

# Grassroots Pastoral Organizations in Mauritania

**E**XTERNAL SUPPORT TO THE LIVESTOCK SECTOR IN semi-arid regions has increasingly emphasized the development of pastoralists' groups to facilitate linkage with support services, especially in animal health, and to improve management of rangeland and water resources, the basis of pastoral livestock production. Although several such projects have been implemented in North and West Africa, little assessment had been done of their development and performance. A recent OED study of one such project—the Second Livestock Project in Mauritania—offers lessons learned that can be applied to achieve a more successful outcome in future efforts to assist pastoralists.

## Background

The Second Livestock Project in Mauritania (1987–95) was an innovative effort that staked its success on the development of pastoral cooperative associations (PCAs). It was the successor to the First Livestock Project (1971–78), which was designed to improve animal health and output through vaccination, to construct and rehabilitate wells, and to promote other natural resource management activities. This first project was considered a success. The objectives of the second project hinged on the establishment of PCAs, which would be responsible for managing allocated grazing areas and providing better extension services and production in-

puts, with the aim of slowing the deterioration of grazing and boosting livestock production.

The OED study assessed the performance of the project in developing PCAs, and reviewed their development, current position, and the issues that arose as they continued to evolve, two years after project closing. It found that overall performance was poor. PCAs had low visibility and no clear role. They did not become effective grassroots organizations with significant mass participation, and they did not achieve effective control over their grazing areas.

The Second Livestock Project had six components: a pilot program to establish



PCAs; the distribution of inputs for sale to livestock owners through the Office of Livestock Inputs Service (*BIE: Bureau des Intrants pour l'Élevage*), to be established under the project; the strengthening of livestock services; the establishment of both a livestock development fund to finance recurrent costs of Livestock Department (*DNE: Direction Nationale d'Élevage*) field services from expected BIE surpluses and a production improvement fund to partially finance mini-projects to be managed by the PCAs; the construction of an abattoir in the capital; as well as project monitoring and the study of livestock production systems.

The preparation and implementation of the project were marked by delays, hesitations, and reconsiderations. There were several reasons for this uncertain start. The project was designed and implemented against a backdrop of social, economic, and political change in Mauritania. It was prepared and appraised in the mid-1980s, when Mauritania was governed by an authoritarian, military-backed regime that opposed measures to empower groups within society; it was implemented during a period of turmoil, when racially based tensions with Senegal led to considerable unrest, a period that also saw a shift to a more open government.

Funding was provided by the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the OPEC Fund, and (in the later stages) Norway. This arrangement in itself created implementation problems, because the cofinanciers did not always agree—among themselves, or with the Government of Mauritania—on the orientation, focus, and means of implementing the project. Procedural negotiations among the cofinanciers at the outset of implementation created additional delays. The project, approved in 1986, was not implemented until 1987.

### Project Performance

The overall performance of the project was poor. The physical facilities for livestock services and the abattoir were constructed, but little progress was made on the remaining components. The financing of livestock services was not reformed and little coherent data was obtained on the livestock sector; measures to improve veterinary and other supplies never became effective; and there were no BIE surpluses to use for the livestock and production improvement funds, a deficiency that became moot when the importation of veterinary and other inputs was privatized. The poor performance of the project and other factors, such as the 1993 reorganization of the Ministry of Rural Development and Environment and the dismantling of the Livestock Department, led the Bank, the cofinanciers, and the government to agree to a reformulated project with only two components: PCA support

and the construction of an abattoir. This project was approved by the Bank's Board in 1995.

### Development of PCAs

By the second year of the project, 7 of the 15 planned experimental PCAs had been established. Further progress was hampered by interethnic violence that extended into some of the PCAs, and few of the project's objectives had been reached by the mid-term review in 1990. Altogether, 14 PCAs had been established and others were identified. Once the experimental phase was completed, the creation of PCAs was generalized, and 60 PCAs were scheduled for creation by 1995. To give the project a chance to succeed, the Bank extended the closing date by three years, to 1995, but the objectives remained unchanged. Additional financial support was provided by Norway in the form of a grant to the government to support the establishment of PCAs.

The early enthusiasm for PCAs began to wane, for a variety of reasons. Expected water-point development did not take place, despite earlier assurances. Established PCAs had no legal rights over their grazing land or water points, which limited their capacity to manage their natural resources. And the top-down structure of the PCAs, together with the lack of human and financial resources, meant that there was little supervision of the earlier PCAs, which led to a low level of activity.

Interest in PCAs was revived by changes in the political environment, as well as structural and institutional changes in the organization of the associations. In 1992, shortly after the mid-term review, the 39 established PCAs formed the National Grouping of Pastoral Associations (GNAP). At the same time, changes in the political environment—including a 1993 law that provided a stronger legal framework for creating cooperatives—made it easier to set up independent interest groups. This led to the restructuring of the GNAP by 1994.

The PCAs thus evolved into unions of cooperatives with a mandate to coordinate the local cooperatives, and the GNAP became a cooperative of unions. It was hoped that presenting the PCAs as local unions of smaller cooperatives with varied activities and interests might improve the level of activity within the associations. These changes, which took place between 1993 and 1995, renewed interest in the associations, despite the shortcomings of the project, which had failed to provide real training and support, or to enforce legal provisions for the right to manage natural resources within a PCA's domain.

By the close of the credit in 1995, the post-project evolution of the structures established by the Second

Livestock Project was already under way. The cofinanciers continued to provide some financial support, which enabled the creation of the National Grouping of Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral Associations (GNAASP). Eleven of the associations had already transformed into unions, and the remaining 28 have followed.

### Membership

The system of representation by delegates makes it difficult to determine the exact number of PCA members, but the estimated membership is 20,000, or more than one-third of the pastoralist households in the country. Although this is a considerable achievement, evidence suggests that only a small number of pastoralists are actively involved in PCAs. Membership is often nominal, and the associations are in a highly variable—but generally precarious—state.

#### *The Pastoral Cooperative Associations (PCAs)*

A typical PCA covers an area of 2,000–5,000<sup>2</sup> km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of about 5,000 persons. Each association has an assembly of delegates, each of whom is chosen by a group of 20 to 30 families with some common interest (grazing their herds in the same general area, for example). The assembly is expected to meet annually to select the chief officers of the PCA and a small committee (bureau) to run day-to-day affairs. The assembly also approves the contribution of each member to the revolving fund.

#### *Ethnic Composition*

The ethnic composition of PCAs is divided along tribal lines: almost two-thirds of the groups evaluated (8 out of 13) consist entirely of Maurish tribes, while the others are ethnically mixed. The Maures also dominate at the national level—the Executive Committee, the GNAASP Secretariat, and most of the leaders are Maures. The PCAs are thus reflective of the political and social structures of rural Mauritanian society, but these political divisions inhibit the effective functioning of the PCAs.

#### *Age and Gender*

Most PCA leaders are male, between 45 and 56 years of age, but women are much more active at the level of the member cooperatives. The local women's cooperatives are among the most active groups within the association (now union of cooperatives), and in rural society in general. The leaders of the individual PCAs are generally prominent members of society, with both urban and rural interests. Members of the committees are predominantly local. The membership of the *bureaus* has opened up with the creation of unions of cooperatives.

#### *Representation*

There is still one delegate for each group of 30 families, although active membership is small. The annual PCA assemblies seldom meet; only the smaller management committees meet regularly. Decisions are usually made by the permanent committee or the president. Thus, the PCAs are not participatory structures, and they generally reflect the interests of the local elite (the leaders), although their actions may serve the common interest. The number of those who have actually benefited from the associations' actions is small, and the impact on the livestock sector is limited.

#### *PCA Activities*

*Revolving funds:* Most PCAs maintain a small revolving fund for the purchase of veterinary supplies. This is the most common and the most successful association activity.

*Mini-projects:* Most PCAs have also undertaken productive mini-projects that usually involve milk production and fattening, essentially for the local market. Other initiatives—such as poultry and salt pan projects—failed to generate funding. In general, the lack of management training and experience, supervision and control, and transparency has limited the effectiveness of PCA activities.

*Natural resource management:* The provision of water through the drilling of bore holes or the rehabilitation of pastoral wells was a priority for pastoralists, but it was not given high priority by the project. Natural resource management activities such as cutting, stocking, and selling hay; preventing brush fires; inhibiting the cutting of trees; and controlling access to pastures to prevent overgrazing were also unsuccessful because no resources were provided for their support.

*Raising awareness:* The associations' activities contribute in raising awareness about the livestock sector. They provide a framework for consciousness-raising and dissemination of information on issues such as improved resource management, cost-effective livestock production, and better marketing of livestock products. The associations also play the role of lobbyist to the extent that they make the concerns of livestock producers an issue in the planning and policymaking decisions of the government, NGOs, and lending agencies.

*Training and education* activities are limited. Very few trainers, *encadreurs*, have been trained; few associations have held training sessions, although they were found to be beneficial; and no management training, not even in the management of a PCA or the design of a mini-project, or technical training was offered.

*Herders' interests* receive some representation through PCA activities, but these activities depend

almost entirely on the enthusiasm and resources of the PCA representatives.

### Project Follow-up

Following completion of the project, support to the PCAs was continued, with a view to their inclusion in the successor Rainfed Natural Resource Management Project (PGRNP), approved in fiscal year 1997. This project also had a natural resource management focus, but with greater emphasis at the local level on village development, and it included the full range of land users. Three major kinds of activities are envisaged: land and water conservation activities; water supply and productive investments; and microenterprise matching grants for activities along the lines of the earlier mini-projects. Support for the provision of medicines—both human and animal, funded by the existing PCA revolving funds—is also planned.

To date, the PCAs have not been formally involved in this process, and they believe they are being sidelined in favor of more village-based entities, to the potential disadvantage of the pastoralists.

### Overall Performance in Establishing PCAs

While the project succeeded in establishing PCAs, it was inconsistent over time in its approach to the organizations—moving from experimenting with a few pilot associations, to expansion, and back to consolidation. This created confusion and conflict and kept the associations from developing a clear status in the country.

This problem was aggravated by the large size and scale of the PCAs, which made it difficult for them to overcome internal heterogeneity of interests and act as genuine cooperatives. In addition, there was little in the way of support or resources for these new institutions.

The project continued to emphasize range management, although the PCA members were more concerned with water and animal health, and despite evidence that efforts to establish a freer system of distribution of veterinary products were appreciated by the herders and proved the most popular and durable of all the initiatives. The primary concern of the project with natural resource management was not linked to a strategy founded on a detailed understanding and analysis of the complex dynamics of contemporary production systems, nor on an appreciation of the major environmental constraints in a rapidly evolving ecological situation.

At the outset, PCA members understood that the project would place priority on rehabilitating or drilling wells for stock-watering points. But the lack of BIE surpluses meant that funding was never established, and this crucial element materialized in only a minor way at

the end of the project, when additional funds were made available. This was a source of particular frustration for the pastoralists.

In summary, the PCAs have not developed a strong presence, and consequently lack visibility, both locally and nationally. They risk becoming sidelined and withering into insignificance. Given the marginality of pastoral livestock producers and their need to integrate into the larger economy, this could lead to tensions that will undercut other efforts, including those of the PGRNP. The Bank should recognize that it cannot initiate community groupings and then ignore them in subsequent operations if it—and they—are to retain credibility.

It is essential that the PGRNP recognize and mesh with the structures developed under the Second Livestock Project. The PGRNP should:

- Work in a fully participatory manner with the PCAs and other local groupings to further the development of its strategy for natural resource management and development.
- Give high priority to improving stock-watering points and completing the program identified under the Second Livestock Project.

Although the project did not meet expectations, it did have an impact. The process of project preparation and negotiation for project implementation procedures had a significant effect on legislation and administration of the livestock sector. The creation; implementation; and, above all, the funding of the project by major international institutions enhanced the status of the sector and identified it as a major interest group within the national economy. This was further reinforced by the creation of the PCAs and the GNAP and the additional funding of the project.

### General Lessons

The findings of the study indicate some general lessons that can be applied in efforts to support pastoralists:

- Clear and attainable objectives should be set. In this case, the project focused on two conflicting objectives for the same group: producer organizations that would be both cooperative organizations and territorial institutions.
- Resource management requires intensive and continuing support for local initiatives and recognition of the limited selection of new technologies available for extensive production and natural resource management systems. Priority should be given to helping pastoralists better integrate into the larger economy

and society, rather than to attempts to devise and introduce improved technologies.

- Actions that foster the growth of a broader pattern of local leadership in the communities would provide an enabling environment for new initiatives and the emergence of new cooperative groupings.
- Because the resource base in many marginal communities is already effectively used, improvements must be sought through means other than physical intensification of the existing production technologies.
- When strong local structures for development-oriented activities do not exist, a sequenced, process approach to project operations is required, especially when the local socioeconomic and resource management systems are not clearly understood. This would involve investigation, followed by actions that produce needed results (for example, animal health or water resources), and, finally, a broadening of the experience after the successful implementation of the first operation.

► This *Précis* is based on *Mauritania—Second Livestock Project*, by [John English](#), Report No. 18133 IER, June 1998. Available to Bank Executive Directors and staff from the Internal Documents Unit and from regional information service centers, and to the public from the World Bank InfoShop.

