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## Pastoralism, Social, Gender, and Policy Issues

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## PASTORALISM, SOCIAL, GENDER, AND POLICY ISSUES

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**Key words: Pastoralism, Territories of life, Recognition**

### Introduction

Nearly half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangelands. Rangeland's health and productivity are directly critical to the livelihoods, cultures, and resilience of more than 500 million people worldwide, many of whom are indigenous peoples who depend on rangelands. Pastoralism is very diverse; it can be found in all continents, from the drylands of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to the highlands of Asia and Latin America, or the tundra in the circumpolar zones, and in particular where crop cultivation is physically limited. Pastoralism supports several hundred million households worldwide and manages one billion animals, including camels, cattle, sheep, goats, yaks, horses, and reindeer, contributing more than 10% of the world's meat production and the large portion of dairy products, wool, leather, handicrafts, and other byproducts. Pastoralism produces food and ecological services and is often the only significant economic contribution in the world's poorest regions, and is the cultural backbone of longstanding civilizations.

As the late Dr. Mohamad Taghi Farvar<sup>1</sup> regularly noted, "The migratory practices of indigenous peoples are almost always *de facto* nature conservation strategies."

A growing number of researchers and practitioners documented that Pastoralists are the Backbone and Invisible Assets of the World's Drylands. In addition, there is increasingly robust evidence that pastoralism is a viable and sustainable livelihood and productive system, managing uncertainty, and risk in diverse arid land ecosystems. In addition, there is ample scientific evidence that pastoral systems based on mobility and livestock diversity support a healthy ecosystem and complement other land uses such as wildlife conservation.

Pastoral women are key agents in socio-cultural and economic development, conservation, and management of natural resources. In most pastoral societies, women face more challenges linked to property rights, decision-making processes, and socio-cultural aspects.

Build on this vision, the history of conservation by indigenous peoples and local communities, including mobile pastoralists, goes back thousands of years and is based on their strong social organization, identity, collective production, and adaptation of their customary governance and management systems to complex ecological conditions in rangelands and grasslands of fragile ecosystems. Pastoralists have co-evolved over millennia with rangelands and grasslands", and this refers to the fact that grasslands and rangelands are 'grazing dependent' and will deteriorate if all grazing is taken off. These are collectively referred to as **"territories and areas conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities, or more simply, "territories of life"<sup>2</sup>**, A globally applicable governance type for areas and territories under customary management.

Pastoralists are multifunctional, and they generate diversified sources of income and contribute to sustained natural resource management because they intertwined their cultures, identities, and ways of life, they produce food in the harshest environments despite the lack of recognition and support from state governments and others in powerful positions in today's society.

These shreds of evidence show how pastoralism provides many hidden benefits that are not included in statistics and how this absence of true values fuels the marginalization of pastoralists

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iccaconsortium.org/index.php/dr-mohammad-taghi-farvar-president-of-the-icca-consortium/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/indigenous-peoples-and-community-conserved-territories-and-areas-icca> & <https://biodiversitya-z.org/content/indigenous-peoples-and-community-conserved-territories-and-areas-icca.pdf>

and encourages policies that erode the sector and traditionally suffer from being poorly understood marginalized excluded from policy dialogues.

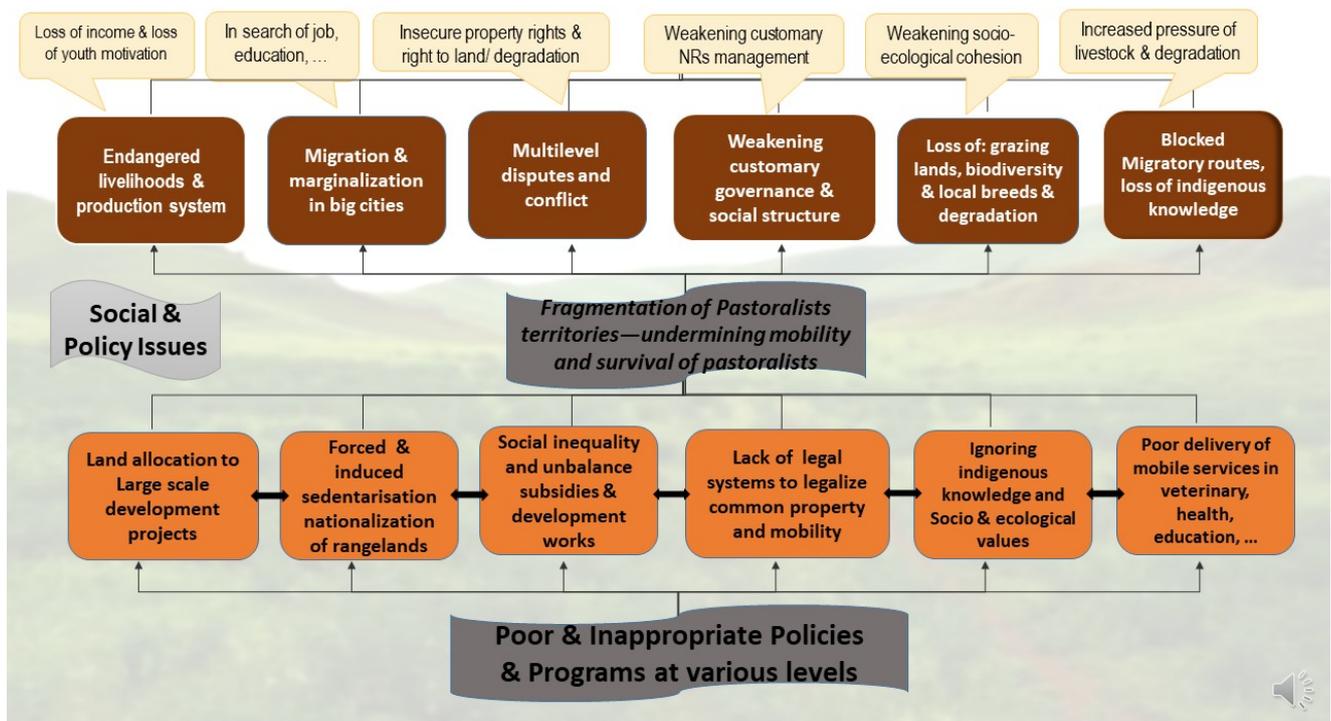
### Policy and Social Issues

The indigenous mobile pastoralists have traditional customary systems and practices with unique rules, regulations, spiritual beliefs, and relationships that guide the governance and stewardship of their territories of life. These systems have been forced to face issues that threatened their very existence in the recent past. Chief among these threats are two: the induced weakening of the social governance systems and the resultant fragmentation of pastoralists' territories of life due to generations of marginalization and exclusion from decision-making processes that affect them, dispossession from territories, and cultural practices. These have, in turn, tended to result in various social issues and erosion of the socio-ecological integrity of their territories.

Despite the existence of robust evidence, most policy and decision-makers have preconceptions about pastoralists' importance as a land-use system, believing it to be economically inefficient and environmentally destructive. Actually, in addition to the climatic tensions of drylands, the said preconceptions are the root of significant excuses for designing, approving, and implementing a series of inappropriate policies and programs. These policies are not in harmony with the socio-economic and ecological features of pastoralists and increased various types of pressures threatening their territories of life in the recent past.

In other words, pastoralists well-conserved their territories before the massive interference and domination by government policies, at least since the early twentieth century, and later by the private sector. In this background, in addition to using the existence of "Free Prior Informed Consent" or any other available tools to recognize and defend the rights of Indigenous Peoples, there need more assertive and proactive approaches such as self-determination, self-governance, and recognition of collective territories and cultural practices to secure the fullness of territories and cultures against specific threats that consistently undermined drylands ecosystems and pastoralists.

The following diagram represents a general problem tree of social and policy issues of pastoralists and rangelands.



General Problem Tree of Social and Policy Issues of Pastoralists and Rangelands

The diagram shows how mobile pastoralism is increasingly under threat from legal, economic, social and political disincentives and barriers to mobility of livestock including rangeland degradation. The ultimate drivers of rangeland degradation are typically associated with policies, socio-economic changes, or interactions of socio-economic and governance factors with climatic stressors, such as drought. In a nutshell the **poor & inappropriate policies & programs are the root cause of the fragmentation of pastoralist territories—undermining their Mobility and survival.**

## Gender issues

The role of women among pastoralists has been much discussed, and it is agreed that "Empowering women in pastoralist communities is to empower future generations of pastoralists." Gender Equity is one of the main elements and pillars of sustainable pastoralism. Therefore, addressing gender issues through a collective and bottom-up approach while retaining pastoralist society's culture and traditional lifestyle.

In most pastoral societies, women face more challenges linked to property rights, decision-making processes, educational opportunities, water shortage, energy, health issues, and even food in a climate crisis. Such inequalities affect their role and responsibilities, restrict women's development potential, and limit their opportunities for self-strengthening in various aspects, in particular within the socio-economic growth of the entire family.

Pastoral women play a key role in different aspects within pastoral communities, including indigenous food production systems, mainly processing dairy products; livestock keeping (in particular, newborn ones, grazing, feeding, milking, and sheep shearing); producing handicrafts; Treating animal disease (traditional & modern); managing poultries and their byproducts; supporting community during seasonal migration (packing and unpacking the stuff); maintaining the family cohesion in different aspects; managing family diet in terms of cooking and washing and conservation and sustainable use of medicinal and edible plants.

In fact, despite many challenges, Pastoral women are key agents in cultural and socio-economic development and conservation and management of natural resources. In addition, pastoral women have been active participants in global policy dialogues and relevant gatherings in various regions, highlighting their role in achieving sustainable pastoralism.

Therefore, pastoral women need to strengthen their position in various socio-economic aspects, including property rights, decision-making, use and control of income, assets, resources, and services. It is important for women also to be part of the community processes of adapting and responding to changes as women have a crucial role in helping adapt to changes, which might entail other changes within families and communities.

## Conclusion

For centuries mobile pastoralism has adapted itself to the environment and regulated migration in search of water and feed, so it is said that mobile pastoralism is the most viable and resilient form of production and land use in most of the world's fragile drylands. In this context, the world is responsible for thinking profoundly and wisely towards a fundamental change and **considering pastoral communities' dynamic and viable socio-economic and ecological systems and values. A Paradigm Shift is needed towards Sustainable Pastoralism and sustainable use, conservation, and restoration of rangelands and grasslands.** We need to halt drivers of biodiversity loss and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, both in direct and indirect ways, to stop harmful industries like mega-infrastructure, unsustainable consumption, growing inequality, and climate breakdown.

Mobile pastoralists identify themselves by their ancestral territories, including summering and wintering territory and the migratory routes, with no regard to administrative and political boundaries. In other words, mobility, territory and, right to land are the basis of pastoralists' social

identity and livelihoods. In the last decade, Territories of life have gained significant recognition by IUCN, CBD, UNESCO, and other international policy instruments. Still, there are huge gaps. Most countries have no or very inadequate legal and policy mechanisms to recognize territories of life as a crucial missing link to put the indigenous mobile pastoralists as the primary agents to conserve their bio-cultural diversity within their territories.

Recognition of pastoralists' tenure and property rights with particular attention to women's right to land in the framework of gender equality (as one of the ten implementation principles of the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure**) is a necessary change benefit rangelands and pastoralists society. Empowerment and strengthening the role of pastoral women to establish self-organized and locally adapted funds and institutions to address gender issues and equity is necessary to meet gender-responsive policies and programs and improve pastoral women position in various aspects, including property rights, decision-making, income, and wealth generation activities, and access to resources and services. Provision of proper and locally adapted mobile social services, plus institutional and financial support to motivate and encourage pastoralists youth (male & female) to engage in pastoral livelihoods and continue pastoralists way of life, needs extreme attention to sustaining the pastoralists systems and sustainable land management.

Even though the policies are inappropriate and unbalanced, they can be fixed as long as governments understand the tremendous contribution of pastoralism to GDP and see that sustainability will require changing paradigms. Therefore, we call for Multi-stakeholder alliances to approve the IYRP to raise awareness and fill knowledge gaps globally about the value of healthy rangelands sustainable pastoralism, supporting pastoralists to document and communicate their perspectives, experiences, knowledge systems, and science - as mainstream research/science are biased against mobile pastoralism.

Let us remember and renew our promise to leave no one behind toward conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of rangelands and grasslands through strengthening, recognition, and involving the pastoralists society and their governance institutions for their actual participation in decision-making and policy-making process linked to their destiny at all levels.

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