

Gerge, Ngari Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region(TAR), April 2009.

My name is Tenzin Lhamo. I come from Toe (upper) Ngari. I am 38 years old. It has been two weeks since I arrived here in India. My parents are in Tibet. We are nomads.

**Have you seen grassland degradation in your area? How severely has it been degraded?**

The Grasslands in my area have been severely degraded. This is due to the mining in gold and lead that has been taking place in the area.

The number of livestock that a nomad family can own has been limited. One has to pay a fee if their animals exceed the maximum number allotted. The day the nomad exceeds the allotment of grasses and water used by certain animals, they have to pay 50 yuan for one yak and 100 yuan for a horse. Living standards of nomads have not improved.

On average, some 500 livestock will be lost from 1000 livestock if a snowstorm hits. But due to the policy only 20/30 will remain out of 100 from the disaster. There is always the risk of snowstorm at the winter and autumn pastures.

Fencing has been implemented. Earlier there were only "Rukhag" (nomadic community) which went on like "Rukhag" one, two. But the lands have now been made into a small number of plots and divided among the nomads. Fencing policy has raised tensions among the nomadic communities. There has been internal fighting among family members, especially among first cousins for the grassland rights.

Elders said they have never heard about fighting and trials for the grassland in their lives.

Nomads are required to live strictly under the rules and policies of Chinese government. They warn nomads that they will confiscate livestock that exceed the allotment if they don't reduce it themselves.

**How do the nomads manage to feed their livestock when the surrounding grassland is degrading?**

Rain does not fall all the time and there is virtually no rainfall in the summer. Elders believe it is because of the mining in the area. Livestock die due to lack of rain and strong winds in winter. Nomads can't feed large herds with these conditions. They give Tsampa (roasted barley) mixed with Chura (dry cheese) to their animals.

Some kill their animals and use organs, like intestines and their blood for survival. Some collects grasses and leaves brought by wind and give it to the animals.

### **Which grassland policies are being implemented in your area?**

Earlier there was a collective where all our belongings were collected and combined. Later they privatized everything which has now resulted in a limit in the number of livestock. Animals are being marked by the piercing of their ears. If the number surpasses the maximum allotment there is a punishment fee or the livestock will be confiscated.

There are other factors affecting living standard of nomads. Earlier there was income from selling milk, curd, and wools which could be sold anywhere. Now they are asked to sell only to the government where they cannot attain a decent profit. Usually a gyama (1 gyama equals to 1 pound) of wool can be sold in the market for 100 yuan, but the government only pays 70 yuan.

They have made limits for how much wool can be produced per goat. For example if a nomad has 10 goats, then the maximum wool that can be produced is 5 gyamas. If they sold more than 5 gyamas they would be charged a fee. In this way the nomads are being impoverished. There are many nomads now who have fallen into poverty.

### **Has the new resettlement policy come in your area?**

It has. They asked us to settle in the land if the grasses there can sustain us. The government has built foundations for housing. But since the areas in which we live are far away, we are unable to settle permanently.

They have decreased the quantity of wool to sell. The number of livestock has also decreased. Land size has been reduced while they have claimed that they are alleviating poverty. We were told to be grateful to the Communist government.

### **What factors were you told were responsible for grassland degradation?**

It is due to untimely rainfall and nomads' irresponsible way of animal herding.

### **Do you think it is the truth?**

I don't think these are the causes. Earlier, there was no fencing or restrictions on how much wool could be sold and no limits existed on the number of livestock. At this time poverty was not widespread. Nomads were rich enough to sustain themselves. Now, nomads have become poor. Our livelihood and culture has degraded.

None of the development methods have improved our living standard.

### **How do nomads manage to feed livestock with water at the time when there is no timely rainfall?**

Nomads migrate to other places where they can access water. With great difficulty they are able to survive from the little water they find.

### **Are there any positive changes after the implementation of grassland polices such as your income?**

There have been no positive changes, only negative. They speak softly and tell us that they fully support us and working for our benefit. There are now new limitations on the number of livestock and a new policy of fencing grassland. In regards to selling off wool, the market price for one gyama is usually 100 or 110, but the government only gives 70 yuan. Aren't we being deprived? If they really wanted to bring benefits to us they would pay 120 yuan for one gyama of wool, more than we would receive from the market. They won't do this and there are punishments if we do not sell to the government.

They have already estimated how much gyama of wool will come out from 10 sheep or goats. If there is less than their estimation they will ask if we had sold our wool to other sources and then fine us.

### **How many livestock were there in your community before the policies were implemented?**

Earlier, if there were 100 or 1,000 it all used to belong to Rukhag. There was no private ownership. Later they privatized. There was 300/400 in a community (one community has around 5 or 6 families) or some even have 1,000.

Now due to the restriction nobody has over a 1,000 livestock. Earlier nomads could keep as many livestock and horses as they could. Now, only one horse can be kept within a community of 8 families. There is a similar restriction on the number of yaks.

### **How many livestock could your pasture feed about 20 years ago?**

Previously there was no case of livestock unable to be fed by pasture. Livestock were allowed to go anywhere. There was no lack of pasture. Unfortunately, now there is untimely rainfall and land is divided. Nomads fight when animals from other nomads entered their land. Nomads believe the mining in gold and silver on the pasturelands is the cause of the lack of rain.

### **At what time period did nomads take their animals to summer pasture?**

We started on the third month of the Tibetan calendar. For the first two months we stayed at Sosa (refer to spring season in Tibetan) and then moved to the summer pasture. In the fourth month we arrived and spread livestock for milking. There we earned our living.

### **Winter pasture?**

We went to winter pasture in the eleventh month. We started off on the eighth month and reached there in the eleventh month.

### **Is there a change in the time periods?**

The timing is the same every year. The Time period has been fixed by leaders of the towns. Regardless of weather, warm or cold, we move. It is similar to the old traditions. Sometimes snowstorms take place when we reach Sosa. This leads to the death of number of livestock. We have no other options if bad weather strikes and there are no enough grasses for grazing.

### **Do you cultivate?**

No, we don't cultivate. There are three counties where both nomadic and farming are practiced in Ngari. They are Ruthok, Purang and Tsada. We are pure nomads. We don't have any other livelihood than our nomadic lives.

### **Which rivers are flowing in your area?**

There is Sengey Khabab (Indus), Macha Khabab (Karnali). I believe Tachok Khabab also runs in Ngari but I haven't seen it. Sengey Khabab runs in my area (payul) and Macha Khabab runs in Purang.

### **Did you see changes in the water flow in these rivers?**

There has been change. Earlier we had rainfall all the time and the flow of the rivers was strong. Grass was growing tall as well. The Rivers now have a slower flow due to less rainfall. Those left with a small flow have been curbed to generate electricity at the hydropower station.

### **Earlier at what time did snow fall in your area?**

Around the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Tibetan calendar and just before losar (Tibetan New Year) we had snowfall.

### **Now what times does it fall?**

It still falls at the same time. And it also falls during soka (spring) when nomads are having high time. It is the third month of the Tibetan calendar.

### **Did these changes make any difference in feeding your animals?**

Yes, it does. When nomads migrate from one pasture to another at different altitudes, problems arise when nomads think that they have reached a safe attitude with mild weather due to the snow fall and number of livestock lost.

### **Have you seen lakes/springs drying up?**

There are many lakes/springs that are now dried up. We don't know what has caused them.

### **Do you have Pikas on your grassland? Are Pikas destroying the rangeland?**

I haven't seen pikas destroying the rangeland, but I have seen rats digging the ground at different places and leaving the ground black where grasses cannot grow.

### **Can you tell more about animals buried alive underground by claiming that new disease had hit the animals?**

It was in the year 2007 when vet doctors found disease in livestock in Ngari. They claimed the disease had no cure and animals that were carrying the disease had to be killed. We deem livestock as our parents as our survivals depend upon them. Some people said they wouldn't kill their animals even if they were told to. In Ruthok and Siliphuk township veterinarians found the disease in animals. They asked the nomads to kill animals and said they would give money to cover the costs.

We had seen wounds on animals' legs during the rainy seasons. It was there from the beginning, this was not a new revelation to us. We didn't feel that the animals needed to be killed from the diseases. We don't have the disease in our animals. We cannot bury our animals alive underground. But in Ruthok and Siliphukpa they agreed to hand over the animals to them. They give compensation for each yak and sheep that were buried. They buried some 300 to 800 livestock. Some nomads even cried for burying their parents (animals).

Animals were thrown in the dug open pit and the pit was closed by throwing soil on top of them after spreading some medicine. An announcement to kill animals inflicted with the disease came second time to our area and Ruthok. We had already sent an application to town office saying that our animals didn't carry the disease. So they didn't come to our place.

When they came to our place we drove them away by throwing stones. In some places they convinced the nomads and buried animals. Those who saw this cried. Animals thrown in the pit were crying. They said they would give money to nomads for survival. Animals give us milk and curd not only to sustain us but also earn some money by selling extra cheese, butter and wool. They deceived us. If we were given 10,000 per year it would not be enough, as the animals produce goods throughout their life. The animals give us benefits both daily and annually, money runs out. Though nomadic communities had complained about it but there was no benefit. So the situation is same. Now, some nomads don't even have any livestock.

### **Do you have anything else to add? I am stopping here.**

Factors that weaken our lives and livestock are restrictions which creates obstacles for us. By not allowing us to sell wool to people from outside; it has to be sold only to the government. Land division and fencing off the land has not benefited us.

### **Do nomads consider climate change as responsible for grassland degradation?**

We were told that the weather we have today is not like it used to be. Winters are long and summers are short. We face hardship in summers when warming and rainfall are not occurring at time. Yes, the nomads are going through hardship.

