

Reto-O-Reto Project

Better policy and management options for pastoral lands: Assessing the trade-offs between poverty alleviation and wildlife conservation

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Short description of the project

This project was designed to create the knowledge and relationships to enable poor agro-pastoral communities to influence local and national land use policies affecting their livelihoods (access to pasture, water) and the sustainability of biodiversity (wildlife) in the areas where they live. Researchers aimed to work with these communities to generate new knowledge that contributes to: a) understanding the impact of livestock-wildlife systems on biodiversity and the implications of changing land-use practices for pastoralist livelihoods and the environment; and b) processes and actions that empower local communities to better manage their livestock and landscapes and to contribute to policy changes that help alleviate poverty and conserve natural resources. The project focused on four principal large landscapes and the communities within them: 1) Kitengela / Nairobi National Park, Kenya; 2) Amboseli / Longido, Kenya and Tanzania; 3) Mara / Trans-mara, Kenya; and 4) Tarangire / Simanjiro, Tanzania.

The research is carried out by an integrated community – facilitator – researcher team. The information from the project is being exchanged with communities and policy makers through various means: feedback workshops, target group presentations, conferences and workshops, community meeting, posters, policy briefs, and through radio, and exchange visits of local community, field visits of pastoralist from other parts of the world.

1. Problem definition:

In many of the pastoral areas in East Africa there has been a need for better and more usable information that allows a wide range of stakeholders to work together to manage land and water more sustainably, equitably and productively. Although there is significant research on this issue, this research is rarely linked to the problems or information needs of pastoralists in local communities. From another perspective, the policy makers make changes in policy without seeking the participation of both the community and researchers. And communities are not taking advantage of the existing knowledge and information to better manage their land.

Across the region, pastoral groups, government land managers, and policy makers alike expressed the need for objective evaluation of the short and long-term economic and ecological returns to various policy and land management options. To address these issues the team had a series of meetings with a number of stakeholders during the proposal formulation process and prior to the start of the project to set the research agenda.

Once the project was funded and started, this research agenda was fine tuned by a new team of community facilitators who worked closely with communities and policy makers at local and regional level and also the ILRI research team.

2. Research management

The research project was designed to put communication and community / policy maker needs at the centre and up front, rather than at the periphery or last. In a pictorial sense, the communities and policy makers were in the middle of the circle and the researchers were in the ring around the edge of the circle. In boundary organisation language, each member of the team was charged to take some of the function of a boundary individual: to be responsible not only to their home institution, but also discuss and represent the needs of a set of other stakeholders at different levels of scale.

The project started with a logical framework to guide planning and monitoring, and then quickly also adapted the IDRC Outcome Mapping approach to refine its vision, strategy and identify boundary partners. Put simply, this method plans backwards from identification of desired changes in partner behaviours to research products, rather than the other way around. The boundary partners consisted of community groups, policy makers, government institutions, and local authorities and NGOs. For each boundary partner specific outcome challenges, progress markers, specific outcomes or measurable goals and evidence were developed. The targets for the community were to improve pastoral livelihoods and livestock production, strengthen community institutions and empower community members, and improve access to common property and environmental sustainability. The target for our policy boundary partner was to ensure that environmental sustainability and land use planning were developed at the local and national level. And finally the target for the donor and development agencies was to improve financial and political sustainability of the project through increased donor support. The logical framework has been more useful for monitoring the progress of producing outputs, and the outcome mapping has been more useful in making sure the research is strongly user-driven and focusing the team on creating 'outcomes' or changes in behaviour on the part of boundary partners.

The researchers were accountable for producing information, with the participation of community members, and making sure all results were available in useable form for the various boundary partners. The role of the facilitators was to support their communities in making positive changes through information and knowledge generated from the project. The team has made considerable progress facilitating policy change – but this process also depended other factors which are beyond the control of the team. Refer to Outcome Mapping articles for more detail information.

3. Program organization

The project team which comprised researchers, policy impact and community facilitators worked closely towards achieving project targets. In a group or individually, the team members picked boundary partners to work with from community, local authorities or policy makers or a combination of the three. The strategy was to produce information that could be used by the various partners to address the problems stated in section 2 above.

The centerpiece of this project was communication and linking communities with scientists with policy makers. To accomplish this, the team created four new positions, called community facilitators, who worked full time at spanning the boundaries between these three groups. While the facilitators worked either for ILRI or African Wildlife Foundation (in Tanzania), their job assignment was to work closely with a variety of organizations to understand fully their information needs and to help those organizations find the needed information, either inside or outside ILRI. Each facilitator was evaluated with informal and formal evaluations and judged on how well they were 'responsible' to their boundary partners (as above) and facilitated their needs. They also were assessed on how well they worked with the 'researcher team'. We often remarked on how the boundaries between the facilitators and

researchers were very blurry, and that we were all both, facilitating our chosen boundary partners, and carrying out research, with a different location and level of scale for each member of the facilitator – researcher team.

One of the most important aspects of this communication process was the selection of the facilitators themselves to ensure they would be as effective as possible when working with local communities and policy makers. A joint pastoral and researcher team carefully defined the criteria for the facilitators that would make them most effective from a Maasai cultural and researcher cultural perspective. These characters included: 1) good listening skills, 2) respectful of elders, 3) rising leaders in good standing with the community, 4) eloquent speakers, 5) advanced education (at least a BSc.), 6) ability to work independently, and 7) a member of the communities they serviced.

At first the flow of information between researchers, community and policy makers was not strong. As information started flowing between researchers and communities, communities and policy makers, and then researchers and policy makers, different specific information channels started to evolve. In a number of instances, the community started to work directly with policy makers to discuss policy issues; researchers also worked directly with the communities and policy makers. Policy makers started calling scientists to contribute to some policy review work. Over time, trust and open dialogue developed among the researchers, communities and policy makers at local and national levels. This happened more strongly for the Kitengela and Mara sites, and not as strongly for the Amboseli and Simanjiro / Longido sites in Tanzania.

4. The decision-support system

In a sense, the end-to-end ‘decision support system’ adopted by this project was entirely based on the community facilitator – researcher – community team. The process seemed to work like this: 1) the team identified priority research questions with input from the communities (either directly or through the facilitator, based on the outcome mapping) and also based on scientific interest / importance, 2) the team then identified the outputs or products that could be produced in the short term and meet requested needs right away, and over the long-term, 3) the team then produced the information together (with community members participating, often with significant training investment), and then 4) the team decided what forms the information should take to be most effective to communicate with communities more broadly (meetings, radio programme, posters, feedback workshops, briefs) and with scientists (reports, papers, book chapters, international conference presentations, international assessments). Interestingly, one of the lowest priority communication avenues was a website (communities often do not have access) and, correspondingly, this website is still under construction.

With this approach, big changes happened. Research is usually a very slow process, and we had to figure out how to produce initial information much faster and get it out to people. The researchers on the team felt their research was useful and helpful to people on the ground for the first time and this added to their feelings of responsibility in producing accessible information. The communities started paying attention to researchers and started to request their input and support regularly. Confidence among community members rose as they used the information to build their case with policy makers. Policy makers engaged more often and more directly with communities partly because of the stronger confidence and the reliable information at hand. Policy makers also requested direct help from the researchers in reviewing new policy instruments.

For example, in the Kitengela, the four research areas of communication, land use, biodiversity and livelihoods were treated separately. Over time, the team integrated so that it

could support the complicated issues raised by communities, policy makers or researchers. For example, by combining information on land use, livestock, household economics, wildlife trends and agriculture, the team derived trade-offs of various land use options. Much of this information is now being used by the communities and local authorities to develop the first-ever master land-use plan for Kitengela.

In addition, as the project started producing and sharing information many partners started to share data and work with project team. The database developed by the teams is being used by other projects and organizations addressing the issue of ecosystem services and poverty.

5. Learning orientation

These are the main points:

- The team adopted a learning approach from the beginning, which was unsettling at first, because we had no set recipe for what would and would not work
- As we learned, we gained confidence and built on the successes and learned what did not work
- We then experimented with new avenues of communication like radio programmes and policy briefs. It is not clear yet whether the latter is really useful yet, but the initial indications are good.
- What really worked included:
 - The community facilitators as boundary individuals and their work, the spark and drive they added to the team, and the critical role they played in every step of this project
 - Bi-monthly 2-day meetings to discuss progress, new community needs, new research outputs
 - Feedback workshops
 - High profile presentations at a wide range of meetings
- What was less successful included:
 - The ratio of facilitation time to research time was inappropriate. Because reliable research information is so hard to create, the researchers rarely kept the facilitators busy communicating re-to-o-reto research information. This did allow the facilitators to work with other ILRI researchers and communicate a much broader and more useful set of information.
 - It was clear that the amount of information flow entirely depended on the quality of the facilitator, which created some unevenness
 - The researchers had little time to spend in the field, partly because the demands to create information were so large and daunting

6. Continuity and flexibility:

This is an issue for this team because the original project was funded by a large outside grant. During the course of the project, the team wrote many grants to continue funding on different aspects of the project past the end of the original grant. Community members also engaged strongly in the research and took responsibility for contacting the core team at ILRI about their needs. Extensive training helped build the capacity of community members to collect information and to judge the reliability of other information.

7. Other insights:

- The project was too short - there is now demand for the project to continue, and the stakeholders require the previous, highly funded level of engagement
- There is a need to scale up the lessons from this work to other places and broader scales of resolution

- The integrated team (different backgrounds) made a difference but also has its difficulties
- It takes a long time for government agencies to change their approaches to tackling issues, thus long-term engagement is necessary for outputs to become outcomes and then impact
- There is still a great deal more to be learnt from the field
- Mutual trust, open minds, a common vision, good leadership and a desire to make a difference were the core values that united the team and made it especially effective.

8. Other issues:

- How do we document our work and experiences and develop principals that can assist other people to replicate or improve on this approach?

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10. Representative publications / products:

- ONeWORLD Radio Programme (contact M. Said)
- Policy briefs (contact M. Said)
- www.maasaimaracount.org
- Project posters (contact M. Said)
- Kitengela land use map (contact S. Kifugo)
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