Gender Mainstreamed in Improved Pastoralism

Experiences in ‘Securing Rights and Restoring Lands for Improved Livelihoods’ Project
In its twentieth preambular paragraph, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification stresses “the important role played by women in regions affected by desertification and/or drought, particularly in rural areas of developing countries, and the importance of ensuring the full participation of both men and women at all levels in programmes to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought”.

**Deterioration of Rangelands and Pastoralist Communities**

With a population of 6.5 million and Badia extending over 90% of the country’s landscape, Jordan has to struggle with limited natural resources and serious environmental challenges. Desertification combined with deteriorating standards of living is forcing locals to abandon Pastoralism and immigrate to urban centers.

In addition to natural factors, desertification in Jordan can be attributed to human activities, mostly the decline of traditional grazing systems, relinquishing lands to the pressures of industrialization, urbanization and agricultural intensification. The inevitable outcome of this dilemma was poverty and unemployment amongst Bedouins and villagers who have been using those rangelands for livestock grazing as a main economic activity.

The Zarqa River Basin in the north of Jordan demonstrates a prominent example of this situation.

The rangelands within this Basin were once characterized by an effective land tenure system and grazing rights based on standards set by tribal socio-economic institutions. Those standards protected the resources within lands and provided for their use in ways that supported conservation and sustainable productivity of rangelands despite the prevalent environmental and social conditions. Upon elimination of these systems and tribal access rights in the past few decades and declaration of rangelands as State-owned areas that are open for everybody to use, new unsustainable land uses encroached upon the rangelands. Vast areas of these Lands have become over-exploited without consideration to the resource sustainability requirements or their long-term productivity.

The elimination of tribal ownership also caused lack of incentives for Bedouins and other pastoralists to maintain and conserve the resources and rangelands under their control and use.

Changes in rangeland utilization systems have led to growing problems of water scarcity, resulting in large-scale groundwater abstraction and thus depleted aquifers. Indigenous plant diversity and land productivity were diminished with rangeland degradation. Farming systems were subsequently pushed further into areas with already limited fodder production capacity. Locals are now faced with the difficult decision to either forsake their extensive pastoral systems in favor of purchasing fodder, subsequently lowering their living standards, or maintain traditional systems risking unemployment. This has also induced unsustainable practices by local women while collecting plants and herding cattle.

Women have also become subject to additional responsibilities by tending to the land around their houses and livestock, keeping them outside for most of the day then tending to household chores in the evening.

**Gender-Balanced Local Management of Rangelands**

To a great extent, the current dilemma draws on inefficient management of rangelands whether on the local-level or the level of national planning and decision making processes. A major drawback in current local-level management of limited natural resources is a lack of ‘real’ contribution by women. Involving women to a greater extent in local management decisions and processes would help revive traditional practices, alleviate poverty and thus improve standards of living. There is a gender-based employment gap in Jordan, as male workers exceed 1 million, compared to little over 200,000 female workers (Department of Statistics, 2011). Over 90% of pastoralist households in Jordan are supported by the father while women have unaccounted roles through essential contribution in agriculture, animal husbandry and rural enterprises. Distinct gender roles within Bedouin communities largely undermine the indigenous knowledge and skills of local women. Decision making and management on the household level and community level are mainly governed by the males in contrast with the fact that it is females who are in direct contact with natural resources use and processing either for livestock feeding or meeting family needs.

Gender mainstreaming is an opportunity for transformative and sustainable development.
To reverse this situation and optimize local women’s role in restoration, management of natural resources, and improvement of domestic livelihoods, several factors need to be addressed.

1. Restoration and equitable management of rangelands

Restoration and increasing vegetation cover of indigenous plants will enhance soil organic matter and improve soil's ability to hold more moisture through better water infiltration and improved soil structure. To ensure effective application and sustainability, restoration initiatives need to be planned, managed and implemented in a participatory manner. True practice all communities need to ensure that different (and sometimes conflicting) interests are represented and addressed. It is essential that local women are included in this process as not only their practices as herdswomen, plant collectors and farmers have contributed to the deterioration of rangelands, but also because they are the most affected by the consequences of such deterioration.

2. Strengthening access rights to ecosystem services

Traditional land tenure arrangements and grazing rights have helped conserve resources and sustain productivity for centuries. These rights were replaced in the past fifty years by declaring those lands as State-owned areas open for indiscriminate use contributing to a breakdown in natural resource governance. The consequence of which is degradation of the rangeland ecosystem functions and processes on which provision of ecosystem goods and services depend. Taking into consideration the better financial resources and institutional capacities at the disposal of other more organized rangelands users like agriculture and industry, traditional rangeland management techniques should be reintroduced to secure locals’ rights and access to land tenures, improve governance of land and natural resources and enhance income generation. Women and marginalized groups should particularly have access rights to ecosystem different resources as they are the most vulnerable to resources depletion and excluded from skills and tools needed to practice that right.

3. Supporting economic and income generating options for rural communities

Despite the deterioration of vegetation cover in rangelands, livestock remained a core socioeconomic element in the life of inhabitants, raising some of their basic nutritional needs and providing a much-needed additional source of income besides the civil service jobs many have. However, an industry is subject to increasing pressures due to a lack of sufficient pastures, high costs of forage, water scarcity, spread of livestock diseases and difficulties in marketing livestock products.

Through the provision of appropriate incentives, such as mainstreaming economic values of rangeland natural resources, pastoralists can be encouraged to adopt more sustainable practices and overcome the challenges mentioned. Creating income generating opportunities for local communities can improve their socio-economic and livelihoods, but it is important first to build their management and leadership capacities and align communal interventions. Platforms are needed for local communities to voice their concerns and demonstrate their indigenous knowledge and newly acquired abilities in natural resources management. Such platforms represent excellent opportunities for women to have their voices heard and specific needs acknowledged by policymakers as to be integrated within governmental planning for rangeland management taking into consideration the cultural context.

4. Policy Dialogue

Weak coordination between relevant governmental agencies and local communities had resulted in conflicting approaches to the management of land and natural resources. This weakness alienated communities from managing their own ecosystems and led to the introduction of intrusive unsustainable exploitation practices such as mining and overgrazing. Sustainable approaches to natural resource management which have mainstreamed community livelihoods and ecosystem services need to be included in dryland policy frameworks. The involvement in dialogue of both stakeholders and decision makers at the governorate level and national level will create the enabling environment for such policy formulation. To effectively engage women groups with government at all levels, it is important first to build their management and leadership capacities and align communal interventions. Platforms are needed for local communities to voice their concerns and demonstrate their indigenous knowledge and newly acquired abilities in natural resources management. Such platforms represent excellent opportunities for women to have their voices heard and specific needs acknowledged by policymakers as to be integrated within governmental planning for rangeland management taking into consideration the cultural context.

Securing Rights and Restoring Lands for Improved Livelihoods

To sustainably restore and manage rangelands in the Zarqa River Basin, a European Commission funded project seeking to reduce poverty and re-introduce traditional rangeland management techniques such as the Hima system was established. The ‘Securing Rights and Restoring Lands for Improved Livelihoods’ project is designed to set a positive example for protecting rangelands and reviving biodiversity. The project is implemented, by IUCN ROWA in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Arab Women Organization, in four Jordanian villages (Duleil, Hashemeyeh, Bani-Hashem and Halabat) all located within the Zarqa River Basin.

Women’s indigenous knowledge, acquisition of relevant skills and access to resources use and management are a major factor of restoring rangelands and improving standards of life in local communities.

‘Hima’ is a traditional conservation system used by Bedouins to organize grazing and protect land. Encouraging the Hima systems in each of the project villages necessitated holding tribal community meetings attended by Zarqa governorate officials, directors of governmental departments and representatives of the Environment and Water Committee at the Parliament. Local community committees were formed, each under the name “Hima Committee”. Some of these committees created a “tribal charter” inviting signatories to practice proper rangeland management and contribute to the restoration of the indigenous plant cover in their areas while giving special attention to providing access rights to the vulnerable groups such as women.

Framework for Change: Bridging Gender Gap

A framework for change has been developed by which local communities would secure rights to manage land and resources. The initiative started to create a greater sense of resources ownership, leading to their protection, restoration and sustainable management. The resultant benefits of improved livelihoods and environmental restoration are to be sustained through accessing markets and acquiring negotiation skills enabling community members to present their cases to the government and other stakeholders. The government’s role is in updating policies and legislations to become supportive to that process and providing appropriate incentives.

The project methodology was based on two key pillars: Stakeholders dialogue for concerted actions and participatory management cycle. Stakeholders include land users from the local community and service providers from the governmental and non-governmental institutions that support the community. The decision making process takes place within the integrated management framework of natural resources, following a consensual approach and dialogue. Such an approach leads to a mutual understanding of integrated management and a greater ability to develop and implement management plans and natural resources regulations.
Changing Realities; Mainstreaming gender for improved pastoralism
Experiences in ‘Securing Rights and Restoring Lands for Improved Livelihoods’ Project

Based on its integrated approach to securing rights and restoring lands for improved livelihoods, the project aimed to enhance the participation and capacity building of women in decision-making, to reduce gender disparities in access to and ownership of resources. For this purpose, a gender analysis was conducted as a first step to mainstream gender related elements in the project. The assessment phase investigated gender-related activities within the rangelands, including roles and responsibilities, resources use and management, and relevant decision making processes. The findings of assessments asserted common characteristics of women in Jordanian rangelands. They live in generally conservative rural communities in which they are mostly dependent homemakers, mothers and daughters. The gender division of labor in agriculture places a heavy burden on females who besides managing household tasks, have heavy workloads outside home in agricultural production tasks as well as taking care of animals. Women have little access to resources, especially land, and their ownership of livestock is also relatively low, although they sometimes play a major role in managing the livestock and grazing.

For the project, women are important actors of change and holders of significant knowledge and skills related to mitigation, adaptation and reduction of risks in the face of desertification and rangelands deterioration, making them crucial agents in this area. This required that both men and women understand the process of sustainable natural resources management and share information and knowledge.

To that end, women must have equal access to knowledge and resources, which are necessary for improving livelihoods. Likewise, it is important that women participate more actively in community interventions, shaping the new structures put in place to address rangeland challenges.

The project sought to involve women in all phases (visioning, assessing, strategizing, planning, implementing and reflecting) to ensure access rights of women and that the issues surrounding their involvement in community management of rangelands are resolved. To do so, the project made sure to include women on the local community committees and build their capacities on gender issues, advocacy, agro-industries, and other subjects. Specific areas of action included the following interventions:

An Awareness campaign was organized in project communities targeting women and other community members, using a participatory video approach to identify their problems and document their suggestions. Sustainable pastoralist practices, communal concerted actions and importance of women engagement in planning for resources management were the major components of this campaign.

Women empowerment that assumed different forms including training workshops on women-specific issues and gender rights, changing men’s attitudes towards traditional gender roles and involving women in local entities. For the first time, a CBO was set up in Hima area to manage and run the project activities on the local level.

Women were included in the CBO’s management bodies as founding members and on the administrative board. This step not only helped women secure a place in the decision making process in relation to rangelands, but also changed community perceptions towards women participation. The CBO coordinates the actions of the community members to make the restoration of rangelands a sustainable income-generating source and improve local standards of living.

A Gender-sensitive community environmental management plan was developed that fosters local ownership of restoration activities and their sustainability. Following the plan, Hima areas were established with proper rangeland management so as to revive the deteriorating indigenous plants necessary for sustainable pastoralism. Grazing and cultivation were controlled and in some places altogether excluded from communal grazing land to allow the land to rest and vegetation to naturally regenerate. Livestock can then be reintroduced in more controlled manner, helping to spread the seeds through a wider area. Women will be granted prioritised access and grazing rights to the restored site. They will not only be able to reduce poverty and improve living standards of their families through harvesting and processing indigenous medicinal plants and marketing their products. They will also acquire more evident and acknowledged roles in natural resource management.
Experiences in ‘Securing Rights and Restoring Lands for Improved Livelihoods’ Project

Progress and Sustainability

The Hima sites have started to improve environmentally and the social conditions in the project area. Tribal conflicts over natural resources have reduced, grazing seasons are now better managed and the indigenous biodiversity is revived. Solving overgrazing will no longer mean keeping livestock from grazing in a protected area, but rather better managed grazing periods. The approach leading to the Hima establishment also emphasized the indispensable role of gender mainstreaming in improving conditions, while involving women in the project activities and benefits has proved the effectiveness of this role.

These solutions have paved a way forward that builds on the capacities of the local community and increased women involvement. These played a major role in improving their livelihoods through securing their access and management rights and building relationships with government institutions. Such adaptive solutions employ available resources and communal efforts to present a successful showcase for donors.

With the project coming to an end in 2014, the focus is turned to the sustainability of its approach and methodology. Aside from capacity building, changing traditional conceptions of gender roles, aligning governmental support, tangible benefits for the local communities will continue being an essential sustainability factor of the intervention proposed by the project. Emphasis will be given to making local communities in direct contact with actual benefits of their improved pastoral practices and acquired rights. Improved levels of living will encourage sustaining these practices and conserving the restored ecosystem. To ensure that, impetus to gender mainstreaming should be sustained through institutionalizing women’s access and management rights to rangeland resources and their empowerment to sustainable and profitable use. This institutionalization necessitates women’s involvement in local community entities including municipal boards, associations, future projects committees and women societies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This project considered gender mainstreaming an opportunity for transformative and sustainable development. Through the project interventions, women’s indigenous knowledge, acquisition of relevant skills and access to resources use and management proved to be a major factor of restoring rangelands and improving standards of life in local communities.

Sustainability of this role is possible through direct economic benefits that are necessarily inclusive of different communal groups including women. Several measures are recommended to optimize that sustainability:

- At the institutional level:
  - Build the capacity of institutions to integrate gender considerations in rangeland planning and management at all levels, e.g. through a gender mainstreaming project led by a national gender focal point.
  - Develop targeted social safety networks to build the resilience of vulnerable groups and women.
- At the household and community level:
  - Train and empower women in particular to diversify their livelihood sources through income-generating activities.
  - Empower communities to participate in natural resources-related decision-making to build on men’s and women’s specific knowledge and skills.
  - Improve the collection and use of sex disaggregated data around the rangelands.

Women are important agents of change as managers of natural resources and as the household’s primary caretakers. They need to be further empowered as key stakeholders and leaders in restoring healthy pastoral modes of life and improving livelihoods.
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