

Building a Resilient Future for Pastoralism

Exploring Commons, Climate, and Culture with a Youth Perspective



21st-23rd June 2024

Gopnad Training Centre

Bechraji, Distt.Mehsana, State Gujarat, India



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BACKGROUND

Pastoralism, a time-honoured way of life practiced for centuries, relies heavily on commons - vast expanses of rangeland covering over 54% of the Earth's surface. These lands, often unsuitable for traditional agriculture, play a crucial role in sustaining pastoral communities. In addition to providing essential resources such as meat and milk, these regions serve as natural guardians of ecosystems.

However, the increasing unpredictability of climate patterns - ranging from severe droughts and heatwaves to cyclones and erratic rainfall, glacier to landslides - poses significant challenges to pastoralists, threatening their livelihoods, ecosystems, and cultures. Historically, pastoralists have demonstrated resilience through sustainable land use, efficient resource utilization, and mobility, enabling them to adapt to harsh conditions. These qualities are deeply ingrained in their cultural practices and social structures, which prioritize livestock rearing and nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles.

Nevertheless, the younger generation of pastoralists faces a critical decision: whether to uphold the traditions of pastoralism or pursue more modern lifestyles. The shift towards education and other career opportunities has led to a knowledge gap, resulting in a decline in the transfer of traditional skills and understanding of the environment. It is imperative to find a balance between preserving the rich heritage of pastoralism and embracing the benefits of modernization to ensure the sustainability of this ancient way of life.

The future of pastoralism hinges on the involvement of youth, who play a crucial role in bridging tradition with modernity. With their vigor, adaptability, and willingness to embrace new technologies, young individuals can ensure the longevity of this time-honoured practice and profession. Recognizing the significance of pastoralists in preserving cultural diversity, food security, and ecosystems, the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026 aims to shine a spotlight on their contributions.

Despite their vital role, pastoralists often find themselves underrepresented in national and global policymaking, leading to decisions that can adversely affect their way of life. To address this issue, the Maldhari Vikas Sangathan (MVS), an offshoot of the Maldhari Rural Action Group (MARAG), has been organizing the Pastoralist Parliament in Gujarat, India since 2008. This innovative initiative advocates for policy reforms and introduces new proposals to various Government Policy Commissions. The Pastoralist Parliament serves as a vital platform for pastoralists to voice their concerns and actively participate in policymaking processes. It places a strong emphasis on the inclusion of women and youth to enhance the resilience and strength of their communities.

In anticipation of IYRP 2026, the South Asia Pastoralist Alliance (SAPA) proposed a Pastoralist Youth Fair held in India from June 21-23, 2024 under the guidance and expertise of MVS. The primary objective is to cultivate community leadership and empower young pastoralists to effectively advocate for their rights while upholding their traditional practices. This event brought together over 100 young pastoralists from South and Central Asia to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and discussions on topics related to the themes of Commons, Climate, and Culture. These initiatives aim to establish a knowledge hub that will

benefit future generations and ensure the sustainability of pastoralism. By fostering collaboration and dialogue and to create a resilient future for pastoral communities.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2026 has been officially designated as the International Year of Rangeland and Pastoralism (IYRP), recognizing the vital role that pastoralists play in preserving cultural diversity, ensuring food security, and maintaining ecosystems. The future of pastoralism relies heavily on the involvement of youth, who are crucial in finding a balance between tradition and modernity. In light of this, the South Asian Pastoral Alliance (SAPA) has proposed a Pastoralists Youth Fair, which took place from June 21st to June 23rd, 2024 at the Gopnad Training Centre in Bechraji, situated in the Mehsana district of Gujarat, India.

The **objectives** and expected outcomes of this event are outlined as follows:

1. **Youth Empowerment:** The primary goal is to empower young pastoralists by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to sustain and innovate within pastoral communities.
2. **Knowledge Exchange:** The event aims to facilitate the exchange of traditional and modern knowledge, strategies, and best practices among youth pastoralists.
3. **Celebration of Culture:** A key focus of the event is to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of pastoralism and promote pride in pastoral identity.
4. **Global Connectivity:** The event seeks to foster connections among youth pastoralists from South Asian countries, creating a regional network for mutual support and collaboration.
5. **Promotion of IYRP 2026:** An important objective is to raise awareness about the significance of IYRP 2026 and the importance of pastoralism on a global scale.

Anticipated Results:

- Youth pastoralists will acquire advanced knowledge and skills.
- Young pastoralists will establish stronger networks and partnerships.
- Greater recognition of the value of pastoralism and IYRP 2026.
- Youth pastoralists will be equipped to lead in their communities.

The event brought together over 320 young participants from South and Central Asia to exchange knowledge, foster collaboration, and engage in discussions on issues relevant to pastoralism and the overarching themes of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP): Commons, Climate, and Culture. This gathering provided a platform for individuals to unite, share experiences, and collectively strive towards a sustainable future for pastoral communities. The event aimed to raise awareness, promote dialogue, and inspire action in support of pastoralism and its enduring values. Spanning three days, the event featured panel discussions, presentations, Q&A sessions, field visits, and cultural evenings.

Day-1

Day -1, i.e., 21st June, is marked as International Yoga Day. And therefore, the event began with Yoga followed by the traditional song written by the MARAG team. The song depicts the problems faced by Maldharis (pastoralists), what they have seen and gone through, but their problems remain unsolved. This event spanned over 3 days and included panel discussions, presentations, question and answers, field visits, and cultural nights. Vagtaram Devasi, convenor of SAPA, welcomed everyone and gave a brief introduction of SAPA and the objectives of this 3-day program. This was followed by the introduction of all participants.

Next was the inaugural plenary, which consisted of a panel discussion on Modern-day pastoralism: navigating challenges and opportunities. The panel consisted of Mona Mehta, Research Professor at Ahmedabad University, Ameer Hamza, a young pastoralist from Uttarakhand, India and SAPA steering committee member, Aneesh from Ekta Parishad, Sabita, trustee of MARAG, and Neeta Pandey, chairperson of MARAG.



Ameer Hamza, a young pastoralist from India, spoke about grassroots perspective. He said that while working at the grassroots level, he realized the need for an organization that formally represents the interests of the community and that would lay the foundation for representing their struggles with the Forest department and other myriad state institutions. This laid the foundation of Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan. This organization is trying to get Van Gujjars recognized as a tribal group. He said that Van Gujjars are culturally similar to other Adivasis and therefore must be recognized as such; however, the state is not recognizing their tribal identity.

The Van Gujjars are a nomadic transhumant pastoralist community of Northern India, residing in the Terai, Bhabhar and Siwalik in winters and the higher Bugyals in Western Himalayas in

summers. Based on geographical spread, they are related to Gujjars from Jammu and Himachal Pradesh, but have been accessing pastures in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh for ages.

The reason for inserting the prefix "Van" is to be classified as forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes like their counterparts in the states of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. However, to date, the Van Gujjars are classified as Other Backward Castes. Despite representations to the state government through the Social Justice and Empowerment department to claim Scheduled Tribe status, there has been no success. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) was viewed as an emancipatory legislation by the Van Gujjars to acknowledge their nomadic, pastoral, and forest-dwelling identity. However, they were labelled as Other Traditional Forest Dwellers, which not only stripped them of their tribal identity but also made it challenging to access forest resources for their livelihood. The rules are more lenient for Scheduled Tribes.

The Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan was created precisely with this motive to ensure the community can stand on its feet, feel proud of its tribal identity, exercise their agency in decisions that affect them, and seek support from the state and institutions for welfare benefits like education, healthcare, subsidy, etc. The Sangathan has put forth its representation to the National Commission of Scheduled Tribes. He further said that in Uttarakhand, there is a strong drive to displace the nomadic pastoral tribe of Van Gujjars in order to protect wildlife. At the same time, there is an expanding road network, an upsurge of wildlife and religious tourism. Unfortunately, it is the Van Gujjar community that is blamed for increased pressure on wildlife through the overgrazing of their buffaloes. Thus, he emphasized the need for an organization that addresses issues of the pastoralist community and that these organizations should work in solidarity to influence policymakers.

The next panelist was **Ms. Sabita**. She spoke on climate change and its impact on the pastoralist community and ecosystem. She said that climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. It affects people globally. As a result, there are alarming changes in climate parameters, such as reduced/heavy unpredictable, rise in temperature, etc... Apart from this, there is shrinkage of grazing land and vegetation cover/deforestation is leading to biodiversity loss. In the past, pastoralists used to have plenty of pastures for livestock. But now, on one hand, there is shrinkage of grazing land in the name of development and on the other, there are no longer quality grass. The rising temperature is resulting in desertification/degradation of land in drylands, loss of access to pastures due to the creation of protected areas, development projects, and state-imposed restrictions on pastoral mobilities are the major concern for pastoralists in India which is adversely impacting the health and productivity and ultimately reduces food security for people. As a result of all this, the pastoralists are forced to migrate to nearby cities in search of livelihood.

She also said that agriculture and pastoralism go hand in hand. Since 1980, agriculture has received much funding support from the government. Unfortunately, the same is not the case for pastoralism. In short, climate change has adversely impacted not only biodiversity and pastoralist communities but also resulted in the loss of indigenous knowledge and information systems on pastoral production and natural resource management, ethno-veterinary knowledge. This is a major issue of concern.

Aneesh spoke about social movements and youth. He said that the biggest challenge for all of us is that we have lost our listening capacity, leading to an overall disconnection across all sectors. For example, there is a disconnection between research, academics, and grassroots. He recalled when he joined this movement in 1998 and mentioned that there was a lot of potential at that time. Unfortunately, today's youth are not interested in participating in such movements. The main reason behind this is that pastoralism is not seen as a skilled profession anymore. Even people from this community do not see this work as valuable. Parents do not want their children to continue this work because neither the government nor the community itself has supportive policies or motivation to carry it forward. Consequently, traditional indigenous knowledge and skills are at risk of disappearing. He concluded his speech by emphasizing the need to establish a connection between academics and grassroots.

The next panellist was **Ms. Mona Mehta**. She shared her views on issues faced by pastoralist youth in urban Gujarat. She said that pastoralist youth living in cities faced fundamental questions about their existence and the future of pastoralism. They face the dilemma of whether to give up pastoralism and turn to other livelihood sources, especially in cities, or if it is possible to remain pastoralists without practicing pastoralism. She mentioned that the five essential steps for the progress of the Rabari community are embracing change, religion, organization, culture, and education. The Rabari have left behind rural wilderness to arrive in the city, and with the help of education, they have transformed and progressed. Rabari youth are crafting a new pastoralist ethic to create alternative pathways for the transmission of traditional skills to adapt in the modern context based on three key dimensions: community solidarity, open-mindedness to embrace ideas through observation and interaction with people from other communities, and reinterpreting the idea of rustic common sense, an adaptive skill possessed by them to understand and face uncertainty.

After Mona Mehta, the next panelist was **Neeta Pandya**, chairperson of MARAG. She spoke on the importance of pastoralism and the role of women in it. She said that MARAG is a grassroots organization that has been working with marginalized communities, including pastoralists, on issues of education, organization, and empowerment. MARAG focuses on promoting and utilizing the knowledge of rural people who have a great understanding and innate knowledge of their unique ecosystem. She said that the lives of pastoralists are linked to water, land, forest, and livestock. Their traditional way of life demonstrates sustainable living, which has become very important in today's context, despite this community being pushed out of the mainstream. The commons are grabbed in the name of development. She further said that there is a lack of education in this community, especially for the girl child. This community practices discrimination when it comes to education. They will send their male child to a good school, but when it comes to the girl child, they either will not allow her to get an education or will send her to a local government school. Most of the time, they are also dropped out of school to take care of their siblings and to help their mother with daily household chores.

She herself closely observed the pastoralist community. The best part is that livestock (called as Mal in Gujarati) belongs to both men and women, a practice that has been in place for ages. Women take care of their livestock and decide how to use the products obtained. They sell

the milk and use the earnings to purchase items needed at home. Unfortunately, women today do not receive recognition for their role in food production and conservation beyond their traditional responsibilities. She also mentioned the Mera Declaration from the global gathering of women pastoralists in 2010, and that IYRP is working on it. She emphasized the importance of intergenerational dialogue. The plenary session ended with an open forum for questions and answers from the participants.

The second session focused on **best practices, learnings, and exchanging perspectives from South and Central Asia by members of SAPA and CAPA**. The theme of this session was youth-driven initiatives fostering cross-cultural learnings through case studies from diverse regions and geographic landscapes. The first presentation was from Nepal, presented by **Santosh Pandey and Anil Jirel from the Consortium for Land Research and Policy Dialogue (COLARP)**. They presented the current scenario of rangelands and pastoralism in Nepal, highlighting the threats and challenges faced by pastoral communities in the region. They began by noting that the majority of rangelands, grasslands, and pasturelands are located in the mountainous regions of Nepal, particularly in the northern mountains, covering approximately 22.6% of the country's total land area. Nepal is home to an estimated 2 million pastoralists who practice the Transhumance system for managing their herds and pasturelands.

Pandey emphasized the unique characteristics of these pastoral communities, noting that they are widely dispersed, lack permanent settlements, and reside in remote areas with difficult terrain that is inaccessible by conventional transportation. He also discussed the diverse ethnic groups in Nepal, such as the Tibeto-Burman communities like Sherpa, Bhote, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Jirel, Gurung, Thakali, and Magar, as well as those dominated by Khas (Brahmins/Chettris) and Thakuris in the Karnali and far eastern regions, each with their own distinct cultures and languages.

In the Transhumance system, livelihoods are heavily dependent on livestock husbandry, including Yak, Nak, Chauri, sheep, and mountain goats. Additionally, pastoralists engage in activities such as collecting and trading non-timber forest products, tourism, trekking, and mountaineering to sustain their livelihoods. Despite their contributions to the economy, Thapa noted that these communities are often marginalized in mainstream development priorities. Pandey also discussed the importance of protecting common lands and regulating access to resources, highlighting the development of local norms and procedures by the community. He explained that there are two types of institutions for forest management in Nepal: customary institutions of forest management, such as nagar of Gurung, and informal institutions known as Kiduk and Gothala. The Kiduk system is also present in upper Tamor and Wolong Chung Gola areas, practiced by the Bhote and Tibetan refugee community in the upper Tamor region. On the other hand, Kipat is a form of communal land ownership historically prevalent among certain ethnic groups in eastern Nepal. It is important to note that different regions in Nepal have different customary systems.

In terms of laws and institutions, the speaker mentioned the Land Reform Act of 1964, which abolished the Kipat system, the Rangeland Nationalization Act of 1974, the Forest Act of 1993, and the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973. These laws determine the tenure rights of local communities. It was noted that Nepal approved the Rangeland policy in

2012, but none of the policy instruments have specifically addressed Himalayan rangelands. Discussing the changing dynamics in Himalayan rangeland areas, the speaker highlighted that climate change and climate-induced disasters pose a significant threat. The population and settlements of pastoral communities are declining, leading to a loss of rangeland areas and resources. Additionally, there is an increase in the area of national parks and a decline in indigenous practices. However, some rural municipalities in selected areas have taken steps to provide salaries and insurance for herders, and efforts are underway to integrate modern knowledge and technologies into traditional practices.

The next presentation was from **Bangladesh, made by Bipasha Adhikary from the Community Development Association (CDA)**. This was an online presentation through Zoom. She began by giving data on rangeland and pastoralists in Bangladesh, covering an area of 200,000 square kilometres (Km) and extending 820 Kms north to south and 600 Kms east to west. The pastoralist population in Bangladesh is over 163 million within an area of 148,460 square Kms. She then spoke about the three livestock production systems: grassland-based extensive system, intensive landless system, and mixed farming system, which differ based on the availability of resources, environmental conditions, and social and economic context. Citizens between 18-35 years of age are termed as youth and were categorized under 15 categories listed by them, such as unemployed youth, women youth, youth entrepreneurs, migrant youth, rural youth, and so on. According to data in Bangladesh, there are over 45 million youths, and it was found that the rate of unemployment is higher among youth. Therefore, it becomes necessary to engage youth in livestock/pastoralism. The two major concerns are youth unemployment and quality education.

She further mentioned priority policies for youth development, focusing on empowerment, health, recreation, good governance, and sustainable and equitable development at its core. She also mentioned the three objectives and scope of the national livestock development policy, which are:

1. Promoting sustainable improvements in productivity of milk, meat, and egg production, including processing and value addition.
2. Promoting sustained improvements in income, nutrition, and employment for the landless, small, and marginal farmers.
3. Facilitating increased private sector participation and investments in livestock production, livestock services, market development, and export of livestock products and by-products.

She mentioned the two types of pasture in Bangladesh - Native pasture and Annual pasture. Milk-producing areas in Bangladesh include Pabna, Sirajgonj, Manikganj, Munsiganj, Faridpur, Madaripur, Kishorganj, Rangpur, and Tangail districts. Some of the threats mentioned by her include disease control, availability and cost of fodder, water scarcity, market fluctuations, and others. According to her, regulatory compliance, land use competition, climate change, etc. are the major challenges. Therefore, she recommended that there is a need for mobilization and policy advocacy at the constituency level for reformation/reformulation analyzing the context of climate change, indigenous and ecologically sound systems, and biodiversity conservation in relation to youth participation towards the right to life, which are already aligned with policy prospects.

The next panellist to speak was **Dr. Abdul Razak Kakkar**, an esteemed expert in low carbon livestock, ethnoecology, and camel husbandry **from Pakistan**. Dr. Kakkar highlighted the various ecological zones in Pakistan where pastoralists reside with their livestock, including regions such as the north, Baluchistan, Punjab, Thar, Sindh, and Cholistan. These pastoralists follow diverse systems, such as nomads who migrate to highlands in Afghanistan during the summer and return to Pakistan, sometimes reaching Drass or the Indus basin. Dr. Kakkar emphasized a common global issue faced by pastoral communities - the intense competition for land. While pastoralists require ample land for their livestock to graze and roam freely, they often face challenges from policymakers, authorities, influential individuals, and elite societies who engage in land grabbing under the guise of conservation parks or housing developments. This encroachment occurs on land that has historically been utilized by pastoralists, further exacerbating their struggles.

One of the issues he discussed is the negative impact of colonialism on India and Pakistan. He highlighted how British colonialists viewed pastoral communities as uneducated and backwards, leading to the imposition of harmful changes to their traditional practices and culture. This included confining animals, administering vaccinations, pasteurizing milk, and using chemicals and pesticides. Unfortunately, these practices continue today due to policymakers and scientists being educated in Western institutions, resulting in a lack of support for traditional pastoral systems. Despite the fact that indigenous practices are more environmentally friendly and have a symbiotic relationship with the habitat and ecosystem, there is a prevailing belief that foreign breeds of animals are more productive than local breeds. This misconception needs to be addressed through policy changes to promote the value of pastoralist practices and their positive impact on the environment.

However, now there is a glimmer of hope emerging as people are beginning to recognize the superior quality of products from indigenous pastoralists compared to those from commercial farms. It has been noted that India is leading the way in embracing this trend of prioritizing indigenous and local breeds, with consumers willing to pay a premium of 5-10% for these desi livestock products. The speaker emphasized the importance of educating the younger generation on the value of our natural resources. Unlike the West, we are blessed with a wide variety of livestock such as buffalo, sheep, and goats that need to be preserved for their genetic diversity. It is crucial for us to support each other in conserving these natural and genetic resources, regardless of geographical boundaries.

In conclusion, the speaker highlighted the vital role of pastoralists in nature conservation and stressed the need to recognize their contributions by upholding their right to grazing lands.

Dr. Homayoun Ludin, who works with the government in the Animal Husbandry Department and is actively engaged with pastoralist communities and youth in Afghanistan, recently discussed the current scenario and challenges faced by these groups in the country. He highlighted the positive developments in the market for pastoralists, attributing this success to the improved coordination among various ministries such as Public Health, Agriculture, and Communication. This collaboration has led to the promotion of local dairy products and the establishment of milk collection networks in every district, ultimately boosting the economic status of pastoralists.

Dr. Ludin also shed light on the cluster mechanism in Afghanistan, which involves representatives from different tribes coming together to form a cohesive pastoral community. This system facilitates the dissemination of information among pastoralists and has garnered recognition from most government ministries in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Dr. Ludin emphasized the importance of health services for pastoralists and their animals. While challenges persist, efforts have been made to address these issues through the introduction of mobile clinics. Education is another critical area that requires attention, as historically many pastoralists were illiterate. However, recent years have seen a significant increase in educational opportunities for pastoral children, with 30-40% now enrolled in schools. Despite progress, educating pastoral children remains a significant challenge due to their nomadic lifestyle.

During a discussion on the opportunities available for youth in pastoralism in Afghanistan, it was highlighted that young individuals have a promising future in pastoral education and advocacy across various platforms. It was noted that in Afghanistan, youth from the East are hesitant to pursue pastoralism due to the impact of urbanization. However, in the North, there is a growing trend of young people entering the field as it has evolved into a profitable business with significant economic benefits.

The speaker emphasized that the main challenge currently faced by those involved in pastoralism is the lack of financial support from both the government and donor agencies such as FAO and the World Bank. This shortage of funding is a direct result of recent changes in authority and governance structures. Lack of female participation in the pastoralist movement and also reduced collection of milk. In conclusion, the speaker urged for increased investment and support for pastoralism in Afghanistan to ensure the continued success and growth of this vital sector.

Nauzik Ahmed and Dayani, from Sri Lanka, shared their presentation after the previous speaker. He presented a case regarding the Madhavanai and Mayilathamadu grasslands in the eastern province of Sri Lanka. This area is located 45 to 56 kilometres away from Batticaloa town and covers approximately 25,000 hectares of grazing land. There are 978 farms in this area, with 250,000 to 300,000 cattle and 2,500 to 3,000 labourers working on these farms. Historically, herders have used these lands for grazing their cattle since 1972. However, in 1990, due to occupation by the LTTE, they were forced to move from Aththinavaddai to Miyankulam (Kiran Divisional Secretariat). From 1990 to 2006, they grazed their cattle in their native villages. After the end of the war in Batticaloa district in 2007, the farmers brought their cattle back to Aththinavaddai. Approximately 14,000 to 16,000 acres of grazing land were allocated for cattle belonging to Batticaloa, as documented in a gazette notification in 1979.

In 2009, government agents of Batticaloa district, along with the Ministry of Agriculture, issued passes to only 300 farmers in Madhavanai, which were later cancelled in 2010. In 2011, individuals from Polonnaruwa district began illegally seizing land through the Mahaweli Development Authority. The police removed these illegal Sinhala-speaking settlers in 2015, but in 2019, illegal settlers once again started encroaching on the area.

As a result, farmers and civil society filed two cases, one in Colombo and the other in Batticaloa, and received a verdict in favour of the herders. The court ordered the Mahaweli Development Authority to allow herders to continue grazing there.

Between 2020 and 2022, the former governor of Eastern Province actively promoted illegal settlements near Madavanai. These settlers have been preventing herders from grazing their

cattle in the area, as they are also engaged in cattle farming. Unfortunately, this has led to the killing and abuse of approximately 5000 cattle that have strayed into the grasslands.

Despite numerous pleas from the herders to the Sri Lankan government to allow their cattle to graze in the designated area, no action has been taken. In a desperate attempt to bring attention to their plight, the herders staged a protest on September 17, 2023, in front of the Sithandy milk farm Association. However, their efforts have been in vain, as their cattle continue to be mistreated and killed by the illegal settlers.

In light of these troubling events, it is recommended that the Sri Lankan government allocate a portion of the approximately 60-70 billion spent on importing dairy products (which accounts for 2.1% of the total imports of Sri Lanka) to support these cattle farmers and enhance national productivity. By investing in the well-being of these farmers, the government can not only address the immediate issue at hand but also contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of the agricultural sector.

The last session of day one was learning and exchange of best practices from the national perspective in the form of panel discussion. This was presented by the local pastoralists and SAPA members who came from different parts/states of India. The Panel consists of Shailesh from Gujarat, Vagtaram from Rajasthan, Basharat from Jammu and Kashmir, Nazakat from Uttarakhand, Imran Jatt from Banni Kutch, Bapurao Shinde from Maharashtra, Kundan Bhagat from Jharkhand and Devendra from FES.

Shailesh from Gujarat said that pastoralism is the second largest occupation in the world, with around 150,000 people associated with it. In Gujarat, through MARAG, the pastoralist youth, both men and women (Maldhari youth), were organized as Maldhari Vikas Sangathan (MVS). This organization fights for the rights of pastoralists and ensures access and control over common property resources of the community dependent on it. Since its inception, they have submitted 13,900 claims for common property rights. To do this, they have also established legal clinics to facilitate the process of claims.

Basharat from Jammu and Kashmir said that in Jammu and Kashmir, the Gujjar-Bakarwals and Chopans practice transhumance (seasonal migration) and migrate to higher altitudes during the summer months in search of richer pastures for their livestock. As the shepherds and goatherds move, so do their children, and their education takes a backseat during these months. He mentioned that the Chopans are not covered in the FRA even though they are pastoralists, which is a significant challenge. In addition to this, the lack of policies and laws related to pastoralism, urbanization, encroachment by agriculture, climate variability, and inadequate technical skills for range management are the major challenges faced. He also noted that for the past 4-5 years, the government has been involving youth in sheep rearing, which is a positive sign.

Nazakat from Uttarakhand said that the FRA was seen as a liberating legislation by the Van Gujjars to recognize their nomadic, pastoral, and forest dweller identity. However, they were categorized as Other Traditional Forest Dwellers, which not only deprived them of their tribal identity but also made it difficult to access forest resources for their livelihood. For Scheduled Tribes, the rules are more relaxed. Additionally, many claims were passed in the subdivisional

level committee (SLC) but are pending in the district level committee (DLC). He also mentioned the struggles of pastoralists with the forest department.

The next speaker was **Imran Jatt from Banni Kutch**, who said that the Banni traces its significance from the time of Mahabharat. It is the largest grassland of Asia situated near the greater Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. It spreads over 2,618 km and accounts for almost 45% of pastures in Gujarat. Two ecosystems, wetlands, and grasslands are mixed side by side in Banni. Originally, they were nomads who were given land by the then king. This grassland is inhabited by Sindhi-speaking cattle breeders from Jat, Mutwa, and other tribes. As per the Indian Forest Act of 1927, the Banni grassland has been declared a protected forest since May 1955.

He further said that the forest department is giving these grasslands to private owners in the name of conservation, who will convert the land to private parks/hotels and promote tourism. One such example of it is Rann Utsav organized by the Gujarat government (a popular event known for its cultural activities and which saw many footfalls in this event). In 2009 the foundation of Banni Adhikar Sangathan was laid. Since then, they were successful in getting the sanctions of common property rights of 47 villages. These claims were sanctioned in SLC and DLC but no legal title has been given to them.

He also cited examples of the Fakirani Jats (camel breeders) of Jamnagar Marine National Park who breed and rear Gujarat's infamous kharai camels, a unique breed that feeds on the mangroves and related species. These pastoralists fear the forest department, which often penalizes them for grazing in the mangrove areas. Meanwhile, several industries that are being set up on the coast are not being held accountable for the destruction of forest cover.

Kundan Bhagat from Jharkhand was the next speaker. He said that over the last 20 years, grazing land and forests have diminished by more than 30% in the name of development, urbanization, and road widening. Climate change is driving these changes, affecting livestock and markets. He also highlighted challenges that nomadic pastoralists encounter, such as limited resources, shifting climates, restrictions on forest and grazing lands, and a generational shift in preferences, as youth are less inclined to engage in pastoralism. Additionally, there is a shortage and inadequacy of government incentives, and economic hardship has forced some pastoralists to abandon their traditional work.

He further said that they have initiated a new idea of Green Clubs, where students volunteer to conserve natural resources and the environment to create an eco-friendly environment. Green clubs play an important role in creating environmental awareness. To date, 650 Green clubs have been formed and are running successfully.

Bapurao Shinde, a pastoralist from Maharashtra, was the next speaker. He said that Dhangars were an important pastoral community of Maharashtra, though there are others such as Gawlis. They rear different animals including cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, horses, ponies, etc. Most of them were shepherds, and the remaining were buffalo herders and blanket weavers. They are recognized as a nomadic tribe in the state of Maharashtra.

He mentioned that children of this community suffer the most due to the nomadic nature of their work. To prevent these children from being deprived of their education, mobile schools,

residential schools, and hostels should be started. He gave an example of Sheli Mendhi Palan Mahamandal, a recently introduced scheme for the welfare of the pastoralist community. Unfortunately, it remains inaccessible to several shepherds as many of them are not educated and do not have access to the internet (as it requires online applications). He further said that organizations working on the issues of pastoralists should ensure that a greater number of pastoralists benefit from the schemes of the National Livestock Mission.

Devendra from FES Rajasthan said that Rajasthan is home to several pastoral communities including Raikas or Rabari, Gujjars, Sindhhi Muslims like Amin and Mohammad. Shrinking of land available for grazing due to development and wildlife conservation activities, changing weather patterns, and increasing hostility toward pastoralists have left these communities facing an uncertain future. This has resulted in the migration of youth towards nearby cities. In western Rajasthan, Orans or sacred groves, which were classified as wasteland, have been allotted for setting up solar plants.



DAY-2

Day 2 began with a recap of the previous day, followed by a presentation on pastoralism in Central Asia by Eleonora Aliyazova. She stated that the Central Asia region has around 250 million hectares of pastures, highlighting the significance of this land for agricultural activities. She mentioned that about 60% of the population in Central Asia lives in rural areas and is engaged in agriculture. Rangelands in Central Asia are significant for the economy, ecology, and culture. Major challenges include climate change, lack of access to water resources, land degradation and desertification, lack of human resources, and weak involvement of women and youth in pasture management, despite the fact that they have great potential in pasture management. While discussing best practices, she mentioned the following:

- 1) **Artificial glaciers** to solve the problem of regulating water balance on remote pastures and it also creates condition for seasonal rotation of pastures.
- 2) **Rotational grazing**- it is a pasture management technique which involve periodic movement of livestock between different pastures areas to prevent overgrazing, to improve soil health, to enhance plant diversity and increase livestock health.
- 3) **Silvopasture**-which is an integrated land management system that combines trees, forage and livestock on the same land.

She further stated that IYRP would highlight the essential roles of pastoralists and pastoral ecosystems, assisting pastoral organizations and their partners in dialogue with the states of North and South to implement public policies that align with realities. Future actions include:

- Active engagement and supporting IYRP
- Participation in COP29 to promote the voices of pastoralists
- Cross-regional partnership to exchange experiences.
- Promotion of women and youth participation in pasture management.

This was followed by a **panel discussion on Data and policy advocacy**. The panel included Mohan Dangi from Prayatna Samiti and members of SAPA and LFI, who discussed how their organization is providing data support for research and policy advocacy. He was followed by Juned Khan, Project Director at SPWD and member of SAPA and LFI, who emphasized the importance of local data in policy drafting and the involvement of youth in it. Vijay Nagesh, Advocate at Gujarat High Court, was the concluding panellist who spoke on existing laws and their implementation for pastoralists.

The second session on Data and policy began with the speaker **Mohan Dangi**. He said that Pastoralists in South Asia still practice their traditional way of life, including moving with their herds. They are under severe distress and are forced to withdraw from traditional livestock keeping for several reasons, including loss of common property resources, land acquisition by non-pastoralist land users, mechanized technologies introduced in agriculture, etc. The rangeland is increasingly being acquired for varied reasons such as protecting forests, preserving wildlife, rail corridors, mining, special economic zones, power and energy generation. The remaining rangeland is under continuous threat of being acquired by non-pastoralist land users. There is no clear institutional jurisdiction over rangeland. Today,

pastoralists are increasingly bound by inter and intra-state national borders. Their mobility is restricted, making them dependent on farmers, forests, and the government, and are pushed out of pastoralism.

He further said that pastoralism is still riddled with insufficient and unreliable data, difficulty in accessing resources, and unfavorable policies. Data on pastoral household or livelihood practices are missing or not readily available. This is especially true for nomadic and transhumant pastoralists, who are hardly accounted for by official agricultural census. The pastoralists have traditionally suffered from poor understanding, marginalization, and exclusion from policies, investments, and dialogue despite the fact that the pastoral production system supports the livelihoods of millions of people.

Their organization believes that the voice of pastoralists is fundamental for achieving fair and sustainable development of pastoral communities and is thus strengthening the capacity of pastoralist organizations in data collection, management, and analysis, also by advocating and legislating for livestock mobility and improved governance of pastoral lands.

The next panelist was **Juned Khan** from the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD). He said that their focus is on obtaining knowledge from the grassroots level and influencing the larger systems, policies, and programs of the government and other concerned agencies. Their organization works on four themes: forest management and governance, sustainable agriculture, watershed development, tank rejuvenation, water governance, and land use management.

He further said that issues related to women's land rights, youth, and climate change should be raised with supportive data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) or secondary data from various studies and research by different organizations/NGOs. He added that only then will they be able to influence policy-making. Unfortunately, today, instead of data, we are led by projections resulting in speculation.

Regarding pastoralism, he said that the youth are not interested in continuing it due to several reasons. One of the biggest reasons is they do not find this profession lucrative anymore. Today's youth are attracted by money and show. He further said that if a person wants to purchase a motorbike, the interest rate is less than that of purchasing a cow. He said even in rural areas, people have started giving up pastoralism for several reasons. Most of the women work under MGNREGA who earlier took care of cattle. He concluded his speech by saying that all data concerning pastoralism and allied activities should be made available for the public domain for policy advocacy.

Vijay Nagesh, Advocate at Gujarat High Court, the next panellist, spoke on Existing Laws and their implementation for pastoralists. He mentioned that Gujarat's diverse geographical area is home to several indigenous communities following their traditional occupations. The hilly terrain in the eastern, northern, and southern belts of the state has a significant tribal population. The Gujarat State government, under the provision of The Gujarat Panchayat Act (1993), has given statutory powers to the Gram Sabha to address matters related to grazing in forests, removal of encroachments from Gauchar land, creation of indents for livestock vaccination, and other issues. However, since most nomadic pastoralists are out of the village

for about 8-9 months, they are unable to raise these issues in the Gram Sabhas. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) was implemented in Gujarat in 2008, but in Saurashtra and Kutch, it was not initiated until 2013.

He further mentioned that in 2014-15, for the first time in Gujarat, Maldharis of Banni protected the areas claimed for their community forest rights under section 3(1)(d), seeking grazing rights for all pastoralist communities in 47 villages across 16 Gram panchayats. In another case in Kutch, the claims were approved in the Gram Sabha but are pending before state government officials.

A writ petition was filed in 2011 in the Gujarat High Court against the state of Gujarat for rejecting claims on a massive scale for the sole reason that they do not match with satellite imagery. After this, the state government responded by reconsidering all the rejected claims through physical verification at the sites.

It was further mentioned that RTI can be used as a tool to collect data from the government. Once the data is sought, the next step should be to meet the political leaders of that particular constituency along with the data. Then, facilitate these leaders to demand their rights.

The **next session** was on **introducing IYRP and the involvement of youth in it. Natasha Maru from IYRP Global group and ILC** introduced IYRP. What is its need? How is it formed? What is the process involved? She began by saying that earlier, the general perception about pastoralists is that they are illiterate and have no contribution to society, and therefore they are of no worth. Pastoralists produce food in the world's harshest environments and support the livelihood of the rural population. They have traditionally suffered from poor understanding, marginalization, and exclusion from dialogue. IYRP is there to change this perception about pastoralists. She said that in the last 20-25 years, the perception has been changing. A new perception is that the work of pastoralism is actually beneficial for climate change. It is therefore important to recognize the importance of pastoralism and to give identity to pastoralists. Several organizations, research institutes, academia, and all have been trying to convince the United Nations (UN) to declare the year 2026 as the International Year of Pastoralists and Rangeland. The work for this was initiated way back in 2015-16. This was done to emphasize the fact that pastoralism is a way of life and their contribution towards climate change should be recognized, thereby removing restrictions imposed on them.

She further said that the International Land Coalition is a global alliance of civil society and farmers' organizations, United Nations agencies, NGOs, and research institutes. She adds that at present, there are 300+ organizations associated at national, regional, and international levels. There is also an international steering group that decides the agendas for discussion. This international steering group has representation from East Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and other parts of the world. Besides the global and regional groups, there are 8+ thematic groups such as pastoralists youth group, pastoralism and gender, pastoralists and climate, and so on. She concluded her speech with the statement that since the foundation has been laid, it is high time for the pastoralist youth to take an active part in raising their issues first at the national, regional, and then at the global level.

Natasha was followed by **Jacob Lekaitogo, coordinator of the IYRP Working Group (WG)** with Co-coordinator Elena Chen. He briefly mentioned the working groups that have been agreed upon to date and the need for working groups. He further discussed the possible tasks of the working group related to their respective themes. Regarding IYRP priority actions, he listed 8 actions such as stopping indiscriminate conversion of rangelands, recognizing the importance of pastoral mobility, innovating and implementing beneficial economic policies and technologies, and promoting integrated, multifunctional land use.

He also mentioned that the WG is formulating key messages and planning events, including a webinar to exchange with other WGs on youth issues. He added that the membership of this WG has expanded and they are recruiting from outside the normal IYRP networks. They are looking forward to onboarding Asian pastoralist youth, especially Mongolian youths, to be a part of SAPA.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that IYRP will focus on different themes throughout 2026, with each month dedicated to a specific topic related to rangelands and pastoralism. He outlined the objectives of the Pastoralism and Youth Working Group as follows:

- To empower pastoralist youth to become agents of change in pastoralist communities.
- To promote active engagement of pastoralist youth in decision-making processes related to pastoralism.
- To advocate for policies that acknowledge and support the unique contributions of young pastoralists to sustainable pastoral livelihoods.
- To foster the exchange of knowledge and promote collaboration among young pastoralists at local, national, and international levels.

He also said that the thematic issues are classified into three main groups: livelihood diversification, governance, and natural resource governance. The Advocacy Priorities of the International Youth for Rangeland Pastoralism (IYRP) focus on ensuring active representation and engagement of pastoralist youth in the IYRP initiative and other global forums. Additionally, one of the priorities is to establish a pastoralist youth network that allows young pastoralists to connect, collaborate, and exchange knowledge.

Furthermore, the advocacy efforts include promoting policies that encourage youth involvement in livestock development, sustainable rangeland management, and innovative technologies. This also involves advocating for educational access and integration to provide diverse pathways for pastoralist youth, such as vocational and specialized learning opportunities like shepherding schools, summer schools, sustainable agriculture, and animal husbandry programs.

Strategically, the priorities include supporting youth participation in the animal value chain and promoting their role in market development. This includes connecting youth to enterprises for processing milk, meat, and other livestock products, as well as establishing fattening kraals for livestock. The IYRP also aims to provide training on fodder flow plans, introduce climate-smart forage production techniques like hydroponics and cover crops, and help youth set up profitable businesses to sell fodder to pastoralists in their communities.

The next speaker was **Dr. Hasrat Arjjumend, co-chair of IYRP Central Asia and Mongolia**. He said that Pastoralism is the second oldest occupation, which started with Agriculture. Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed were also pastoralists, but in modern times pastoralism is looked down upon as a profession. He then mentioned the Grassroots Institute Canada, of which he is a member on an individual basis, which supports pastoralist communities, their livestock, and pasture resources. He further said that he is also the co-chair of IYRP Central Asia and Mongolia. The countries that come under Central Asia are Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. He also gave an example of the Gobi Desert in Mongolia, which is a cold desert and grassland region in southern Mongolia and northern China. He mentioned that India also has a cold desert b

He further adds that they are working on several issues, as a result of which the issue of land is taking a backseat. Pastoralists are losing grazing land due to several reasons, including enclosure of commons, fragmentation of common land, conversion of grazing land, and land degradation. This poses the question of how to reclaim these lands because without grazing land, how will we feed the livestock?

He further mentioned that criminalization of pastoralists is also a big issue in India, whereas in Slovakia, pastoralists are allowed restricted grazing in national parks and are even paid for it. He ended his speech by citing the Supreme Court Judgement in Jagpal Singh & Ors Vs State of Punjab & Ors, dated January 28, 2011. According to this order by the Supreme Court, the transfer of village community land for private and commercial use is illegal, and all state governments have been asked to prepare schemes for eviction of illegal occupants of village community land and restore them for the purpose it was originally meant for. He also said that taking it as the base, 1017 village committees have reclaimed 30,000 km of land.

The next speaker was **Fernando from WAMIP (World Alliance for Mobile Indigenous Peoples)** who spoke about the School of Pastures that was established in the year 2004 and is still running today. The majority of the students studying here are from urban areas. They believe that pastoralism is not just a job, but a way of life. He further elaborated that the students coming to this school were first taught theory about animal health. It took 2 months to complete the theory syllabus. The remaining 4 months are for practical experience. The students here were also trained for the marketing of value-added products.

Regarding WAMIP, he said that it is an international Civil Society organization established in the year 2003 with a mission to assist and empower mobile indigenous peoples throughout the world to maintain their mobile lifestyles in pursuit of livelihood and cultural identity, to sustainably manage their common property resources, and to obtain their full rights. There are 200 members/partners from Latin America, Europe, West and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, West Asia and North Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia.

The last session of Day 2 was a **collaborative session**. All the participants were divided into three groups based on the themes of IYRP, which were commons, climate, and cultural aspects of pastoralism. The participants were asked to share their problems, aspirations, and suggestions/commitments. Facilitators were also present to monitor the group activities. Each group was then asked to present their discussions, followed by a question and answer session. A charter of demands was prepared based on the two days of discussion.



DAY-3

Day 3 began with a speech by **Laljibhai Desai, a social activist and pastoralist from MARAG**, who set the stage for a fruitful discussion and at the same time made the participants aware of what is happening at the national, regional, and international levels. He talked about how pastoralism is a way of life deeply rooted in Indian culture, being the second oldest socio-cultural occupation and more than just a means of making money. He added that pastoralism involves a profound connection with nature, the land, grasslands, and forests. Livestock such as sheep, goats, cows, buffaloes, horses, donkeys, camels, and yaks are integral to pastoralism in India. The migration routes of pastoralists can span from 50 to 5000 km or more.

Desai revealed that pastoralists are facing challenges not only in India but globally. Current threats include urbanization, privatization, decreasing common lands (a crucial source of grazing for livestock), financial constraints, and political influences. He further stated that Governments, policy makers, and industrialists often target common property resources, as acquiring this land requires minimal investment since it is considered government-owned. This results in indigenous people who rely on these resources becoming labourers, a pattern seen worldwide. Desai highlighted four crises facing the world - food, fuel, job, and climate crises - which collectively contribute to a fifth crisis, a global peace crisis. These crises are a result of flawed development models.

Pastoralists are currently facing a myriad of challenges, primarily due to the government's lack of recognition of indigenous/traditional knowledge. Additionally, there is a failure to acknowledge the intricate relationship between pastoralism and agriculture, as well as the harmonious way in which pastoralists coexist with nature. The concept of the 5 Js - jungle

(forest), jal (water), jameen (land), janwar (animal), and jan (human beings) - highlights the historical interdependence of these elements, which has been disrupted by the overuse of technology, leading to conflicts. The resulting clashes have discouraged young pastoralists from pursuing this occupation, as they do not see it as a source of pride or financial stability. Government policies further exacerbate the challenges faced by pastoralists. It is crucial to restore harmony by embracing indigenous knowledge and recognizing the vital role of pastoralists in nature conservation, food sovereignty, and addressing the climate crisis.



After his speech, Ameer Hamza gave a brief overview of the past two days' activities and discussions held. He was followed by Vagtaram, convenor of SAPA, who read the charter of demands prepared based on the 2 days of discussions. The charter of demands includes the following:

Formation of Maldhari (pastoralist) Commission at the national level.

1. Recognition and evaluation of the economic and natural benefits of pastoralism.
2. Strict provision of compensation for severe diseases and deaths caused by natural calamities or extreme weather/climate change.
3. Conservation of local and indigenous grasses and animal breeds, and promoting indigenous knowledge while recognizing pastoralists as custodians of knowledge.
4. Recognition and promotion of pastoral skills under the Skill India Scheme of the Government of India.
5. Strengthening Maldhari community institutions and the process of collective decision-making.
6. Industries and development projects should not be allowed to operate in commons. If any project is proposed, it should be mandatory to consider the opinions of Maldhari women who hold/use that land.

7. Proper implementation of pre-existing laws, acts, and government orders such as FRA, Biodiversity Act, etc. should be ensured at the ground level.
8. Proper provisions should be made for Maldharis to conserve the commons, forest land, and pastures, which are government resources.
9. Organizations working with livestock and pastoralists should also be included in the census of livestock to be conducted this year.

After this, the house was set for an open forum to discuss various issues related to pastoralism. These issues range from issuing certificates of ST and ration cards for migrant pastoralists, to subsidies and setting up MSP on milk to form a cadre and train them so that they can strengthen the movement for pastoralists. The highlighted part of this open forum and discussion is the participation of women from the pastoralist community. Around 70-80 women pastoralists participated in this 23rd Youth Parliament/Fair. It is worth mentioning here that women of this community were not allowed to go out and talk in public with other men, but today they are empowered through continuous training and leadership development programs, enabling them to raise their voices to demand justice and their rights. MARAG organized pastoralists in Maldhari Vikas Sangathan (MVS), a grassroots organization.

To quote few pastoralist women's voices-

Leeluben said that there was an urgent need to stop wrong cultural practices. “**bhanave pan maal bachave**” and that it is good to educate children but first they should save/preserve their asset i.e. our livestock and culture.

Tejuben Rabari stressed on the need to organize, importance of education and persistent efforts to achieve the targets.

Geetaben presented the plight of migrant pastoralists. It includes lack of proper education facility for the children of migrant pastoralists, issuing of Ration cards, census of livestock and existing grazing land.

Surajben said that 23rd June is celebrated as world widow day and recalled how Maldhari Vikas Sangathan was formed in 2014. It happened after the international pastoralist convention in 2010. She motivated others to organize themselves by sharing her association with Maldhari Vikas Sangathan, women's wing under the leadership of Neetaben Pandya.

Lakshmiben said that the difficulties of Sheep herders have increased today because now the relation between farmers and sheep herders is broken. Moreover, the wool is also not in demand as a result of which they either have to throw away the wool or have to sell it on give-away price. Many times, they have to pay from their pockets to get the wool out of sheep. She emphasised on government intervention.

Dinesh bhai spoke about the strategy adopted. He said that the journey began in 2014. What started with a handful of pastoralists youth had now taken the form of an organization owned and run by pastoralists. He informed that it was decided that the leadership will be rotational and the youth will be from the age group of 20-35 years. He also mentioned that many pastoralists' organization are now a part of SAPA. This movement has also started in Central Asia.

Lalsingh Bhai Rayka, former Head of Axis Bank and founder of Rayka Education Charitable Trust (RECT), emphasized the importance of setting goals as the first step. He also highlighted the significance of budget allocation, stating that activities cannot be sustained without sufficient funds. Therefore, creating a fund for necessary activities is crucial. Rayka stressed the undeniable importance of education, noting that it is the key for the Maldhari community to progress. In 2003, he established RECT to provide educational guidance and support to Maldhari children for various competitive entrance exams conducted by the state government for government jobs like PSI/ASI, DYSO, Mamlatdaar, etc., free of charge.

Rayka also emphasized the need for community representation in politics to influence policy changes. Drawing from his own experience of running for both State Assembly and Legislative Assembly, he highlighted the voting rights issue faced by migrant pastoralists in Rajasthan. He proposed implementing postal voting for these pastoralists to address this issue.

Furthermore, Rayka pointed out that migrant pastoralists struggle to benefit from the government's Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) due to the transient nature of their work. He suggested that the government issue a stamp to enable pastoralists to access the scheme regardless of their location. Additionally, he recommended establishing a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for wool to alleviate the financial burden on sheep herders when shearing wool.

He spoke about how farmers receive funds from the Kisan Nidhi fund, but pastoralists do not benefit from any such scheme. This is because the definition of pastoralist is not clear. He agreed that pastoralists are the most affected by climate change. He added that the bond or relationship between farmers and pastoralists has been broken. Pastoralists also face discrimination and criminalization. As a result, even if their livestock is stolen, the police do not file a complaint/FIR. He said that the reason pastoralists are falling behind is that the community does not raise their voice. Unless they do so, they will not be able to take action. He suggested that the community should question the government about the methodology of livestock census to clarify doubts, such as whether migrant pastoralists will be included in the census or excluded. He concluded that in order to raise their voices, the community must first be organized, only then will their voices be heard and they can influence policy. He cited several examples of powerful movements, such as the Thakur Sena Andolan, Patidar Andolan, Mandal Bechraji Sar Andolan, etc.

The discussion in the open forum was concluded by Lalji Bhai Desai expressing happiness that the women of the pastoralist community are actively participating in the discussion for their rights. He mentioned that there was a time when they were not even ready to go out of their homes. He further said that there should not be just one face for any movement to be successful. When a movement has many leaders, it will not deviate from its motto. He added that there is a possibility of one or two people deviating from the goal, but when there are many leaders, the achievement of the goal remains intact. Just as a farmer remains a farmer regardless of their caste, there is a need to remain pastoralists first, irrespective of caste or province. This will only be possible by elaborating on the definition of Maldhari/pastoralist.

He called for committed volunteers for a mass movement for the rights of pastoralists. He suggested that a team can be formed consisting of 10-11 committed volunteers from each

district in Gujarat. This team will then be trained on how to take the movement forward. This is necessary to develop a uniform understanding among each volunteer. It was suggested that two or more districts should be covered in one training. Another suggestion was that one convention of Maldharis in each of the 4 zones should be organized once a year, and one Mahakumbh (grand convention) should be organized at the national level, similar to the one held in Rajasthan. It was decided that on November 26, 2024, the day marked as International Day for Pastoralists, the Gujarat Mahakumbh will be organized.



The event ended with a vote of thanks from Lakhabhai, who thanked all the participants for taking part in the event. He mentioned that more than 320 pastoralist youth from different regions participated and discussed the issues they face in their respective areas. He especially thanked all the 70-80 women for actively participating in the discussion.