Mobile pastoralism in West Asia: myths, challenges and a whole set of loaded questions...

M. Taghi Farvar

Despite important differences in climate, culture and contemporary political history, pastoral communities in Asia still have much in common. These communities include the *"kuchi"* of Afghanistan, the *"ilaat-o-ashayer"* of Iran, many tribal peoples of Pakistan and Anatolia, the *Bedouin* of the Arab regions of West Asia and hundreds of other tribes in Mongolia and Central Asia. In Iran alone there are some 700 nomadic pastoral tribes totalling some 200,000 tentholds (households) that qualify as nomadic pastoralists according to the following conditions:[1]

Having a common territory and recognisable rangeland zones for their seasonal migration;

Possessing a social structure consisting of typical tribal levels of organisation;

Each member of the tribe being conscious of his or her place within this system and having a feeling of belonging to it;

Having a cultural domain common to each major tribal grouping, and

Reliance on more or less traditional migratory animal husbandry as a main mode of subsistence.

Attitudes towards nomadic pastoralists differ widely. During the Pahlavi regime in Iran (1921-1979) there was an irresolvable enmity between the state and the nomadic pastoral peoples. The entire two decades of rule of Reza Shah, and over two-thirds of the reign of his son Mohammed Reza Shah were spent at war and conflict with the tribes. While Reza Shah's main weapon for sedentarisation of nomads was brute military suppression, his son was more clever, employing a mental alienating system of mobile schools with an urban curriculum in Persian (a language most of the tribal populations did not know), coupled with physical alienation from rangelands—the very base of pastoralists' subsistence and economic strength—through the nationalisation of natural resources. The disdain for tribal peoples was replaced with admiration and moral and even material support during the time of the late Imam Khomeini who called them the "reserves" of the revolution, and referred to them in his political will as the fourth branch of the armed forces of Iran (on a par with the Army, the Revolutionary Guards and the Police). This brief period of exaltation, however, was soon replaced by single-minded—and equally unsuccessful—renewed attempts to sedentarise and control the nomadic pastoralists. The mental and physical alienation methods employed by the Pahlavis continued and at times intensified under the Islamic regime. With the encouragement of the World Bank, a dual policy of support (with subsidies and services) and a relentless effort at sedentarisation has been the main government policy for years. With variations regarding means and intensity of efforts, sedentarisation has been promoted, among other countries, also in Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

Figure 1. The Qashqai women accompanying their tents and belongings in their seasonal migration. *(Courtesy Ali Aghili)*

Myths

Myths and misunderstandings concerning nomadic pastoralism abound, at times with a touch of schizophrenic attitude. On the one

hand, the culture of nomadism is exalted and praised to epic proportions. Films and TV series play on the virtues of the *Ashayer* (Iran) and the *Bedouin* (Arab countries). The local languages are full of proverbs and epic stories of the simple, honourable, hospitable, valiant, gallant, tough and indomitable *Bedou* or *Ashayeri*. On the other hand, they are considered by many, and certainly by the administrative branches of government, to be backwards, out of place, uncontrollable, eking out a miserable living out of meagre and marginal resources of the degraded rangelands, for the deplorable condition of which they are held responsible. The nature conservation establishments hold the pastoralists and their animals, especially their goats and camels, to be the enemies of wildlife, and the departments of range management in the ministries of agriculture usually think the nomads are overgrazing their land. The planning departments' staff is constantly alienating their lands and deploring that they do not settle down to "benefit" from nationally designed programmes such as schooling and human and animal health services. Some of these prevalent myths will be examined below from the perspective of the greater West Asian region.

Throughout West Asia and the Sudano-Sahelian region, a system of community conserved areas of both range and woodlands has been practiced by nomadic pastoralists from time immemorial. Such systems—which are known to pre-date Islam and are sanctioned by it—are called *hema* (from the Arabic word *hemaya*= conservation or protection), *mahmiyya* (conserved area), *mahjar* (protected area marked by stone border marks) and qoroq (exclosure in Turkish and Persian), and have an associated set of customary laws regarding community benefits, responsibilities and sanctions.

Myth 1: Pastoralism is an archaic form of production not adapted to modernity

This is simply not true in West Asia. The rangelands are seasonally productive and need to be grazed seasonally. Many experiments to settle nomadic pastoralists have resulted in disaster because the environment of the rangelands is not suitable for animal production on a sedentary basis. Many valuable breeds of animals are possessed and maintained by nomads which would not survive a settled life. At times this myth is based on a bias for modern amenities such as electric lights, television sets and telephones. In fact, advances in technology have now made these claims themselves to be outdated and not adapted to modernity, as modern amenities are all available in portable versions. For instance:

Figure 2. A Qashqai elder in Iran *(Courtesy CENESTA)*

In Mongolia and Iran experiments with the provision of solar energy through the use of portable photovoltaic equipment has made it possible for students to have electric lights to do their homework, and for adults to receive visitors after sunset without having to settle for dim lights. An effective alternative is also paraffin (kerosene) fuel lamps.

Liquid gas in bottles, same as those available in towns, has been made available to nomadic pastoralists in Iran through programmes that have established distribution networks and local storage points. Training of nomadic pastoralist women for use of gas-burning equipment, including safety training, has made it possible for this system to be met with enthusiasm.

Mobile refrigeration run by solar panels has been available for a long time for health centres, for example to store vaccines for human and livestock, thanks to the development of 12 volt systems.

Television is now available relatively easily, and

the coverage for many TV stations is constantly improving. In some regions satellite TV has started to be more commonly available in nomadic tents and houses.

Myth 2: Mobility is inherently bad

This great myth of our region has been created by government sponsored propaganda, formal school systems with urbanised teachers, false modernisation and misinformation.[2] It is taught in nomadic schools, planning ministries and bought and spread by "first generation sedentarised" folks, who, like first generation immigrants, do their best to get away from their origins and their past. A recent session with a mobile primary school group of students in Iran showed these tribal youngsters (and their teachers) had developed great disdain and contempt for their parents' way of life. Every one of the students wanted to become a pilot, doctor, engineer or lawyer. When asked who would then do animal husbandry and agriculture for the country and their region, they responded: "*These occupations are for the dumb and the stupid! We are educated.*" This is the ethos of a society that has gone through a forced transition, to the point of internalising the ideology of the more powerful oppressive system.[3]

Figure 3. Nomadic pastoralist men crossing the river at a natural ford with their flocks. *(Courtesy Ali Aghili)*

Myth 3: All conflicts are caused by pastoralists

In fact most conflicts are caused by the fact that sedentary rural populations, the private sector and government moved into the land traditionally owned and used by pastoralists. "Protected areas" have been set up without consulting them, military bases and oil and gas extraction or refining outfits have been placed in the middle of their pastoral routes, roads have been crisscrossing the same routes without regard to the need of passage for the animals and the inevitable accidents going to be caused, housing developments have been set up as if urban people were going to use them, and so on. A thousand impediments exist to nomadic lifestyles simply because planners are usually sedentary people who do not understand the mobile peoples and their needs. In addition, when conflict happens, instead of the traditional systems of conflict resolution, the police and urban courts (usually well linked to settled people) are now called in as arbitrators. Their judgements often leave the pastoral nomads spellbound, as their rights are stripped away without any meaningful recourse to remedial action.

The old systems were based on a complex understanding of the ecosystems and their varying carrying capacity coupled with a fine-tuned opportunistic approach to using available resources in micro-environments, and moving away from them before they are destroyed.

Myth 4: Rangelands are degraded because of over-stocking and overpopulation

The very concept of degradation of rangelands has been called into question by modern range

ecology and management schools. If there is one feature that sets out the traditional *ashayer, bedouin or kuchis* from the rest of the crowd, it is their superb and meticulous ability to use the rangeland resources sustainably and maintain their productivity and biological diversity. As an example, in the Bahmaee tribe of south-western Iran, it has been documented that the clan elders have had a system of range management that has worked like clockworks. Following scouting information ahead of the season of migration, the elders do an accurate assessment of the carrying capacity of the range expected to welcome them and decide the size and composition of the flocks that it can nourish. The size of the human population to follow the flocks is determined by the labour needs for the flocks, starting with one woman per 35 lactating ovine (sheep and goat) population. For each woman, of course, a number of children and male members of the tenthold and camp are needed to service the grazing and protection of the whole flock. Among the Qashqai pastoralists, sophisticated manoeuvres have been planned and carried out to cope with seasonal climatic variation (droughts, abundant rainfall) and equally sophisticated marketing decisions are made in the summering grounds—based on the expected carrying capacity of the rangelands in the wintering grounds during the following season. The Lurs of the Zagros Mountain range have had elaborate techniques of rangeland rehabilitation including reseeding with wild germplasm and manuring, using both ovine and human power.

Can we help nomadic pastoralists mitigate the impact of the climate change upon them by allowing them to regain access to the entirety of their migratory landscapes, including the special ecological niches and buffer zones so important for the functioning of their overall livelihood and management strategies?

Throughout West Asia and the Sudano-Sahelian region, a system of community conserved areas of both range and woodlands has been practiced by nomadic pastoralists from time immemorial. Such systems—which are known to pre-date Islam and are sanctioned by it—are called *hema* (from the Arabic word *hemaya=* conservation or protection), *mahmiyya* (conserved area), *mahjar* (protected area marked by stone border marks) and *qoroq* (exclosure in Turkish and Persian), and have an associated set of customary laws regarding community benefits, responsibilities and sanctions.

The landscapes under the use of the nomadic pastoral groupings (Camps, Lineage Groups, Clans, Subtribes and Tribes) include their wintering and summering grounds as well as the migratory paths in between. Under traditional management, there are special areas used only in time of severe climatic stress or special conditions, wetlands of crucial importance, etc. In their original indigenous form, the total landscape of each tribal group is well qualified to be considered a Protected Landscape according to IUCN Category V.

As for population growth, this is not an issue for the pastoralists in the west Asian region. Following a long standing pattern, as a pastoral population grows beyond the carrying capacity of the rangelands that support them, the excess population stays behind, or gets into what the late Nader Afshar has called "nomads on the waiting list" until the climate and carrying capacity improve. These people busy themselves with handicrafts, grain production, seasonal wage labour, etc., waiting for their turn to travel. If the population increases beyond the overall absorptive capacity of the region, the excess population migrates more permanently into other zones and pursues different livelihoods. Some believe that most of the villages and urban civilisations of West Asia developed this way. The statistics about the number of migratory pastoralists, where available, seem to confirm this fact. In Iran, while the percentage of nomadic pastoralists in the country has steadily declined from at least a quarter of the total population a century ago to some 2% today, their absolute number has remained dynamically constant, ranging between some 1.2 to 2.5 million depending on climatic and political factors. This is estimated to be the real carrying capacity of

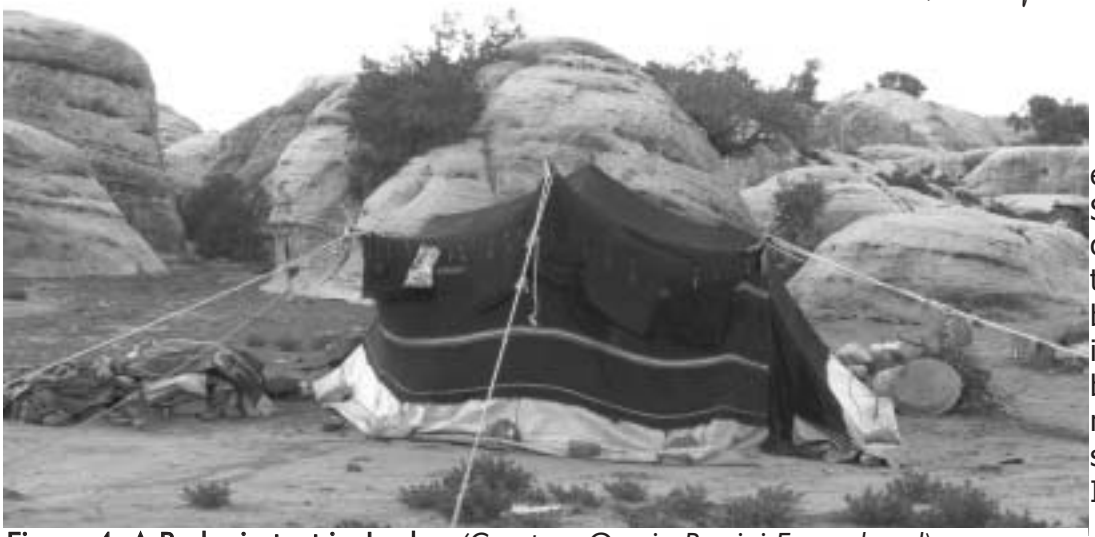

Figure 4. A Bedouin tent in Jordan *(Courtesy Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend)*

the rangelands of the country. This marvellous self regulation of nomadic pastoralism in the region renders any advocacy of policies for population or even flock reduction in the rangelands of this region devoid of any grounding in objective data.

Myth 5: Pastoral production has very low productivity

By almost all standards, rangelands are considered generally best suited for animal raising, and a nomadic lifestyle renders the highest possible productivity in the region, averaging between 1/3 and 3/4 of livestock productions in given countries. Where other livelihood and land tenure systems are substituted to nomadic pastoralism, it is usually by groups with political power in the country. Examples of the latter include the sedentary landlords of Iran. At the time of the land reforms of the 1960s, they took advantage of a loophole in the law exempting "mechanised lands" from being distributed. They ploughed up marginally productive rangelands in order to lay claim to them. In the Iranian Province of Fars alone some 20% of the rangelands were lost to this loophole. This trick is actually known even outside Asia. In Sudan powerful politicians mechanised huge tracks of land that belonged to the pastoralists of eastern Sudan to bring them under very marginally productive staple grain cultivation. In most cases, they abandoned a heavily degraded land after a few growing seasons and moved on to other areas. This same land, under a pastoralist production system, was highly productive for longhorn cattle and camels, including some of the most expensive racing breeds that fetch extremely high value in export.

Now that many governments have experienced the futility and tragedy of taking away lands from the careful management of nomadic pastoralism, can they decide to reverse their nationalisation policies, give back the rights and ownership of land to the tribal groups on a common-property basis, and make them responsible again for its maintenance and sustainable use?

Myth 6: Pastoralists have to settle down in order to benefit from modern services

This is one of the most baseless allegations, and experiences amply show the contrary. In Iran, a system of mobile schools using tents and trained teachers recruited from the nomadic tribes has operated with success for nearly a half-a-century and achieved high educational standards. Many of the graduates of these tent schools have gone on to higher education and today occupy places of prestige in government, politics, education, literature, academia, medicine, engineering, law, the arts, and private services.[4] The now-pervasive national system of *behvarz* (front line rural health workers) had its first pilot experience among the Qashqai pastoralists in the early 1970s. Mobile veterinary assistants in Iran and Afghanistan have been trained and supported by the government and universities (Iran) and NGOs (Afghanistan). Likewise, work in support of mobile handicrafts (such as the highly valued wool rugs, carpets and kilims) has been carried out in many areas.

Myth 7: Pastoralism destroys biodiversity and leads to desertification

Far from being a destroyer of biodiversity, pastoralist range management systems are a *pre-*

requisite of biodiversity. Most range that does not receive the benefits of livestock stomping, gentle ploughing, browsing, seed spreading and fertilisation will turn into lower biodiversity wooded shrub land.[5] The highly diverse vegetation of the rangelands of the region has evolved together with the livestock and land management systems of the pastoralists. The sophisticated techniques of using scouting and early warning systems to predict droughts, take preventive measures and adopt coping strategies are well known among the nomadic pastoralists of the region. In fact, pastoralists value much more highly than either villagers or urban folks the biological and genetic diversity of their landscape. Most know by name and properties every single botanical species and can give long descriptions of their medicinal, food, feed and industrial properties for animals and people, as well as their place in the ecosystem. They have developed irreplaceable techniques of habitat management and rangeland rehabilitation for maintaining the diversity of the bio-ecological systems. Their lifestyle has made them understand the ways of nature. Under their indigenous management systems, the cutting of living trees, other than in extreme need and with sustainable use in mind, would be considered a cardinal sin. Only fallen and dried or sick trees or parts of the branches the removal of which does not harm them would be considered legitimate uses. Sustainable use of non-timber products (gums, medicinal and veterinary plants, vegetable dyes, mushrooms and other edible herbs and fruits) are relied on for subsistence and only occasional commerce. Literally every nomadic pastoral woman, man and youngster can recount with fascination the ways and habits of the wildlife in their territories, and their love of nature and its diversity. Undisturbed, their hunting habits have preserved wildlife for centuries. The *hema* systems are intended to protect the health and sustainability of the ecological systems on which they depend. The pastoralists are, in short, practicing ecologists who understand sustainable use and environmental protection better than many modern ecologists and conservationists. A survey of pastoral tribes in what was before South Yemen by an FAO consultant in the early 1990s showed that most of the elders of the tribes considered it a pity that the *mahjar* system had been abolished by the Socialist Government, and believed this to be the major contributor to the degradation of the rangelands in their territories. They favoured the re-establishment of this powerful traditional tool for the conservation and sustainable use of rangeland resources.

Given the success of the traditional pastoral systems in the conservation of landscape and species biodiversity of the rangelands, can we learn from their experience and help them re-establish and manage community conserved areas and, where necessary and feasible, co-manage with the government and others specific areas for biodiversity conservation?

Myth 8: Pastoralists do not take care of the land because of the "Tragedy of the Commons"

I nearly get sick hearing again this concept, so much abused and wrongly applied. When Garrett Hardin introduced this notion he meant the tragedy of lands and resources under open access, which is the opposite of the well functioning common property systems the pastoralists usually have in place. Pastoral common property systems are shared by a limited community of users and governed by an extensive set of rules, customary laws and sanctions, excluding non-user communities except under strict procedures. Tribal elders will judge very severely any intrusion and damage to community rangelands, woodlands and water resources, and punish the violators with everything from deprivation from sugar quotas (a serious deprivation indeed for the hospitable tea- or coffee-drinking nomads!) to community imprisonment and public shame.

Myth 9: Pastoralists are poor, in ill health and food insecure

Studies by researchers (such as at the University of Tehran) have shown very low helminthic parasitism (some 10% infection rates

Box 1. RESTORING VITALITY OF NOMADIC PASTORALISM— Livelihoods, nature conservation and cultural identity

The Qashqai nomadic pastoralists have realised that to organise themselves for reversing the dominant trends leading to their disappearance, they need to re-habilitate their historic social organisations, albeit in a civil society mode. This is the case with the Kuhi Subtribe, and they plan to spread the approach to the rest of their kinfolk in the larger tribe.

With the support of the Centre for Sustainable Development (CENESTA), a national NGO in Iran, and enabling help of the Organisation for Nomadic Pastoralists (ONP, a government institution), a landscape was selected as a natural resource management unit comprising the summering and wintering grounds of the Kuhi nomadic pastoralists, and their associated migration routes in between. The Kuhi are one of about 20 sub-tribes of the Shish Bayli Tribe of the Qashqais. With the sponsorship of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), IUCN/CEESP's Working Group on Sustainable Livelihoods, and FAO (interested, among other things, in coping strategies of nomadic pastoralists in the face of drought), the Kuhi subtribe started a participatory action research project on sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation.

Figure 5. The Kuhi people and their community-conserved wetland. *(Courtesy Ahmadreza Siapoush)*

Several participatory planning workshops were held between January and August 2003. The first concern was to involve the whole community. For this, the approach of problem identification and analysis with group exercises was selected. The problems thus identified by the community were grouped by them and the groups were prioritised. The obtained priority list determined quite rapidly some major action by the sub-tribe. One of the major problems identified was the breakdown of the traditional organisational strength of the tribes. For this to be remedied, they decided to analyse their governance situation in some depth. It was recognised that the top levels of organisation and leadership of the tribe were decimated by previous governments. The task was thus to recreate these levels of organisation in a manner that would be able to respond to modern challenges, including notions of participatory democracy. The highest level of tribal organisation that still existed and was functional was the *oba* (or camp), consisting of a number of tentholds migrating and living together. A joint team from CENESTA and trusted leaders from the subtribe went around from *oba* to *oba* consulting them on whom they considered to be their leader(s) at the level of each *bonku* (clan). Leaders acceptable to the *obas* in each *bonku* were thus identified and records were taken to provide a point of reference in case of dispute about the legitimacy of the process. Around 60 leaders from the 14 clans of the *Kuhi* subtribe were then gathered in a workshop to decide the leadership structure of the subtribe. It only took a day for them to settle on who should be the 14 representatives (elders) for as many clans, and a further 14 were selected as alternates. In March of 2003, for the first time since the Pahlavi Regime started to decimate the tribal organisation, a Council of the Kuhi Subtribe was born in the tribal wintering township of Farrashband in the province of Fars.

Early April saw another development, the elaboration of the bylaws for the Subtribe and the election of the leadership committee of the Council. It was decided that the Subtribe would create a parallel structure named "Sustainable Livelihoods Fund for Kuhi Nomadic Pastoralist." The membership of the Fund deliberately excludes those households in the tribe who are considered sedentarised. Sayyaad Soltani was elected unanimously to head the "Council for Sustainable Livelihoods of the Kuhi Migratory Pastoralists" and its associated Community Investment Fund. A Deputy-Chief, Executive Director, Treasurer, and Secretary were also elected.

Preliminary project plans were also pursued for a number of initiatives in each of the 5 categories of problems/needs of the Subtribe referred to earlier. Some of these initiatives include:

1. A project to supply supplementary feed to pregnant and lactating ewes (the term includes both sheep and goats). Expected benefits include lower miscarriage rates, higher twinning and double pregnancies (spring and autumn);

2. A project to empower women to take charge of the supply of wool and natural dyes for their rugs, *gabbehs* and other much appreciated handicrafts as well as the marketing of these products domestically, and ultimately internationally.

3. A project to streamline access to health care of the best quality in the Province using a referral service and female community health volunteers;

4. A project for participatory development of appropriate designs for solar equipment for use of the mobile tribal tentholds, including solar water heaters, dryers, solar electricity and solar cookers;

5. A project to establish a tribal legal support service with three functions: a) elaboration and legalisation of customary laws for the management and use of natural resources, especially rangelands, forests, wildlife and water supply; b) legal education; and c) legal aid;

6. A project to set up a mobile library of books and video programmes of an educational nature for all age and gender groups in the subtribe.

7. Restoring the natural resources of the tribe to common property ownership/control. One such unique opportunity is the Chahar-Tang e Kushk-i Zar wetland, extending some 9 kilometres in length, shared between the Kuhi and the Kolahli subtribes. This area has been a community conserved wetland from time immemorial. The Kuhi realise they obtain many "ecosystem benefits" from this wetland, including water reserves, reeds for handicrafts and tent making, fish, medicinal plants, micro-climate control, and wildlife. The government had earmarked part of the area in a controversial plan to be divided up among households for agricultural use. The Subtribe thinks it is better to preserve this area as a *"qorukh"* or *"hema"*—a community conserved area. A petition has been submitted to the relevant governmental authorities to formally declare the wetland and the surrounding rangelands as a community conserved area with use rights being regulated by the elders. In terms of IUCN categories, the overall CCA could be considered as a category V, with the wetland as a portion under category II (key objective of ecosystem management).

This project is showing important ways in which nomadic livelihoods can fully reconcile with conservation. Both can thrive together.

for ascaris and other intestinal parasites) in nomadic pastoralists in the areas where settled village populations suffered from 90% prevalence. Mobile pastoral populations rarely suffer from ecto-parasites such as the hair or bed lice and ticks that afflict settled villagers. They enjoy a higher standard of hygiene, especially in the summering grounds where fresh water from mountain springs and wetlands is plentiful. They usually take baths with warmed up water or stream water at least once a week, a high standard with respect to rural practice. Pastoralists also enjoy richer diets in terms of protein (mostly from the dairy products at their disposal), stored foods (using high protein dried buttermilk, grains and pulses and dried vegetables), as well as fresh mushrooms, wild fruits and berries and herbs most of the year, as they are always in areas of greener nature. Their mobile lifestyle protects them from such diseases of settled people as heart problems and hypertension. A study by WHO of the impact of cholesterol-rich diets in the 1960s showed that the nomadic pastoralists of Somalia, who had the world's highest consumption rates for cholesterol in their diet, had virtually no incidence of heart attacks thanks to their nomadic lifestyle. On the contrary, hypertension, heart diseases, nervous problems and even high rates of suicide among women are common afflictions among sedentarised pastoralists.

Most pastoralists keep their wealth in livestock for the household and gold and jewellery for their women. These represent their mobile capital and savings accounts. Pastoral women are nearly always elegantly dressed and possess a large wardrobe of expensive clothes. If pastoralists are protected from encroachment and intrusion from outside, they can have rich and healthy lives.

Figure 4: Yemeni pastoralists documenting their natural resource management system *(Courtesy Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend)*

Myth 10: Pastoralists overgraze their land

It is now well known that most drylands are non-equilibrium ecosystems (not least because of unreliable and highly variable seasonal and annual rainfall) requiring a different kind of management than equilibrium ecosystems. This concept, however, is relatively recent and has revolutionised the thinking and practice of range management and ecology in the past couple of decades. The conventional carrying capacity calculation for rangelands—too often still practiced—is no longer scientifically valid. The traditional practices of the nomadic pastoralists themselves are finally understood as much more technically correct than the calculations of conventional range management experts. In some countries, the single most important negative impact on the ecological health of the rangelands is related to the nationalisation of rangelands and their ensuing control by technocrats and bureaucrats. The old systems were based on a complex understanding of the ecosystems and their varying carrying capacity coupled with a fine-tuned opportunistic approach to using available resources in micro-environments, and moving away from them before they are destroyed. A good deal of research in specific local situations is still needed to better understand the ecology and responses of the drylands in this region, as most of the research has been made in other environments, such as African dry lands.

Challenges

This brief exploration of some pervasive myths about nomadic pastoralism leaves us to assess the opportunities and constraints faced by sustainable pastoral development. The questions outlined below spell out such challenges while offering a vision of a hopeful future. Bold new initiatives are needed to take up the challenge of helping pastoralism survive and do well in the region. In some places these initiatives are already proving themselves in practice (see Box 1).

Livelihoods

When supported by enabling national policies, the mobile pastoral systems can provide for sustainable livelihoods, well adapted to the social, political, economic and ecological realities of drylands. The determinant questions, in fact, are:

Can state governments abandon once and for all the policies of persecution, discrimination, alienation, oppression and deprivation from the most fundamental human rights of mobile peoples?

Can they recognise the achievements of pastoralists and their contribution to national economies, food security, sustainable use of marginal lands, conservation of biological diversity and health and conservation of natural resources and protected areas? Can they recognise their sophisticated management capacity and their right to cultural identity, which enriches the national bio-cultural diversity?

Can we integrate in what we understand as democracy some innovative styles of governance based on decisions by consensus and on preserving the integrity of the community?

Can they take much needed action to have supportive and protective policies for a segment of the population that produces much and demands little?

Can pastoralists be perceived as whole communities, rather than atomised individuals, and

can such communities be involved in the planning of their own development, the provision of services, the management of finance for investment and credit, and others?

Can we all recognise the uniqueness of the pastoral mode of production as a legitimate way of life and attempt to improve the conditions of life of these communities?

Can we all learn from the experience of nomadic pastoral societies in coping with uncertainty, risk, survival, and conservation of nature?

Poverty reduction strategies

Pastoral communities have their own systems of social organisation. Most poverty eradication programmes, being externally inspired, if not imposed, are individually oriented, such as the micro-enterprise and micro-credit schemes. These innovations can result in the weakening and atomisation of the pastoral community. They should always be preceded by a prior empowerment of the nomadic pastoral tribes as whole communities and by support to their endogenous organisation to take charge of managing their own investment and credit programmes. There are endogenous examples of community organisation for sustainable livelihoods based on the pastoral tribes' own traditions, which avoid imported models such as "associations", "cooperatives" and "micro-finance schemes". Can we learn from these endogenous experiences (such as the one illustrated in Box 1, above)?

Advancing climate change

Time and again pastoral nomads have survived droughts and other environmental disasters. They have managed to keep the integrity of their tribal organisation and have benefited from the uniting and mobilising influence of the traditional elders. Can we learn from these experiences and strengthen the nomadic communities and their traditional and indigenous knowledge of coping with these challenges? Can we help nomadic pastoralists mitigate the impact of the climate change upon them by allowing them to regain access to the entirety of their migratory landscapes, including the special ecological niches and buffer zones so important for the functioning of their overall livelihood and management strategies?

Figure 6. Man and lamb in Iran *(Courtesy Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend)*

Key legal issues

The most important factor in the revival and strengthening of pastoral systems is likely to be the rediscovery and full understanding of customary laws regarding the management of natural resources (range, forest, wetland, water, wildlife and their management). Can we help pastoralists to study and record their own customary laws? Can we organise to have formal recognition of these systems? Can we learn from the experience of some West African countries that have passed quite progressive and empowering pastoral laws (*"Codes pastorales"*) that recognise the primacy of the rights of pastoral people over the legitimacy of their traditional systems of communal property and access to natural resources? Now that many governments have experienced the futility and tragedy of taking away lands from the careful management of nomadic pastoralism, can they decide to reverse their nationalisation policies, give back the rights and ownership of land to the tribal groups on a common-property basis, and make them responsible again for its maintenance and

sustainable use? Can the states confide the management of conflicts over natural resources back to the traditional systems that demonstrated themselves to be more effective and honest than modern court and police systems?

Social and economic services

Much has been learned in terms of effective and efficient ways of providing mobile services of all kinds (health, schooling, veterinary care, marketing, information systems, etc.) to the nomadic populations. This knowledge, however, is often not shared and not even brought to bear in national—let alone regional—practice. Will it be possible to envisage a regional initiative in each pastoral region of the world and mutual learning linkages among regions around a series of demonstration/ learning sites and including ways to provide basic services?

Conservation

Given the success of the traditional pastoral systems in the conservation of landscape and species biodiversity of the rangelands, can we learn from their experience and help them re-establish and manage community conserved areas and, where necessary and feasible, co-manage with the government and others specific areas for biodiversity conservation?

Participatory democracy

Unlike what some believe, traditional systems can be internally democratic and change according to fair processes. Today, as in the past, tribal chiefs can be selected and/or impeached by lower ranking popular community elders. Can new governance systems of nomadic pastoralists be rooted on their traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices? Can their re-enabled community organisations be entrusted as key decision-makers and agents for their own livelihoods and sustainable development? Can we all graduate from the imposition of western democratic systems in traditional societies? Can we stop imposing the alienating tyranny of the majority or, in fact, the tyranny of those with money to buy publicity and votes? Can we integrate in what we understand as democracy some innovative styles of governance based on decisions by consensus and on preserving the integrity of the community? Can we learn from community-based governance systems about how to render more meaningful and participatory the governance system of the rest of society?

Can decentralisation mean anything other than extending the interfering arm of the central government to the outlying areas? Can state governments devolve authority and responsibility to the communities and their endogenous organisations rather than imposing top-down governance models? Can state governments balance this with re-centralised representation of empowered community organisations—"rebuilding the top" on a logical extension of the structures at the base?

The answers provided, or not provided, to the questions above will spell out much of the future for the nomadic pastoralists in West Asia, the integrity of their living landscapes and the wealth of dryland biodiversity in the region.

M. Taghi Farvar (Taghi@cenesta.org) is Chair of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) and member of its CMWG and SLWG working groups. He is Chairman of the Board of CENESTA, the Centre for Sustainable Development of Iran, which is the current host institution for CEESP.

Notes

1 Put forth by the Iranian Organisation for Nomadic Pastoralists Affairs (ONPA).

2 At times royalty from colonialist countries have affected the attitudes. Prince Phillip of the UK, for example, is reported to have admonished the presence of "unseemly" nomadic pastoralists in or near the protected areas of southern Iran in the 1970, when he was looked up to by Iran's royal family as the source of inspiration for anti-people conservation programmes (Colonel Beizai, D.G. of DOE in Fars Province, personal communication, 1974). This sort of conservation without, despite and against local communities and indigenous peoples survived the anti-Shah Revolution of 1979 and is still the bulk of the protected area system approach in Iran. Conscious of the ultimate futility of this approach, the Department of the Environment in Iran is now setting up new experiments that empower Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) and Co-Managed Protected Areas (CMPAs). The influence of statist advice, such as from the Soviet Union and others, seems also to have influenced anti-nomadic policies in such countries as Afghanistan, Algeria, Ethiopia, Syria, and Tanzania.

3 To use the words of Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

4 There have been many criticisms made of these tent schools and their political intent, such as their rote learning methods and their content alienating the students from their own cultures and livelihood systems, but the basic idea that a school can be *mobile* has proved sound and deserves much credit as an adapted model.

5 Much like Alpine meadows, whose extremely rich biodiversity has evolved with, and often depends on, cattle grazing.