Family Farmers' Knowledge Regarding the Importance of Rangeland Conservation and the Impact of Rangeland Management Projects: A Case Study in the Mahneshan Township

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Farmers' knowledge has a significant role in sustainable use and conservation of natural resources. The aim of this research is to investigate farmers' knowledge regarding rangeland conservation, including protection and rehabilitation activities. Data were collected through existing documents review, focus groups, semi-structured and structured interviews with the farmers of the rural areas in the Mahneshan Township of Iran, in which rangeland project had been implemented or was being implemented. The rural households' livelihoods highly depended on livestock keeping through rangeland use, which made overpressure on rangelands. According to the farmers' view, this caused consequences such as soil erosion, decreasing rangelands' soil fertility, increasing flood, and decreasing spring and river water sources. Farmers' knowledge regarding the role, importance and affecting factors on rangeland degradation was relatively high, but they had a low level of knowledge and action about mechanical operations before and after project implementation. Their knowledge about biological conservation and grazing management of rangelands had increased from a moderate status to a high level due to interaction with external institutions particularly the Natural Resources Administration, accessing to extension training courses and receiving credit and services. Extension interventions and providing facilities and required learning condition can lead to increased knowledge and actions of family farmers for sustainable rangeland use.

Key Words: knowledge, conservation projects, rangeland management, farmer, Mahneshan