

Pastoral Field Schools empowered Pastoralists

January 2013, Addis Ababa: Regional and national Pastoral Field School (PFS) meetings were held from January 29 to 31, 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to critically review their role in disaster risk reduction and to sustainably address the root causes of the recurrent drought in Pastoral areas of Eastern Africa.

Opening the regional Pastoral Field School event, Livestock officer at the Eastern Africa sub-regional office of FAO, Emmanuelle GuerneBleich, said Pastoral Field Schools are vital to empower pastoral communities of the region and hence they should be expanded and scaled up in the region and beyond to address the root causes of poverty, food and nutrition insecurity.

“PFS being scaled up in the region, expanding beyond the initial work in Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia, which makes sharing of experiences very timely at this particular point in time,” Emmanuelle said. “The adoption of improved agricultural practices through the implementation of Farmer Field Schools/Pastoral Field School approach will increase production and have a positive impact on food security of farmers and pastoralists.”

Opening the national Pastoral Field School event, director of extension directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture of Ethiopia, Dr. Edmealem Shitaye, for his part said that PFS is a laudable approach in bringing about attitudinal and behavioral change among the pastoralist communities, assist them in diversifying their businesses, and meet the growing economic challenges and building sustainable economic development.

“Pastoralist Field Schools are key to equip pastoralists with the necessary knowledge and skills, and make them more resilient and less vulnerable to natural disasters that may arise in their regions,” Dr. Edmealem added. “I believe, PFS can play significant role in empowering pastoralists with skills and knowledge to solve problems and manage their ecosystems accordingly.”



FAO/Pastoral Field School in Borena, Ethiopia.

Pastoral Field Schools (PFS)

Pastoralist Field Schools, also known as schools without walls, are community managed learning, experimentation, extension and adaptation platforms where group of pastoralists systematically discuss about their social, economic and ecological issues on a regular basis. The overall PFS process is guided by a learning curriculum developed in participatory approach tailored to seasonal livelihood activities and challenges.

PFS allows pastoralists to improve their management skills and become experts in their own resource use practices. It usually comprises of a group of 30-40 pastoralists (including elders, men, women and youth) who meet regularly (weekly) over a defined period of time, often for 1 to 2 years. The group makes observation, analysis and discussion that relates to their daily lives, particularly, concerning their livestock production system and the rangeland ecosystem.

The PFS approach harnesses disaster risk reduction initiatives through its learning and adaptation platforms. It follows a

learning cycle that enhances community level experimentation and recommendations before the implementation of the wide scale DRR programs. This makes the DRR program more community managed, cost effective and sustainable if implemented in line with the PFS learning outcomes.

The approach is an extension of the [Farmer Field Schools \(FFS\)](#) that was developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in South Asia since the 1980s as a means of empowering farmers to develop their own solutions to problems that research and extension could not provide answer for.

PFS in Ethiopia

There are about 50 Pastoral Field Schools across in Ethiopia. In 2010, FAO in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia, established 6 (six) pilot Pastoral Field Schools in Borana Zone of Oromiya National Regional State. In 2011, the PFS approach was expanded to three regions - Afar, Somali and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples regions.

The program is financed by Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), European Commission (EC) and European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). FAO is responsible for the overall supervision and to ensure the principles of PFSs and consistency with donor policies and procedures are followed. It provides guidance on linkages with related regional pastoralist initiatives and is also providing overall coordination and technical and financial management of the Project.

The projects are managed by the Sub-Regional Emergency Office for Eastern and Central Africa (REOA) based in Nairobi, Kenya. FAO, through its Headquarters and regional office, is also providing technical expertise and experience to support the projects. The country specific activities are supported by the FAO country offices in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda.

NGOs implementing PFS in their interventions include IIRR, VSF-Germany, VSF-Suisse, Oxfam GB, Save the Children International, Pastoral Concern, COOPI and Liben Zone Pastoral Development Office. At local level activities are implemented by local communities in collaboration with local authorities and the respective regional Pastoral Areas Development Commission and Bureaus.

Case study from Borena Zone of Ethiopia

The Borana rangeland was formerly acclaimed to be the finest grazing lands in Eastern Africa. However, it is currently degraded due to recurrent droughts, over grazing, denuding, bush encroachment, termite infestation, erosion of the traditional natural resource management practices and competing land use requirements. The degradation of the rangelands is detrimental to livestock productivity and pastoral food security, reducing the availability of food and milk for the local population and limiting opportunities for generating income from sales of healthy livestock.

In the PFS session the bush encroachment is one of the agendas they discuss. Based on Pastoralists interest and the involvement of the local government, selective bush clearing was conducted at each PFS centers. Accordingly, they cleared 168 hectares of bush, estimated at ETB 84,000. They also benefited from the pasture for their livestock and priority is given to PFS beneficiaries, who are extremely poor and vulnerable households also benefited from the project. They have improved their livestock feeding and also the sites are used as demonstration trial for each PFS.

The project provided the awareness to solve pastoralist's own problems by themselves so that they are prepared for and are resilient to different forms of hazards. It has enhanced better quality community-managed sustainable grazing land, improved quality and quantity of rangeland resources which led to improved livestock body condition, increased milk supply and food availability in the target beneficiary community.

This practice also supported the reclamation of commonly reserved pastureland, which is of long term benefit in continuously regenerating the land. Moreover, sufficient grazing land has been provided for lactating cows and their calves and milk production boosted.

Currently, government and good number of NGOs are investing huge resources to curb bush encroachment problem through PSF approach.

However, much remains to be done for successful scale up and expansion of Pastoral Field Schools in Pastoral areas of Ethiopia, which include among others, the creation of an appropriate adult education system that it relevant, appropriate, accessible and compatible with pastoral lifestyles. Besides this, PFS has to

be tailored to specific needs of communities so that PFS has the potential to be an appropriate extension approach for future investment in the dry land areas.

PFS is proven as the right approach to organize pastoralist communities and also to ensure gender equality but it must be outward-looking and gain access to new ideas and support. Therefore, supportive policy measures have to be taken by all stakeholders to scale it up.

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