- * Policy formulation processes is characterized by a top-down approach. It should take into account the active participation of all the stakeholders based on local knowledge, ground experiences and their specific need and aspirations.
- * Keeping in view the unique features of drylands, it is desirable to formulate a separate policy/strategy for dryland development that responds to unique problems and integrates all sectors.
- * A central coordinating agency for dry lands could be established that must ensure coordination and collaboration among all the departments, e.g. agriculture, forestry and livestock.
- * Water is the base for living and most limiting factor in production process – access to water must be recognized as a right and not as a service.
- * Improved access to markets is needed if dryland farmers are to make the most of new opportunities.
- * Economic policies affect the ability of farm household to accumulate wealth and the direction of their investments. Policy makers need to consider these limitations when framing economic policies.

International, national, sectoral and sub national levels, all require different approaches. Engagement with participatory processes is an essential activity for researchers interested in strengthening the usefulness and effectiveness of policies.

