

BOOK REVIEW

Review of Rangeland Stewardship in Central Asia Balancing Improved Livelihoods, Biodiversity Conservation and Land Protection

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Book details

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Rangeland Stewardship in Central Asia

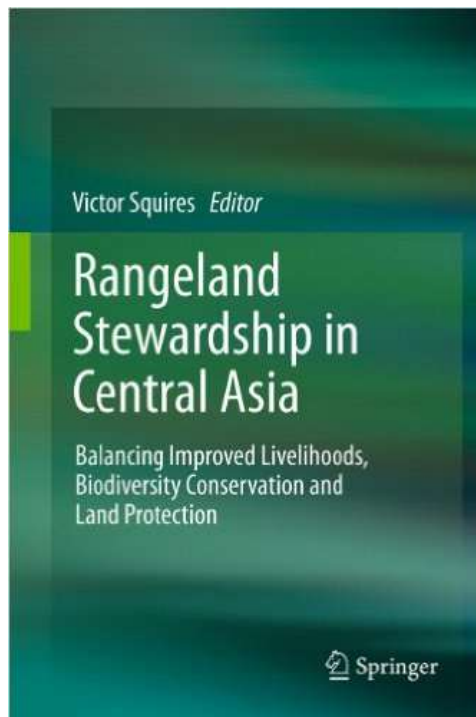
Balancing Improved Livelihoods, Biodiversity Conservation and Land Protection.

Netherlands: Springer, 2012.

i-xxxv, 458 pages, ISBN 978-94-007-5366-2, e-ISBN 978-94-007-5367-9, DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-5367-9

Keywords: **Sustainable Development, Central Asia, Extensive Livestock, Rural Livelihoods**

The book is an ambitious attempt to cover a very wide range of topics related to Biodiversity Conservation and Land Protection and to serve the interests of a wide variety of plants, ecosystems, managements, rangelands and livestock. Central Asia is vast, and the environmental diversity reflects the contrasts that give rise within the region of the coldest and hottest deserts, extensive steppe, grasslands and rangelands, alpine meadows, glacier fields, and mountains and plains. It is this great variation in geography, topography, and climate that provides the rich and unique diversity found in the region's ecosystems. There is great disparity too in the ethnicity of its peoples and the economic status of the various countries within the region. The pressures on these rich natural resources (including water from the high mountains) and environmental systems generally have, however, been increasing over the past few decades. Rapid population growth, urbanization, rising economic output, and more consumptive lifestyles, coupled with increasing incidence of poverty, have all contributed to the region's struggle to adjust to the market economy and the demands of the increasingly disenfranchised citizens, especially those on



or just above the poverty line.

Sustainable use of rangelands is considered a key component of the ADB (Asian Development Bank)/GEF approach. Development of a land ethic that promotes better long-term management is central to this effort. Sharing and dissemination of experiences in sustainable rangeland management gleaned over many years by local and foreign experts whose knowledge of these Central Asian countries is unsurpassed is a vital part of this effort. This book is a significant and most valuable contribution to the knowledge sharing that has been promoted and implemented through the ADB/GEF partnership.

In this context, local decision makers need to stop making decisions based on short-term interests and, instead, look into the importance of long-term sustainability of rangelands on which a large proportion of the people in all Central Asian countries depend for their livelihoods but also for their spiritual and cultural nourishment. The livelihoods of these land users and indeed the economy of most countries in the region will depend on the rangeland resources and the goods and services they provide.

This book reviews past and current land practices and policies against a background of considerable upheavals wrought by changes in attitudes in recent decades in the political, social, and environmental spheres as a number of countries in Central Asia have emerged from the period of central planning, as part of the USSR, to a more market-oriented economy. The book focused on characteristics and issues that are judged to be most important in the current and future management of environmental resources. Chapter one defines a crucial role of animal husbandry in economies, societies and cultures going back for hundreds of years. Pastoralism in its multiple forms and as a livelihood strategy continues to be dynamic and flexible, with changing pastoral strategies reflecting societal pressure, shifting power structures, and economic opportunities that are discussed in this book. Also the book explains that seasonal and spatial fluctuations in forage quality, accessibility, and output provide strong incentives for migratory stock keeping in Central Asia. One of the other subjects that have been discussed is the historical development of grazing systems in the region. Population and economic development in five countries in CA such as; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and its effects on rangeland management is introduced in the book. Overgrazing in good rangelands and cutting of shrubs by local population for firewood are main causal factors in rangeland degradation investigated by authors. Land degradation is one of the greatest challenges countries of the Central Asian Region (CAR) face. Data on livestock population of sheep, horses and goats are presented in the book also. The book is written by leading authorities on the current and latent issues in the region and brings to the reader an up to date analysis and provides a window into this important region. This book arranged in five parts. Part I, the introductory chapters, provides an overview of the region in an analysis of the geography and environmental history. Part V, the last section, poses the following questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to be in the coming decades? And how do we get there?

The general conclusions reached are indeed somewhat pessimistic because of geo-political (such as borders of country to saving) and demographic pressures. This volume of 18 chapters is the work of more than 30 authors, many of whom are natives of the Central Asian region or are researchers who have dedicated a large part of their working lives to studying the dynamics of people, livestock and climate (both physical and socio-political) in this vast and fascinating region. The book is rich with new data presented in 68 easy to understand charts/graphs (many in colour) and 50 Tables. Much of the information is new and was generated for this book by experts working in-country.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.