



Statement by the participants of the International Workshop on Camelid Pastoralism, 5–10 January 2024

Held in Sadri, Rajasthan, India, the International Workshop on Camelid Pastoralism was the first international event of the International Year of Camelids, 2024. The experience exchange was hosted by Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan (LPPS), the League for Pastoral Peoples (LPP) and the Godwar camel pastoralist milk producers. Participants represented the Raika camel herders and other camel pastoralists from Rajasthan and Gujarat in India, camel herders from Mongolia and Kenya, as well as researchers and practitioners from India, Iran, Kenya, UK and Germany. They were joined online by scientists and practitioners from Peru, Pakistan, UAE and USA.

The participants appreciated that the United Nations General Assembly has designated 2024 as the International Year of Camelids, but cautioned that camelids should not be looked at as merely a means of production. Historically, camelids¹ are associated with highly mobile communities who capitalised on their capacity to convert the sparse vegetation of marginal areas into valuable products including food, fibre, fuel and physical energy.

Camelids are vital for food security and biodiversity protection in the arid and semi-arid regions of the world, but only if they are kept in mobile management systems. Their mobility is an asset and an explicit method of resilience, especially in times of global climate change and environmental unpredictability. This is a fact that has long been realised by local people at the grassroots level in Africa who have been switching to camels from cattle to improve the pastoralists' resilience to climate change and to cope with droughts and water scarcity. Camelids are also regarded as especially beneficial for the environment because of their soft feet that do not disturb the soil, as well as their grazing/browsing habits.

Camelid pastoralists, who have lived with their herds since centuries or even millennia, have tremendous bodies of traditional knowledge and wisdom. They regard their camelids as family members and often have a spiritual connection to them. Over the millennia, they have diversified camelids into hundreds of breeds and have developed an extensive range of products from them.

There is an increasing global demand for the special qualities of camel milk as a health food and (supplementary) treatment for various diseases of civilisation such as autism and diabetes. Indigenous production systems and ancient knowledge are vital to save the rich nutritional qualities of camelid products including the microbiological cultures that are associated with them and that disappear when camelids are stall-fed.

¹ Camelids include seven species: Bactrian camels, dromedary camels and wild camels as well as South American camelids, namely domesticated llamas and alpacas and wild vicuñas and guanacos.



Many inspirational approaches to camelid development are women-led. It is noteworthy that women are leaders in developing and marketing camelid-based products. Camelids are valuable assets for them, and they create a diverse range of products from wool/hair, meat and milk. In doing so, they contribute to the livelihoods and welfare of their own community and families, and of camelid pastoralists more widely.

Camelid pastoralists are facing land dispossession and policies and programmes that do not recognise their rights. Land and mobility rights are important factors for the future of camelid pastoralism. The lack of recognition of their customary land tenure and territories of life, the enclosure of customary lands, and loss of access rights to land are amongst the most important threats faced in recent decades. Other threats include reduced mobility, growth of extractive industries (mining, oil and gas) and green energy projects, dam building and other infrastructure construction, extension of commercial agrobusiness, and urbanisation.

The participants rejected the extractive model of animal production that was superimposed on many camelid-keeping countries in colonial times and is now leading to the capital-intensive industrialisation of camelid keeping, which depends on fossil fuels, chemical inputs and imported feed. At a time when greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be reduced to prevent further global warming, fossil-fuel-free camelid development that is solar powered, makes optimal use of local resources and is in tune with planetary boundaries is the need of the hour.

To support this model of food and fibre production and preserve it as an important part of our cultural heritage, governments and policymakers in the countries where camelids live must recognise these animals' territories of life, respect and protect the customary rights of camelid pastoralists and provide them with legal, institutional and financial support that ensures the continuation of camelid herding into the future. Access to good veterinary services is especially important. Furthermore, mobile social services as well as state policies and programmes that guarantee access to grazing and incentivise youths to take up mobile camelid pastoralism are essential to ensure the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

People and groups who care about camelids (including policy- and decision-makers, civil society organisations, camelid herders and other pastoralists and their organisations, researchers, media people, consumers and the private sector) should value and appreciate the quality, embedded cultural heritage and variety of camelid products, such as milk, meat, wool/hair, leather and handicrafts, and work to set up fair and ethical value chains that respect the dignity and interests of the camelid herders and the wellbeing of their herds. Such products are precious and should therefore be remunerated accordingly. Community-based value chains that enable pastoralists to gain the majority of benefits from their own – often rare – products should be a development priority.

The International Year of Camelids (IYC) is an opportunity to understand and value the work and knowledge of camelid-herding communities, which must be at the centre of the IYC activities. We expect global mobile camelid pastoralists to unite their voices and work in alliance with each other to promote and adopt a development model that is good for camelids, people and the planet and can also pave the way for a successful International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists in 2026.

Contacts: info@pastoralpeoples.org , lpps.sadri1996@gmail.com