

ASIAN PASTORALISTS WOMEN GATHERING

8-11 December, Gujarat, India
15 years of MERA Declaration



Context

Pastoralism, a fundamental traditional livelihood system, is being practised in 25% of the global land area where crops can't be grown. Pastoralism is not only a livelihood pattern, but it also defines a social, cultural, and economic way of life for around 500 million people across the globe.

In Asia, pastoralism contributes significantly to the national economies. In India, herders and pastoralists contribute to 4.11 per cent of the country's GDP; in Nepal by 11.5 per cent, in Bangladesh by 2 per cent, in Afghanistan by 15 per cent, and between 10-45 per cent in Central Asia and Mongolia.

Pastoralism plays a crucial role in generating ecosystem goods and services, including food, forages, fuel-wood, seed dispersal, and preservation of wild habitats in the dry land areas despite low and irregular rainfall, and less fertile soil. Pastoralism supports about 1 per cent of India's population, around 13 million people, and accounts for approximately two-thirds of the livestock sector's output, contributing to 53 per cent of the country's milk production and 74 per cent of the meat production. Pastoralists constitute about 10 per cent of the Afghan population and over 35 per cent of Afghanistan's export earnings through livestock-related products such as meat, leather, and Cashmere. Around 74 per cent of Mongolia's total landscape is still used for pastoral purposes, employs more than 28 per cent of the labour force, and contributes to 12 per cent of the country's GDP. Not only an economic contribution, pastoralism also helps to maintain the flow of the energy cycle, productivity, and economic stabilisation in the dry land areas by using water and fodder for the production of meat, milk, fibre, and other economic goods. The pastoralist community supports sustaining genetic biodiversity by raising local breeds, ecosystem diversity by advocating for locally managed systems, and sustainable use of wild and domesticated. Women and girls play a pivotal role in these systems, taking on responsibilities that go beyond livestock management to include caring for the land, conserving biodiversity, and passing down traditional knowledge from one generation to the next.

Despite their significant contribution to livestock management, the role and contribution of women and girls in pastoral society largely remain undervalued, unrecognised, and unappreciated. Women pastoralists face "double marginalisation" — challenges rooted both in their gender and pastoralist identity, making their socio-economic position particularly vulnerable. They have limited access to income, education, veterinary services, extension programs, technology, and market participation, thus restricting their empowerment and developmental potential. Studies conducted in Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Pakistan found that women are generally kept away from governance structures and pasture user groups. In Myanmar's central dry zone, more than 58 per cent of livestock marketing decisions were found to be male-led.

Context

Female-headed pastoral households face increased challenges due to reduced labor availability and resource access, further constraining women's decision-making capacities.

The International Year of Rangeland and Pastoralists (IYRP), a global initiative declared by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to take place in 2026, aims to raise awareness and promote the sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralist livelihoods. It provides an opportunity to recognise, value, and appreciate pastoral women's role and contribution to pastoralism and incorporate their voice, choice, and interest in the decision-making process. UNGA has also declared 2026 as the International Year of the Women Farmer (IYWF), formally adopted it through Resolution A/RES/78/279, to highlight the contribution of peasant and rural women to food security, nutrition, and rural economies. This provides an additional window to recognise the rights and contributions of pastoral women.

In the year 2010, women pastoralists from across 32 countries gathered in Gujarat, India, from November 21-26 to strengthen alliances and forward practical solutions addressing issues affecting them. The gathering brought out a 23-point charter of demands, called the MERA declaration ([MERA Declaration - ILC](#)). This year will mark 15 years since the MERA declaration, and is a good occasion to reflect on the accomplishments of women pastoralist alliances/ networks in achieving the pledge.

In this context, the Pastoral Women Alliance and South Asia Pastoralist Alliance aim to highlight the experience, expertise, and leadership of women pastoralists to create spaces for them to incorporate their voice, choice, interests, and concerns in the decision-making process during IYRP, IYWF, and beyond. The Asian Pastoralist Women Gathering (APWG) will bring together more than 150 women pastoralist leaders, people's organisations, civil society organisations, international organisations, researchers, government officials, and policy makers to converse, collaborate, and make a collective effort to develop gender transformative IYRP strategies.

This gathering will mark the official launch of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026 at the Asia level. It will generate key learning documents that will be taken forward by women pastoralist herders, who will share, advocate, and present these outcomes at various platforms throughout the year and beyond — including global events such as the UNCCD COP17 in Mongolia.

Strategic Objectives



The Asian Pastoralists Women Gathering intends to revisit and update the MERA declaration in the completion of its 15 years to assess the rights and recognition of the pastoralist women in the context of land rights, climate justice, equity, and biodiversity conservation. The women's gathering aims to

1. Influence Regional and National Policy Frameworks for Recognizing Rights and Contribution of Pastoralist Women with regards to land governance, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and economic development
2. Promoting a learning and sharing platform to facilitate the sharing of skills, good practices, and success stories for addressing the common problems that pastoralist women face in the region and globally
3. Develop a Roadmap for Strengthening Global Capacity in Gender-Transformative Pastoralist Interventions
4. Strengthen Regional Solidarity on Pastoralism by fostering collaboration and collective action among Asian Women's Pastoralist Networks and organizations working with pastoralist women

Expected Outcomes



1

A charter of demands/a policy brief highlighting pastoralist women's priorities and concrete recommendations for IYRP 2026 will be prepared and submitted to IYRP committees, FAO etc.

2

Updating MERA Declaration reflecting the current challenges, climate, and environmental context

3

Selecting a few women representatives to convey key messages from the Mera+15 gathering to policymakers worldwide during 2026, in both the IYRP and the IYWF arenas.

4

Promoting a solid network of networks and organizations working on women pastoralist issues for continued policy advocacy and campaign beyond IYRP

Organizing Team

Gujarat – Pastoral Women Alliance and MARAG
India – India Pastoral Community Network
South Asia – South Asia Pastoral Alliance
Central Asia - Central Asia Pastoral Alliance
Global – International Land Coalition and ICCA Consortium
Exploring with other partners

Estimated Budget

No	Category	Estimated Cost (USD)	Description	Funds/Donors
A	External Travel (Asia-wide)	35,000	Round-trip flights for delegates from Central Asia & South Asia (30-35 Participants)	
B	Inland Travel	12,000	Local transport in India and in-country transfers to airports (100-120 participants; on the third day, women pastoralist parliament – 150 participants)	
C	Accommodation	20,000	Hotel stay for 4 nights in Gujarat for all participants	
D	Conference Package	25,000	Meals, venue hire, security, and interpretation service	
E	Stationery & Branding	5,000	Printing, graphic design, and conference material	
F	Administration & Coordination	7,000	Facilitation, mobilization, coordination, translation, rapporteurs	
G	Media campaign	10,000	Media campaign	
H	Exhibition and Food Festival	10,000	Organising a handloom/ handicraft exhibition and a local food festival	
	Total	124,000		