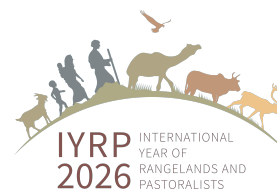


IYRP Working Group on Pastoralism and Land



Introduction

Pastoralism as a land-use system

Pastoralism relies on variable and largely unpredictable grazing opportunities, converting vegetation that people cannot eat, including crop residue, into high-value products such as milk, meat, fibre, manure, and hide or leather. A fundamental aspect of production is the complex and beneficial interaction pastoralism creates with the rangeland environment, consisting of drylands, shrublands, grasslands, highlands, wetlands, etc. Where pastoralists are able to operate according to their rationality, they access grazing resources, alongside ancillary resources such as water, firewood, medicinal plants, forest produce, while contributing ecosystem services by dispersing seeds, improving soil fertility and managing wildfires.

Pastoral systems are found all over the world, from the Sahel to the Arctic, from the Andean Altiplano to the Asian steppes, from the Mediterranean region to the Himalayas. For thousands of years, these systems have co-evolved with all kinds of rangelands, often in close integration with crop-farming systems, and across a mosaic of diverse and more recent tenure types and administrative categories besides communally managed lands, such as public lands, reserve forests, village pastureland, 'wastelands', as well as the shared use of, and common rights over, privately owned fields and fallows. Pastoralists use these areas through diverse forms of sharing arrangements with different degrees of autonomy.

Rangelands, often in high altitude or aridity, show unpredictable and uneven spatial and seasonal distribution of vegetation and high fluctuations in weather conditions such as rainfall. Pastoralists work *with nature* to make the most of the variability in rangeland environments. Through the careful grazing of their livestock across eco-regions, they improve the health and productivity of the land and their animals more than if they were to stay in one area. For example, the intermittent integration of crop and livestock systems across eco-regions offers higher environmental and economic benefits than permanent integration at farm level. Further, through traversing the landscape with their animals, they allow for periods of rest and restoration for rangelands. Pastoralists are, thus, deeply synced with plant cycles, changing weather patterns and variable climatic conditions, and depend on their rich ecological knowledge to thrive in difficult environments.

Pastoralists' mobility and land-use patterns and practices also connect with social institutions, animal breeding, markets, policy incentives, access to social services and several other context-specific constraints and opportunities. Certain key principles and parameters for ensuring pastoralists' tenure and access rights can be established.

Challenges to securing pastoral land tenure

Pastoralists most often access resources that are shared and collectively managed through local systems and institutions that have prevailed, evolved and adapted over time. These may be categorised as 'open access', 'commons' or 'communally managed' lands, often through customary rules and norms that may or may not be legally recognised. Such land-tenure and governance systems fundamentally allow for mobility and for concurrent, overlapping, and periodic or seasonal use rights to land. Pastoral systems not only see a hierarchy of rights and users between the different claims to land; they often require that land rights remain fuzzy, flexible and adaptable to a varying degree, depending on context.

Such systems often come into conflict with post-colonial and globalised formal statutory tenure systems, leading to the undermining of pastoralist rights. This phenomenon, which could be described as the paradox of pastoral land, consists in a tension between the often customary, intermittent, diffused, flexible and mobile use of shared resources, as opposed to the stable, concentrated use of land encouraged by the use of cadastral maps and land registers to guarantee exclusive tenure and title to land, that has made

continued access and use of key pastoral resources difficult. Through mapping and demarcation, current paradigms assign rights by binding resource users to fixed plots of land and the resources they contain. However, the division of land into small parcels is not optimal, as individual and exclusive plots will have periods of gluts interspersed with periods of dearth. Moreover, binding land users to defined areas may lead to the loss of other areas, leading to reduced flexibility to adapt to changing, variable and uncertain conditions.

The question of scale has also always been pertinent when discussing pastoral land rights. Pastoralists breach administrative boundaries of provinces, states and even countries. Their land-use and mobility patterns vary inter-seasonally and inter-annually with fluctuations in weather patterns, and are becoming more and more unstable under external stressors. Therefore, the spatio-temporal scope of policies must be rethought.

The growing need to secure land rights for pastoralists

Growing industrial needs, agricultural expansion and urbanisation, as well as market-based commodification, increase pressure on land, and are leading to its speedy privatisation and degradation, thereby threatening the sustainability of pastoral land-use systems. In many countries, rangelands continue to be seen as empty, barren and waste, making them especially susceptible to appropriation, privatisation and fragmentation. Changes in agriculture, such as mechanisation, the reliance on chemical inputs, and the adoption of genetically modified seeds, has abstracted farming from the environmental rhythms and is disrupting the successful integration of pastoralism. The shrinking of pasture available for pastoralists' livestock is leading to growing decline and vulnerability, as well as increasing conflict between different land users.

Beyond these socio-economic stressors, pastoralists are increasingly facing the effects of climate change through the growing variability and the increasing incidence of extreme weather events such as severe droughts, snowstorms and flash floods. Yet while they confront the effects of climate, they are also being made to unjustly pay the price for it, as their lands are being taken to make room for green climate solutions such as solar and wind power farms, mining for transition minerals, afforestation and fortress conservation.

Securing pastoralists' rights to land and mobility is, therefore, not only needed to safeguard against the ongoing loss of land, but also crucial to enable adaptation to rapidly changing conditions in the future, harnessing pastoralists' dynamic and transformational capacity to provide for both people and the planet.

Securing pastoralists' rights to land and other key resources has the potential to have an impact at four levels:

- Resilient livelihoods: Secure access to resources is key to ensuring that pastoralist livelihoods are secure and have the capacity to adapt over time. This includes complementarities and integration with other livelihood systems that are being eroded by rigid and exclusive titling and sedentarisation. Livelihood security also enables the achievement of related social and development goals at the community level. Right to land tenure is also an essential pathway to, and an indicator for, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 1, to 'end poverty in all its forms everywhere', although the mechanisms through which this is achieved needs to be more aligned with and inclusive of pastoral systems.
- Food security and economic contributions: In many dryland environments, mobile pastoral livestock keeping is more productive than stall-fed systems, and produces animal source products, such as milk, meat, manure, fibre and leather, to meet not only local but also global demand. Therefore, secure access to resources ensures food security for local and vulnerable populations, especially in contexts where crop agriculture is difficult, while also contributing to national GDPs and to sustainable food systems.

- Nature and climate benefits: Mobile pastoral systems mimic the effect of wild herbivores in rangelands, thereby contributing to plant species heterogeneity and richness, as well as improving soil health by enhancing micro-biodiversity, nutrient cycling and water management. Well-managed pastoral systems can contribute to restoring environments, and this is also recognised explicitly through the integration of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs) into the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the principles of Land Degradation Neutrality. While rangelands are known to be good stores of stable soil carbon, pastoral practices offer several incremental gains in improving carbon sequestration.
- Rights and social justice: Land access, use and tenure security are central to the full realisation of fundamental human rights. The increasing socio-economic and climatic stressors and the continued resource expropriation and disenfranchisement are increasingly limiting pastoral practices. At the same time, pastoralists' resilience thus far is being used as an excuse to continuously push for them to adapt rather than offer necessary safeguards and rights. Safeguarding the custodianship of pastoralists over their lands, many of which have been inhabited and traversed by pastoralists over generations, is essential to ensure their wellbeing and the wellbeing of the environment over time.

Seeing like a pastoralist

Pastoral mobility and land use have long been seen as a deviation, transgression or threat within mainstream thinking. Colonial policies deemed pastoralists as backward, destitute, unproductive, even criminal, and therefore needing settlement. The push for sedentarisation was further supported by the 'tragedy of the commons' narrative that considered the shared and common use of resources as being environmentally damaging. While scholarship and development thinking have advanced to see mobility as a strength and benefit, the history of its vilification continues to permeate in policies and programmes in direct and indirect ways.

Understanding the logic of pastoralism and making the voices of pastoralists more central in decision-making processes will enable us to co-create different ways of strengthening land tenure, access and use rights adapted to different contexts. Several scholars have proposed different ways of understanding pastoral resource use which can form a base – whether as common property resources, 'sovereign pastoral commons,' 'open property regimes,' or 'complex mosaics' – and still others have proposed ways of securing adaptive capacity and mobility through overlapping land rights, transhumance networks, etc. At the same time, rising awareness of this logic is also reflected in the approach of international organisations such as through the VGGTs, FAO's papers 'Pastoralism – Making variability work' and 'Making way: Developing national legal and policy frameworks for pastoral mobility', IFAD's 'Toolkit: Engaging with pastoralists – a holistic development approach,' IUCN and FAO's 'Crossing boundaries: Legal and policy arrangements for cross-border pastoralism,' IUCN's 'Supporting sustainable pastoral livelihoods – A global perspective on minimum standards and good practices' and resolutions by UNEA-2 'Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands' and UNEA-4 'Innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism.'

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026 presents an opportunity to showcase the strength of pastoralist land-management systems and the need to secure locally adapted diverse tenure systems. It directly brings attention to the unique relationship of pastoralists with their lands and can offer a platform for pastoralists' leadership in addressing their issues.

Purpose:

This Working Group has been constituted to discuss and highlight issues related to pastoralists' relationship with land, including securing tenure and access to land, and improving governance for its mobile and shared use, across eco-regions and biophysical features as well as across varied ecological and administrative categories. This is critical for resilient livelihoods, sustainable food-system transformations and just climate solutions.

Composition and governance:

The Working Group on Pastoralists and Land is a voluntary group consisting of all interested in pastoralists and their issues around land contributing as per their available capacity. The Working Group is facilitated by the International Land Coalition and consists of a core group responsible for the outputs listed below, in coordination with and based on feedback from the wider Working Group.

Scope:

Generating global messages to inspire national, regional and international policy processes towards land tenure security, livelihood support, and nature and climate solutions by disseminating knowledge about pastoralists' relationship to land, territory, mobility and seasonality.

Objectives:

- To deepen and nuance understandings of pastoralists' relationship with land, including the seasonal use of and access to shared resources
- To build a more representative narrative and improved vocabulary to define pastoral practices, processes, institutions and policies around land use and access
- To reinforce pastoral land-tenure systems for the purpose of supporting pastoralists' livelihoods, including diverse tenure systems for collective and customary use, access to and management of land, and support for the institutional recognition of these systems
- To identify pressing cases of appropriation and disenfranchisement and to run solidarity campaigns
- To influence policy processes and challenge mainstream development thinking that undermines the rationale of pastoralism and pastoralists' livelihoods
- To showcase, in connection with other IYRP Working Groups, the effects of pastoralists' use and management of land as important for nature conservation and climate adaptation and mitigation.

Outcomes:

- Key concepts and themes around pastoralism and land are defined and explained.
- Clear parameters, principles and guidelines to safeguard pastoralists' relationship with land are laid out.
- The importance of secure tenure to resilient livelihoods, nature conservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, social development and overall wellbeing of both pastoralists and their animals is established.
- Campaigns addressing cases of land appropriation and disenfranchisement in pastoral contexts are identified and supported.
- Case studies for securing pastoral land rights and improving governance for the better management and restoration of shared resources are documented and disseminated.
- Critical policy processes for the positioning issues around pastoralists and land are identified and influenced.

Outputs:

- A crisp and clear position paper on pastoralists and land
- A set of policy recommendations for securing pastoralist tenure and access rights to shared resources
- Communications campaigns supporting pastoralists' claim-making
- An archive containing case studies of policies, initiatives, campaigns, etc., for securing pastoral land tenure and access rights
- A toolkit with case studies and examples, tools and methods of securing pastoral land rights and improving governance for the better management and restoration of shared resources building on past tools, especially the VGGTs
- Videos and animations with key messages and case studies
- Presentations at policy and multi-stakeholder forums.

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