IFAD’s Agricultural Investments and Services Project (AISP) assisted in the implementation of the 2009 “Pasture Law” which devolved pastureland management to local government and pasture users, in the form of pasture users’ unions (PUUs). 768 PUUs and 714 community pasture management plans were developed. The project aimed at fostering integrated, equitable, socially and environmentally sustainable pastureland use and management by devolving responsibility to the local actors, and applying a community-based approach. Not only did the legal reform prove to have a positive impact on the rural population; investments in pasture management proved to be both economically viable and financially profitable for farmers.
Traditionally, Kyrgyz herders used a transhumant system, grazing mixed herds at higher altitudes in the summer, middle altitudes in the spring and fall, and on low-lying pastures in the winter. The Soviet system replaced the traditional one with centrally managed intensive livestock production. With independence, the livestock was distributed to households, but the loss of a guaranteed market for Kyrgyz wool, combined with low wool prices and high meat prices, resulted in a rapid reduction in the country's sheep and cattle herds.

Since independence, the country has struggled with pastoral management as individual households have been rebuilding Kyrgyzstan's livestock numbers. The individualization of livestock holdings, which resulted in large numbers of households with small numbers of animals, coupled with a distrust of professional herd management and fragmented administrative control over pastures, has resulted in concentrated grazing on local pastures all year-round. As a result, remote pastures have become underutilized. An estimated 33% of the pasture near farms and settlements is substantially degraded, 19% suffers from erosion and inedible weeds have overtaken.
In this context, the Agricultural Investments and Services Project (AISP) (2008-2014) supported by IFAD, World Bank and the Swiss Development Cooperation, supported the adoption and the implementation of the 2009 “Pasture Law”, which devolved pasture management to local government, down to the level of pasture users, in the form of pasture users’ unions (PUUs). A specific component of the project aimed at fostering integrated, equitable, and socially and environmentally sustainable pasture use and management by devolving responsibility to the local actors, and applying a community-based approach. Following the success of AISP, the achievements in pasture management were consolidated in new programmes, namely the Pasture and Livestock Management Improvement Project (2014–2019), financed by the World Bank, and the Livestock and Market Development Project phases I and II (LMDP I and LMDP II) (2014–2019/2020 respectively), financed by IFAD. The programme supports legal and regulatory reforms as well as sustainable pasture management through capacity-building of PUUs.

Not only did the legal reform prove to have a positive impact on the rural population, investments in pasture management improvement proved to be both economically viable and financially profitable for farmers. Benefits were generated primarily through the establishment of 768 PUUs and the development of 714 community pasture management plans, and through community-based investment in pasture infrastructure, providing improved access to pastures. This resulted in reduced stocking rates and, consequently, higher livestock productivity in terms of meat and milk yields. Kyrgyzstan’s experience is highly valued in the region and recognized as best practice. Government representatives and pasture users from neighbouring countries have since visited Kyrgyzstan to study the 2009 Pasture Law as well as its policy and legislative reforms.
Support to the legislative process. AISP aimed to establish an adequate legal, regulatory and institutional framework for the devolution of responsibility for pasture use and management at local level. In order to do so, the project contributed to raising awareness of decision makers and provided recommendations on legislative reforms, culminating in the development and the adoption of the 2009 Pasture Law. The Pasture Law transferred authority over pasture management to the lowest administrative level of aiyl okmotu. This was then followed by the delegation of authority from aiyl okmotys to pasture users’ unions (PUUs) and their executive bodies, the pasture committees.

Community-level pasture management. PUUs were established in each aiyl aimak’s territory at the initiative of pasture users, and all are registered in the state regional offices of the Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan, gaining the legal status of Body of Territorial Public Self-Government. PUUs are required to develop community-based pasture management plans which are intended to serve as a foundation for pasture land management, maintenance, improvement and use. Pasture use rights are to be allocated through pasture tickets, which give the holder the right to a number of animal grazing days, as well as access to grazing routes.

Inclusive decision-making processes. A broad-based representation of all types of pasture users empowers them and provides for more equitable rights. The 2009 Pasture Law stipulates that all members of the rural population should be included in PUUs, irrespective of whether or not they own or use pasture resources. The Pasture Law envisaged PUUs not as member organizations but rather as territorial unions of self-governance that are open to any resident of an aiyl aimak. Other stakeholders besides the herders – such as women and the poor – are to be represented in the pasture committees, and should participate in decision-making processes.

Demarcation of pastureland. With pastureland demarcation being a prerequisite for PUUs assuming the responsibility of pasture management, AISP supported activities to demarcate pasture boundaries between the aiyl okmotys (village governments). Through this process, pasture boundaries between aiyl okmotys were demarcated for almost all PUUs (97 per cent) in the country. This proved to be an important legal basis for their operations. Demarcation of pasture boundaries was extremely effective in preventing potential conflicts associated with the use of pasture areas, not only between aiyl okmotys but also at raion level.

Dispute resolution mechanisms. Public disclosure and dispute resolution mechanisms were established at local and national levels. The process of pasture reform unexpectedly resurrected a number of long-lasting conflicts over pasture territories between neighbouring aiyl okmotys (rural municipality administrations). This slowed the pace of implementation of the Pasture Law. The project assisted with the establishment and operation of dispute resolution mechanisms to settle disagreements between and among the administrations over boundaries and user rights.
LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to follow a systemic approach to improving the governance of pasturage, which takes pastoral water as the entry point for interventions, and is built on respect for the pastoral system and the three pillars on which it is based: resources (water, land), society (families, chiefdoms, institutions) and the economy (livestock).

The challenges for pastoral tenure can be addressed by focusing on strengthening customary pastoral institutions or customary-formal hybrids, building the resilience of common-pool resource users, mitigating conflict through participatory land-use planning and multi-stakeholder user agreements and developing inclusive policy and legal frameworks.

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY

The establishment of an appropriate legal framework was a critical precondition for sustainable community-based pasture management. Prior to 2009, fragmented management by government was unfair and disrupted seasonal grazing, resulting in pasture degradation. Following its implementation in 2009, the Pasture Law provided a clear legal framework allowing for strong PUUs to assume responsibility for sustainable pasture management and to collect the fees necessary to maintain pasture lands. The legal reform process confirmed the importance of implementing agencies’ capacity and the huge commitment required if social mobilization activities are to be inclusive. Rural communities, adequately empowered and supported, have proved to be conscientious and effective managers of common resources.
FIND OUT MORE
