The Range Management Handbook of Kenya

by Dennis Herlocker

A familiar problem

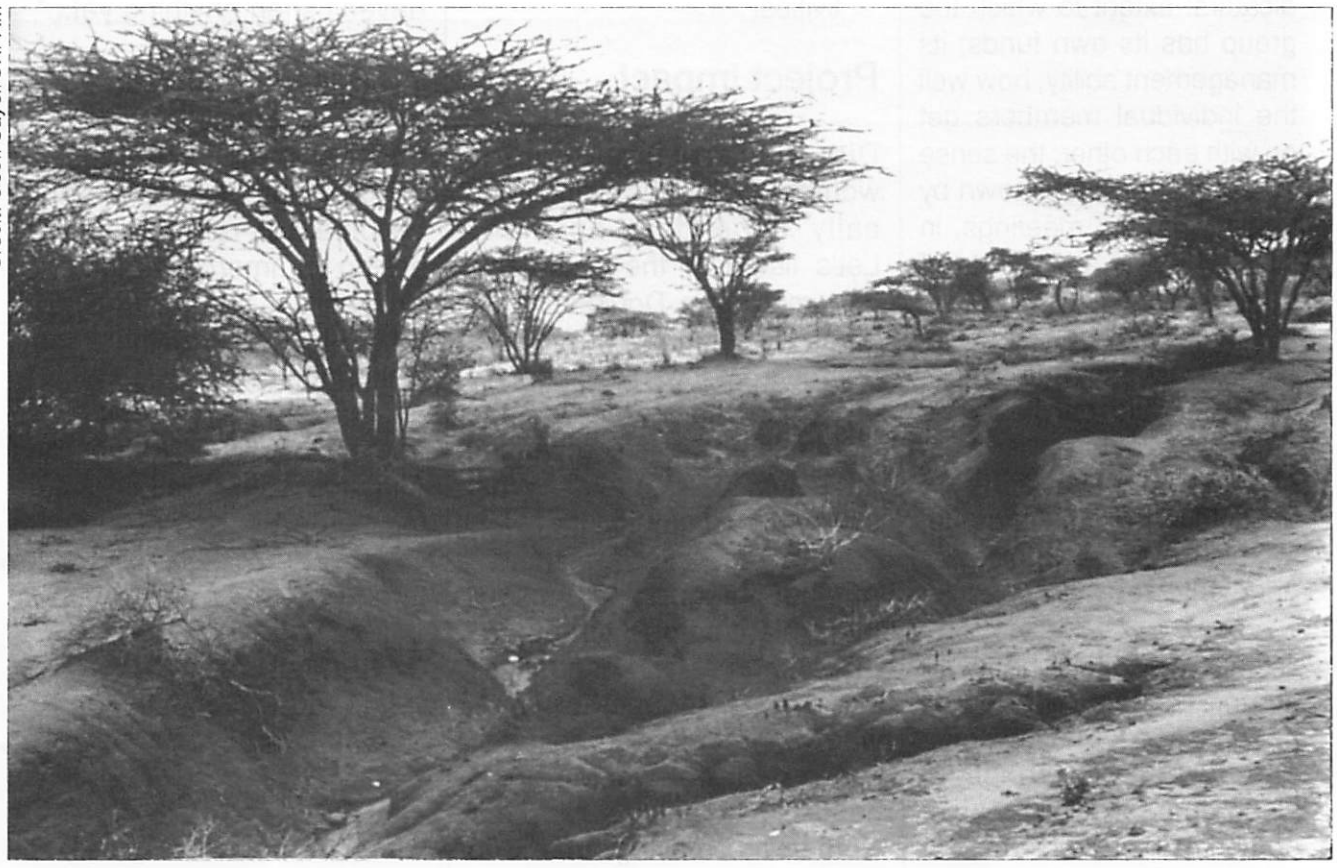
Lets say that you are an NGO representative wanting to properly site a new livestock water source; a District Agricultural Officer needing to know if extension inputs into an as yet unsettled area have a chance of eventual success; an educator interested in reference and training materials on arid and semi-arid areas or a programme officer for a large donor agency who is checking the practicality of a proposal to fund a number of new boreholes in a specified area.

A few years ago there wouldn't have been much factual data available to use and on which to base decisions. In the case of the proposed development activities there would, of course, have been lots of opinions, sometimes knowledgeable but, more often, based on incorrect assumptions or just self serving. You would have been on your own and you would have had to learn from experience the answers to the problems stated above.

Too often, the results would have been partial or complete failures, good to learn from but possibly disastrous for the pastoralists and farmers directly affected. The educator would simply have had to make do with what little information on dryland areas he or she could find.

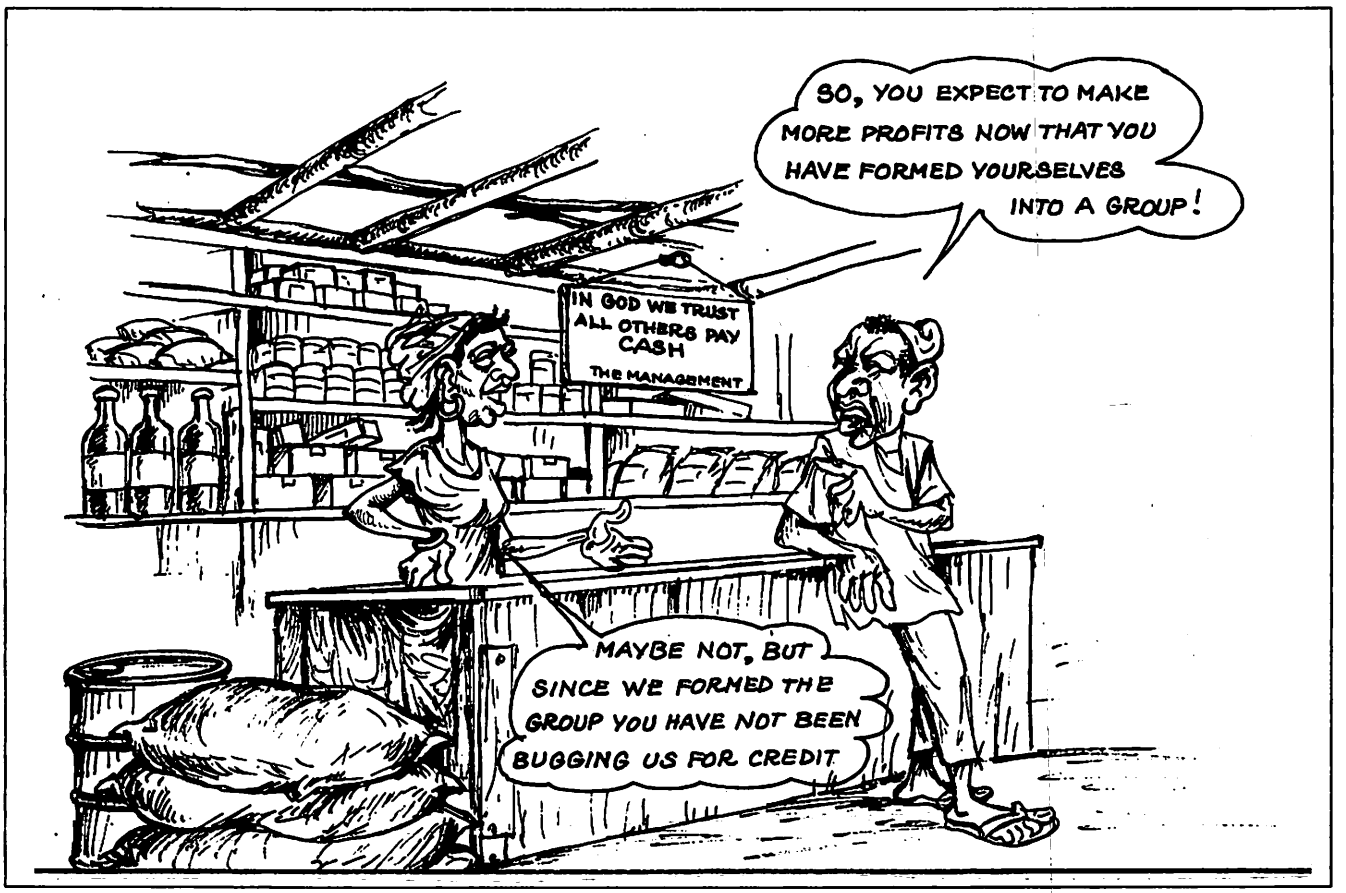
Help has arrived

Now, however, at least for those of you dealing with northern Kenya, help is at hand. The Kenya Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Development and Marketing and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) are preparing a three volume, 19 part Kenya **Range Management Handbook.** The core of this book deals with over 20 environmental and renewable resource attributes for each of northern Kenya's nine administrative districts. The handbook provides much of the information needed to deal with the technical and ecological aspects of planning development activities in northern



Credit: Geoff Sayer/OXFAM

Degraded rangeland in Samburu, Kenya. Can information on better management help reverse this damage?



- The groups solidarity. This is measured by the following indicators: extent to which the group has its own funds; its management ability, how well the individual members get on with each other; the sense of organization, as shown by holding regular meetings, in which there is a high rate of participation.

- The group's objectives. These should be clear and precise. Individual members should not have different expectations from the group, as this may lead to discouragement later on.

- Exchanges visits between groups. These are a source of motivation and lessons. Through the exchange of ideas and collective consideration of their problems, the women succeed in taking the best decisions for their activities.

Project impact

Did the project help the women to be less economically dependent on men? Let's listen to the comments of a man from Doulakoïra village. "The money has disappeared from the men's pockets and is now to be found in the women's hands. The women have lots of money." What more can we say?

Another important point: Did the project help to strengthen the women's self-confidence? Let's listen to another man, who was recently surprised to see a group of women going out in a boat. "So now our women are moving around to hold meetings?" A woman replied in this way: "You haven't seen anything yet..."

Thus there is reason to be optimistic about the future of these women. But it will be crucial for the women to become self-reliant, as there are no commercial credit institutions in the region and CARE-Mali is only there for a limited time.

Lucia Nass is a trainer and Alimatou Touré was in charge of women's activities with CARE. You can contact them through:

CARE-Mali,
B.P. 1766
Bamako, Mali.



Credit: Geoff Sayer/OXFAM

Once the soil has been washed into the sea, it is lost forever.

Kenya. It contains a wealth of material of value to educators and researchers dealing with arid and semi-arid lands.

Northern Kenya

The area actually dealt with by the handbook is the northern half of Kenya, an area of approximately 280,000 km², (about the size of Burkina Faso), which comprises the districts of Mandera, Wajir, Isiolo, Samburu, Marsabit, Baringo, Turkana, West Pokot and the Kerio River Valley in Elgeyo Marakwet District.

Northern Kenya is arid. Only about 10% of the area - in the southwest - is semi-arid or better. The major land use is nomadic pastoralism on communal rangelands. This is changing to more sedentary pastoralism, some farming and other forms of land ownership in those limited areas with higher rainfall or access to permanent flowing rivers. Tourism is limited by the large distances to be travelled and poor infrastructure.

Past activities

Northern Kenya has, over several decades, seen a number of water, range and livestock development activities. Frequent droughts have spurred famine relief programs which have included numerous rural development activities. Development activities have ranged from large capital intensive projects funded bilaterally or multi-laterally and covering large areas to small, community-based interventions by NGOs.

Frequent failures

Many development projects have failed or not met expectations, especially the larger ones. Often this is because the local users targeted by the activity were not adequately involved in the planning and execution. However, purely technical reasons have also commonly been to blame.

Development activities in northern Kenya have often been poorly planned, simply for a lack of reliable information on the area's environment and resource base. For instance, buildings have had to be abandoned because they were seriously weakened by the seasonal shrinking and swelling of the underlying heavy clay soils. Agriculture and settlement has been encouraged in areas where low rainfall and poor soils are not capable of supporting it over the long term. Livestock water pans and dams are often placed where soils are too sandy to retain water for long periods.

Now, much of that information is available from the **Range Management Handbook**.

A major venture

The handbook is still in the process of being published (about half of it is now available for distribution) but will eventually comprise 3 volumes and 19 parts.

Volume I provides the historical, administrative, and policy context for range and livestock development in Kenya. It also includes a section on traditional pastoralism and one on practical approaches to range and live-stock development.

The core of the Handbook is Volume II which provides, for each of the districts covered, a report and a set of more than 20 maps. Climate, soil types and vegetation, water sources, livestock marketing and pastoral practices are presented and discussed. Range units, naturally defined land management units, are used to summarize important management information and indicate potentials and constraints to development.

The accompanying maps present detailed information on the following natural resources:

Climate: average annual rainfall, amount and reliability of seasonal rainfall, length and reliability of growing season, drought risk and climatic zones;

Landforms and soils: landform and soil units, wet season and year-round constraints on movement by livestock, fertility, erosion risk and soil moisture storage capacity;

Vegetation: vegetation types and range condition;

Water: type and location of water sources and distance to water.

Depending on the availability of information, some districts have special maps. For instance, Wajir, Mandera and Isiolo districts have maps showing types of livestock habitat as defined by local pastoralists. Each type has a traditional type and timing of pastoral use.

Volume III of the Handbook includes miscellaneous reports relevant to the ecology and management of the dryland areas of northern Kenya. These can be divided into references which provide information, such as **The guide to plants tolerant of arid and semi-arid conditions**, and field guides, such as **A survey method for classification of range condition**, which help you gather your own information.

For more information about this useful tool contact:

Kenya Range Management Handbook Project,
Ministry of Agriculture,
P.O. Box 34188,
Nairobi, KENYA

Examples of questions the Range Management Handbook can help you answer:

1) Which water sources in my area need repair?
2) Which parts of my area have no water?
3) What type of water development seems most ecologically appropriate?
4) What are the most important forage species here?
5) How can I tell if this rangeland is degraded?
6) What are some tree, shrub and/or grass species that might be usefully grown in this area?
7) Is what I'm seeing here erosion?
8) Is it accelerated erosion which might call for some sort of management action, or normal geological erosion?
9) What are the management/rehabilitation implications of this type of erosion?
10) Are the soils of this area easily erodible?
11) How can this soil, which I have just found to be degraded, be practically rehabilitated?