

Charter of Demands from Young Pastoralists in South Asia

Pastoralism, a time-honoured way of life spanning centuries, heavily relies on commons—expansive rangeland areas covering 54% of the Earth's surface and 45% of earth's surface is used for livestock keeping. These lands, often unsuitable for crop agriculture, are vital for sustaining pastoral communities. Besides supplying essential resources like meat and milk, these regions serve as custodians of ecosystems. However, unpredictable climate patterns—from severe droughts and heatwaves to cyclones and erratic rainfall— and linked socio-economic shifts pose increasing challenges to pastoralists, jeopardizing their livelihoods, ecosystems, and cultures.

Historically, pastoralists' sustainable land management, efficient resource utilization, and mobility have enabled adaptation to harsh conditions. These practices are deeply ingrained in their cultural traditions and social structures, emphasizing livestock rearing and mobility.

South Asia is a home to rich diversity of pastoral communities shaped significantly by its varied geography. The Himalayas and Karakoram provide summer pastures for communities like the Gujjars and Raute from India, Nepal, and Pakistan. Arid regions such as the Thar Desert and Balochistan Plateau support nomadic groups such as the Baluch and Rabaris. Afghanistan's Hindu Kush is home to Kuchi nomads, while Bhutan's high pastures are utilized by the Brokpa and Layap herders. Fertile plains and deltas in Bangladesh and India offer seasonal grazing opportunities, while in Sri Lanka, the Veddas and some Tamil and Sinhalese communities practice semi-nomadic pastoralism in dry zones. These diverse landscapes profoundly influence the livelihoods of South Asia's pastoralist communities herding camel, cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat, yak and donkey.

Competition for common lands from various state and non-state entities—including farmers, urban dwellers, mining companies, developers, tourism operators, and conservationists—further complicates pastoralism's viability and the prospects for sustainable livelihoods in the face of climate change across South Asia, considering its diverse developmental contexts.

However, the future of pastoralism depends on youth, who are vital in carrying forward the livelihood in a shifting political economy. With their energy, flexibility, and openness to new technologies, they can ensure the sustainability of this ancient practice and occupation. The younger generation of pastoralists is navigating a complex landscape with increasing craze for non-contextualized education and alternative career paths has led to a traditional and environmental knowledge gap, diminishing the transmission of traditional skills, and increasing burden of urban migration and intensive labour work. Here they have the opportunity to blend traditional practices with modern influences. This dynamic reflects their evolving roles, need and aspirations, highlighting their potential to innovate while still drawing on their rich heritage with too much hindrances in sustaining traditional practices.

We, the youth pastoralists from South Asia representing six countries, have gathered to strengthen alliances and propose practical solutions to the issues that affect us. During our meeting in Mera, Gujarat in June 2024, we prepared this charter of demands.

We are part of a worldwide community of pastoralist people, 180 million strong. The designated International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists in 2026 offers a platform for us to gain further recognition and advocate our needs and demands. In the context of this significant year, we present our demands to provide direction to key stakeholders for action in the near future.

Our demands are organized around three key themes that we believe are critical for pastoralists today and in the near future: the commons, climate change, and culture.

Commons

We DEFINE

the commons to include local governance (Gram Sabha in India) grazing lands, those lands that have traditionally been used for grazing and lopping whether it is reserved forest, sanctuary, national park, oran lands (samlati), lands allotted by erstwhile kingdoms, dam lands, lands near waterfills, dumping grounds, lands used for grazing in Nepal, as well as farming lands grazed after harvest.

1. A policy for the use of common lands by pastoralists is enacted/developed at National level with due involvement of local pastoralist community
2. A: No industry or infrastructure development should be sanctioned in the lands defined as commons as above
B: If for any reason, any plan or scheme for land conversion is developed, then pastoralist women should necessarily be consulted
3. Pre-existing provisions such as the Indian Forest Rights Act 2006, Biological Diversity Act of India, 2002, Nepal Rangeland Policy 2012, Forest Rights Act of 1993 Nepal, Environmental Law 2007 of Afghanistan should be implemented in full at the ground level
4. Any government budget allocation for the conservation and restoration of commons or forest lands should be given to pastoralist associations or civil society organisations as true stewards of such land.
5. Social safety nets such as for livestock insurance, vaccination, and compensation for human induced nature loss need to be extended to appropriately cover pastoralists
6. The government support pastoral mobility by allowing access to key grazing area, interstate/ interprovince and inter countries through traditional routes.
7. Promoting different pastoralist women lead and run livelihoods under her name

8. Formation of a separate commission/ department for pastoralists at the national level
9. Determining the Vocational courses for pastoral youth.
10. Include pastoralists organization and alliances into the process of livestock census, ensuring each count of livestock – (Indian Context)
11. Scheme formation to encourage traditional occupation for the youth pastoralists
12. Immediate Implementation of all the recommendations provided to Renke commission (Indian Context)

Climate

We DEFINE

Climate change to encompass situations where communities, despite not having contributed significantly to its causes, face numerous challenges because of it. These challenges include the proliferation of non-edible grasses, alterations in migration routes, shifts in seasons, droughts, floods, and earthquakes. Additionally, there are changes in crop patterns and increased mortality rates among humans and livestock due to natural calamities.

We DEMAND

1. Protection of local grasses and traditional water resources be prioritized to maintain the ecological balance of pastoral lands by Local Govt. and International and Local Institutions Including Community's participation and implementation of their traditional knowledge at core.
2. Pastoralists' contributions to environmental protection be recognized, and they should be remunerated accordingly, with proper evaluation of the economic and environmental benefits of their lifestyle.
3. Amendments in environmental protection policies, laws and schemes to reflect the needs and challenges of pastoralist communities.
4. Global platforms be used to amplify the voices of pastoralists, especially regarding climate justice and adaptation strategies.
5. Inclusion of young pastoralist leaders in political processes, ensuring their voices and concerns are heard at all levels.
6. Strict compensation provisions for pastoralist communities affected by climate change impacts, including natural calamities and shifts in ecosystems.

7. Consent from pastoralist communities, especially women, should be mandatory before land acquisitions for renewable energy projects like solar plants or windmills on common lands.
8. Promote and Recognise pastoralist Community Conservation Areas (CCAs)

Culture

We DEFINE

Pastoralist culture to mean/include traditional knowledge such as grass identification, livestock breeds, migration routes, local veterinary practices, practices associated with conservation and regeneration of rangeland, forecasting, language, embroidery, handicrafts, and the nomadic way of life.

We DEMAND

1. Documentation of traditional pastoralist knowledge on local medicinal plants, grasses, forest and rangeland regeneration, and conservation practices be undertaken, preserving this invaluable heritage through academic institutions.
2. Establishment of a " Pastoralist Language Day " (Maldhari Bhasha Din) to protect and promote pastoralist languages and dialects with larger groups in support with Government and Local to Global Civil Societies.
3. Recognition and promotion of pastoralist skills under national programs like the Skill India initiative, integrating these skills into mainstream vocational education.
4. Organization of "Kala Mela" (Art Fair) to showcase and revive pastoralist art, traditions, and crafts.
5. Facilitation of intergenerational dialogues between young and elder pastoralists to ensure the transmission of valuable knowledge across generations and within regions for cross learning.
6. Incorporation of pastoralist culture and traditions into school curricula, with specific case studies and activities focusing on the contributions of pastoralist communities, also design of new course promoting Animal Husbandry considering reservation for pastoralist communities.

7. Conservation of local and indigenous grasses and livestock breeds should be prioritized, with traditional knowledge of their rearing promoted and supported by relevant institutions including scientific approach of GI tagging and patent on different aspects.

Additional Demands:

1. Strengthening community governance institutions and integrating collective decision-making processes to ensure that pastoralist voices are central to policy-making and implementation.
2. Consistent and coordinated terminology should be used across policies and programs to ensure clarity and alignment with the needs and aspirations of pastoralist communities.
3. Support training programmes focused on leadership and communication enable pastoralist youth to effectively participate and negotiations in all the issues and solutions provided by their way of life.
4. Support and und research into win into new technologies that further improve the efficiency and environmental sustainability of pastoralist way of life

We call on governments, governing agencies of the United Nations, other relevant international and regional civil society organizations, research institutes and our own customary leaders to support us.

