

The ICCA
Consortium

Pastoralist Voices

from the Territories

Stories of Governance,
Care, and Resilience



A Report for the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
**RANGELANDS AND
PASTORALISTS**
2026

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Contents

Pastoralist Voices from the Territories	4
Stories of Governance, Care, and Resilience	5
Introduction	5
1 Methodology and Limitations	6
2 Synthesis Across the Stories	7
Customary Laws and Governance Systems	7
Mobility and Territorial Continuity	8
Pastoralism as Conservation Through Use	8
Women and Youth as Knowledge Holders and Agents of Change	9
Threats to Pastoral Territories of Life: Exclusion, Fragmentation, and Conflict	10
Climate Pressures and Pastoral Resilience	10
3 Across Regions: Pastoral Territories of Life in Practice	11
Africa: Mobility Under Pressure	11
Asia: Mobility Across Diverse Landscapes	14
Europe and the Mediterranean: Commons in Transition	17
Latin America: Water, Territory, and Indigenous Governance	19
4 Thematic Spotlights	22
Mobility as Adaptation	22
Commons Governance	23
Culture, Identity, and Territorial Memory	25
Women and Youth	26
Pastoralism, Biodiversity, and Restoration	28
5 A Call to Action: Placing Pastoralist Communities at the Center	30
Global Processes: Move from Representation to Influence	30
National Governments: Recognize Self-Governance	31
Donors and Development Partners: Move Resources and Decision-Making Power	31
Conservation Actors: Support Custodianship, Do Not Take It Over	32
Closing Remark	34

Pastoral Territories of Life Catalogue 35

Africa 36

Naramam–Chesra, Kenya — Women-Led Restoration	36
Karamoja, Uganda — Resource Sharing in Drylands	37
Simanjiro, Tanzania — Maasai Stewardship of a Shared Landscape	38
Turkana Communities, Kenya — Adaptation in a Changing Dryland	39
Leparua Rangelands—A Pastoral Commons System in Northern Kenya	40
Mbororo Pastoralists, Cameroon — From Conflict to Cooperation	41
Northern Tanzania — Collective Tenure and Community Governance	42
Ferlo, Senegal — Mobility as the Foundation of Pastoral Life	43

Asia 44

Abolhassani Tribal Confederacy, Iran—Coping with Climate Change and Droughts	44
Zagros Mountain, Iran — Livelihoods and the Resilience of Nomadic Pastoralists	45
Indigenous Knowledge, Glaciers, and Nomadic Pastoral Territories of Life in Iran	46
Chahdegal and Kouh-e-Zنده, Iran — Mobility and Customary Governance	47
Muzhayo Commons, Pakistan — Commons Under Pressure	48
High-Mountain Kyrgyzstan — Women at the Frontline of Resilience	49
The Hima System in Jordan—A Community-Based Approach for Pastoral Territories of Life	50
Munzur Valley, Turkey — Sacred Landscapes and Pastoral Heritage	51
Van Gujjars, India — Forest Rights and Mobile Pastoralism	52
Banni Grasslands, India — Pastoral Commons and Community-Led Restoration	53
Orans of Thar, India — Sacred Commons and Community Conservation	54
Gaddi Transhumance, India — Mobility as Climate Resilience in the Western Himalayas	55
Changthang, India — Mobility and Commons Governance on the High-Altitude Plateau	56
Western Himalayas, India — Ecological Guardians	57
Bayanbulag, Mongolia — Co-management for Pastoral Conservation	58
Gyatong grassland, China —Community-led Sustainable Development	59
Chagannuur, China — Pastoral Stewardship for Migratory Bird Conservation	60
Jiangbutas Village, China — A Kazakh Pastoral Territory of Life in a Changing Climate	61

Europe and the Mediterranean 62

Sinjajevina, Montenegro — Defending Mountain Commons	62
Lagorai, Italy – A Territory of Dairy Resistance	63
Cattani Farm, Italy –The Continuity of Traditional Droving Practices	64
Covas do Barroso, Portugal — Commons Against Mining	65
Áldujohka Sámi ICCA, Finland — Reindeer Mobility and Indigenous Governance	66
Xiberoa, France — Shared Mountains, Shared Responsibilities	67
Longmynd Common, England — Customary Commons and Collaborative Stewardship in Upland Landscapes	68

Latin America 69

Malargüe, Argentina — Transhumance in the Southern Andes	69
Lof Kinxikew, Argentina — Indigenous Governance in a Protected Area	70
Aymara Wetlands, Chile — Water, Camelids, and Restoration	71
Pewenche Territory, Chile — Transhumance and Living Territory	72

Pastoralist Voices From The Territories



Pastoralist Voices from the Territories

Stories of Governance, Care, and Resilience

Introduction

Pastoral territories of life are important expressions of communal self-governance over natural resources. They are governed, managed, and conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities that maintain profound natural and cultural relationships with their territories through customary laws and other effective governance systems. Pastoral ways of life sustain communities and landscapes of high ecological and cultural value.

Mobility lies at the heart of pastoral knowledge systems and provides a foundation for addressing multiple ecological and social challenges. Through seasonal movement, rotational grazing, and other forms of mobility, many pastoralists support vegetation recovery, soil health, and landscape resilience. Pastoral territories of life can also contribute to biodiversity conservation by maintaining genetic diversity, supporting threatened species, and sustaining heterogeneous habitats. Beyond their ecological contributions, these territories sustain collective practices, intergenerational knowledge, cultural identity, and local economies, helping communities respond to rural depopulation and social marginalization. Despite these contributions to international policy agendas, pastoral territories of life are often neglected or misunderstood in policy and conservation practice.

Mobility is a fundamental right of pastoral peoples and is embedded in complex and often overlapping tenure systems. Yet pastoralist communities continue to face sedentarization policies, land grabbing, conservation enclosures, and other interventions that fail to recognize and protect their rights. Even where rights are formally acknowledged, that recognition often does not translate into enforceable protection against encroachment or the erosion of customary governance systems.

Prepared in the context of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, this report brings together stories from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America that reflect the realities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It focuses on stories directly relevant to pastoral territories of life, particularly those involving livestock-based pastoralism, mobility or extensive grazing, collective or customary governance, territorial relationships, and conservation or rights. By documenting diverse lived experiences, governance systems, and contemporary challenges, the report highlights key features of pastoral ways of life. It aims to inform public policy, conservation practice, and development strategies so that pastoralists are recognized as legitimate rights-holders and custodians of their territories of life. It also emphasizes the importance of customary governance, mobility, and biocultural stewardship in responding to biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development challenges.

1 Methodology and Limitations

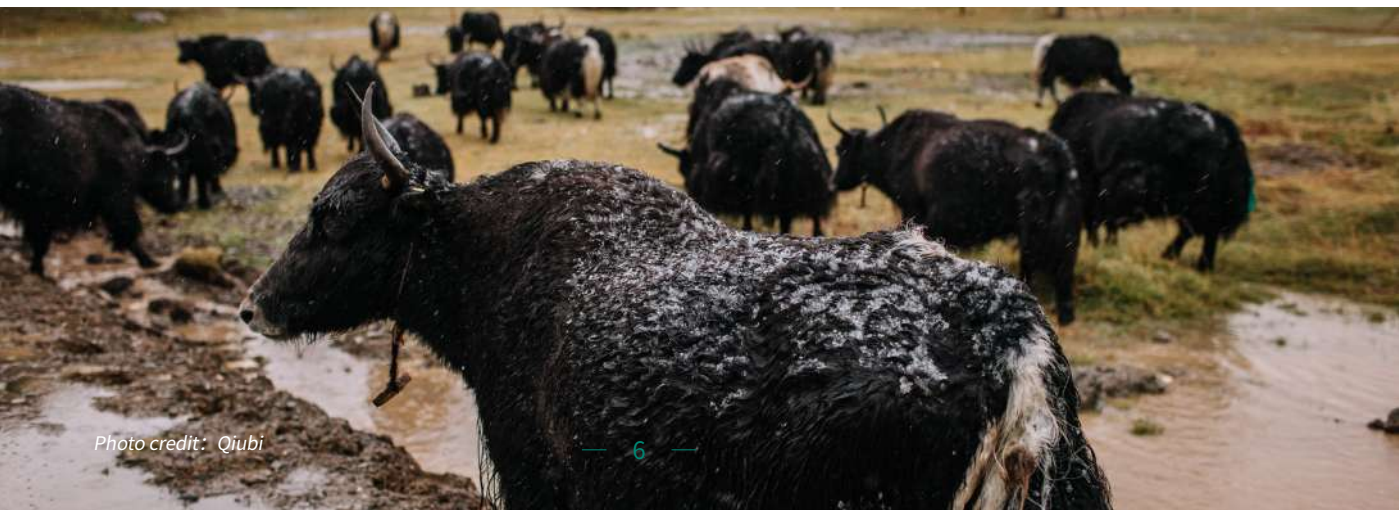
This report draws on stories contributed through the ICCA Consortium's Pastoralist Working Group and allied collaborators. The stories were not collected as a statistically representative sample; they are community-based and partner-supported accounts intended to illustrate the diversity of pastoral territories of life across regions.

The synthesis identifies recurring patterns, lessons, and implications for action emerging from these stories. It gives particular attention to stories directly relevant to pastoral territories of life, including those involving livestock-based pastoralism, mobility or extensive grazing, collective or customary governance, territorial relationships, and conservation or rights.

During the editorial review, stories were assessed for their relevance to the report's focus. Stories related to territories of life but not directly connected to pastoralism were not included in the main synthesis. Stories involving livestock-based livelihoods, but with less clearly documented connections to customary governance, collective management, or territories of life, were considered selectively, particularly when they helped illustrate pastoral transitions, hybrid governance arrangements, or contemporary adaptations.

The preparation of this report was guided by the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, the do-no-harm principle, and respect for the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. All customary territorial governance practices of indigenous peoples and local communities must operate within the scope of each country's prevailing national laws. Contributors were asked to confirm that the information, photographs, quotations, names, and sensitive details included in the report could be shared publicly and that community perspectives were represented appropriately. Particular care was taken with stories involving land conflicts, conservation restrictions, militarization, sacred sites, Indigenous knowledge, gendered knowledge, or politically sensitive contexts. Where publication could create risks for communities, individuals, or territories, details were anonymized, generalized, or excluded from the main report.

For these reasons, the report does not claim to provide a comprehensive global assessment of pastoralism. Rather, it offers a grounded synthesis of lessons emerging from the contributed stories. Where possible, stories were reviewed for consent, sensitivity, accuracy, and safeguarding considerations before inclusion. The report should therefore be read as both a synthesis and an advocacy-oriented publication. Its purpose is to highlight key patterns, challenges, and messages from the stories while recognizing the diversity, complexity, and locally specific realities of pastoral territories of life.



2 Synthesis Across the Stories

The stories show that pastoral territories of life are not only livelihood systems but also complex social, cultural, ecological, and governance systems. They are sustained through mobility, customary laws, collective institutions, intergenerational knowledge, relationships with livestock and landscapes, and adaptive responses to uncertainty. Several recurring lessons emerge across the stories. These lessons do not describe every pastoral system, but they highlight important patterns and help clarify why pastoral territories of life matter for rights, conservation, climate resilience, and territorial governance.

● Customary Laws and Governance Systems

Customary laws are rules of conduct rooted in community customs, norms, traditions, and knowledge. Together with statutory law, they form an important part of the governance systems through which Indigenous Peoples and local communities exercise self-governance. In pastoral territories of life, these laws often regulate access to grazing areas, water sources, seasonal pastures, mobility routes, sacred sites, forests, wetlands, and other shared resources.

The stories show that pastoral governance is usually collective and relational. It may involve councils of elders, community assemblies, clan-based systems, Indigenous authorities, women's groups, youth initiatives, herder associations, pastoral commons institutions, spiritual authorities, and other locally grounded forms of decision-making. These institutions are embedded in social relationships, cultural obligations, ecological knowledge, and territorial responsibility.

In many stories, governance is closely connected to mobility. Decisions about when to move, where to graze, when to rest pastures, how to share water, and how to respond to drought or conflict are made through collective processes and guided by detailed knowledge of vegetation, rainfall, snowmelt, animal behavior, water availability, and seasonal change.

Legal recognition alone is not enough. Even where customary laws, community institutions, or collective rights are formally acknowledged, this does not always translate into effective protection. Recognition must be practical and enforceable, protecting the conditions that allow pastoral governance to function: mobility, access to commons, water rights, collective decision-making, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

The stories in this collection offer compelling evidence of customary governance as a living and adaptive practice. In condensing these accounts, however, it is worth acknowledging that pastoral communities are not internally uniform, and that collective rights to territory and resources do not automatically translate into equal participation or equal benefit for all community members. Who holds decision-making authority, who accesses key resources, and who bears the costs of governance arrangements varies within communities in ways that matter for both equity and effectiveness.

Crucially, the relevant forms of internal differentiation are locally specific - structured by kinship, lineage, ceremonial status, and other logics that do not map straightforwardly onto external categories such as gender, age, or wealth as commonly understood in policy frameworks. Applying

these categories without grounding them in local realities risks misreading the governance systems the collection seeks to document and support. Follow-on policy work would benefit from engaging more closely with how communities themselves understand and navigate internal differentiation, rather than assuming that standard representational frameworks capture what is at stake.

● **Mobility and Territorial Continuity**

Mobility lies at the center of many pastoral territories of life. It supports seasonal access to pasture, water, forests, wetlands, highlands, lowlands, dry-season refuges, and other resources distributed across space and time. Across the stories, mobility takes many forms, including long-distance nomadism, seasonal transhumance, vertical movement, rotational grazing, herd splitting, short-distance seasonal movement, and semi-mobile systems.

This diversity matters. Pastoral mobility should not be understood as a fixed model, but as a continuum of practices that allows communities and herds to respond to ecological variability. Mobility functions not only as a livelihood strategy but also as a governance mechanism. Through movement, pastoralists distribute grazing pressure, allow vegetation to recover, maintain relationships across territories, and coordinate access among households and communities.

Mobility corridors are therefore not simply routes between two points. They connect pastures, water sources, resting areas, sacred sites, markets, social networks, seasonal camps, and customary institutions. They also carry memory, identity, and knowledge.

The stories reveal a persistent mismatch between pastoral understandings of territory and dominant land-administration systems. Pastoral systems are often based on seasonal movement, shared access, overlapping rights, negotiated use, and flexible territorial arrangements. By contrast, many modern land-administration systems are based on fixed boundaries, exclusive ownership, permanent settlement, and static land-use categories. When mobility is restricted, pastoral systems lose one of their principal adaptive capacities.

● **Pastoralism as Conservation Through Use**

The stories challenge the idea that conservation must always be based on separating people from nature. In many pastoral territories of life, conservation outcomes emerge through use, mobility, restraint, restoration, and collective responsibility. Pastoralists do not simply use landscapes; they often help shape, maintain, and regenerate them through long-term relationships with animals, plants, water, soils, and seasonal cycles.

Pastoralism can support conservation in several ways. Seasonal movement can reduce continuous grazing pressure and allow vegetation to recover. Rotational grazing, temporary closures, drought reserves, and customary restrictions can regulate use and prevent degradation. Local knowledge of forage species, water availability, animal behavior, fire, snow, wetlands, forests, and wildlife can support adaptive management.

Many pastoral communities are also actively involved in restoration and conservation responses, including restoring degraded rangelands, protecting water sources, reviving traditional water systems, removing invasive species, reseeding native grasses, rehabilitating wetlands, protecting forests, monitoring wildlife, and defending commons against destructive development.

This does not mean that pastoral systems are automatically sustainable in all circumstances. The key lesson is more specific: where pastoral mobility, collective governance, local knowledge, and territorial rights are maintained, pastoralism can be highly compatible with conservation and restoration.

However, emerging conservation and finance mechanisms also require careful consideration in pastoral territories. The growing interest in nature finance and biodiversity credits—including wildlife conservation bonds, biodiversity offsets, and other credit-based approaches—raises important questions about how pastoral territories are valued, governed, and represented. Many of these instruments rely on fixed, measurable, and bounded units of land and biodiversity, which may not align easily with mobile pastoral systems and the flexible, negotiated governance arrangements that sustain them. Where customary tenure is weakly recognized, there is a risk that relational territories may be misunderstood as vacant, underused, or available for external intervention, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities. Experiences from carbon markets, including cases where conservation interventions have contributed to displacement or restricted local resource access, highlight the need for caution and stronger safeguards. Future engagement with biodiversity credits and other forms of nature finance in pastoral landscapes should therefore be grounded in recognition of customary tenure, respect for pastoral mobility and governance systems, and meaningful free, prior and informed consent. These principles should not be treated as safeguards added after investment decisions are made, but as foundations for any conservation or finance initiative from the outset.

● **Women and Youth as Knowledge Holders and Agents of Change**

Across the stories, women and youth emerge as essential actors in sustaining pastoral territories of life. Their roles are sometimes underrecognized in formal governance, but they are central to the everyday functioning, continuity, and transformation of pastoral systems.

Women often carry detailed knowledge of livestock care, milking, dairy processing, animal health, household food systems, medicinal plants, seeds, water use, handicrafts, restoration practices, and local economies. Women's groups have also become important platforms for restoration, savings, income generation, education, and participation in community decision-making.

Youth also occupy a critical position. Youth outmigration, formal education disconnected from pastoral realities, limited livelihood opportunities, and the declining social status of pastoralism can weaken knowledge transmission across generations. At the same time, young people are agents of renewal: they document traditional knowledge, use media and digital tools, engage in rights advocacy, participate in ecological monitoring, develop new market connections, and create bridges between customary knowledge and contemporary opportunities. Supporting women and youth is therefore not an additional concern; it is central to the future of pastoral territories of life.

● **Threats to Pastoral Territories of Life: Exclusion, Fragmentation, and Conflict**

Pastoral territories of life face multiple and overlapping pressures. These vary by region and context, but several recurring patterns appear across the stories: exclusion from land and decision-making, fragmentation of territories, restrictions on mobility, weak recognition of collective rights, climate stress, market pressures, and conflicts over resources.

Land grabbing, privatization, fencing, agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, tourism projects, mining, energy development, and urban expansion can reduce pastoralists' access to grazing lands, water points, migration routes, forests, wetlands, and seasonal refuges. In some contexts, pastoralists also face conservation restrictions or protected area governance models that limit customary use, even where pastoral practices have long contributed to maintaining the landscape.

Conservation-related restrictions require particular attention. Protected areas, wildlife conservation, carbon or biodiversity offset schemes, and restoration programs can create risks when they fail to recognize customary tenure, collective governance, and pastoral mobility. Conservation can become a source of dispossession if it treats pastoralists as intruders rather than custodians.

A common thread across these threats is the limited recognition of pastoralists' rights, governance systems, and relationships with their territories. Addressing these pressures requires secure collective tenure, recognition of customary governance, protection of mobility corridors, meaningful participation in land-use decisions, and safeguards against conservation or development interventions that undermine pastoral territories of life.

● **Climate Pressures and Pastoral Resilience**

Climate change poses a significant challenge to pastoral territories of life. Many rangelands, mountain pastures, wetlands, forests, drylands, and steppe ecosystems are highly sensitive to changing rainfall, temperature, snow, water availability, vegetation dynamics, and extreme weather events. Across the stories, pastoralists describe pressures linked to drought, wildfires, reduced pasture productivity, changing snowmelt, water scarcity, wetland degradation, extreme winters, livestock disease, and shifting seasonal patterns.

The stories also show that pastoralists are not passive victims of climate change. Many communities have long experience of living with uncertainty and variability. Mobility remains one of the most important climate-adaptation strategies in pastoral systems. Other strategies include rotational grazing, herd diversification, fodder storage, restoration of water systems, the use of traditional ecological indicators, temporary pasture closures, livelihood diversification, women-led savings and production groups, youth education, and community-based monitoring.

However, climate resilience depends on the conditions that allow pastoral systems to adapt. If mobility is restricted, water points are lost, commons are privatized, customary governance is weakened, or communities are excluded from decision-making, pastoralists become more vulnerable to climate shocks.

Strengthening climate resilience in pastoral territories of life therefore requires recognizing pastoralists as knowledge holders and climate adaptation actors. Policies and programs should protect mobility, secure collective tenure, support community-led restoration, strengthen water governance, provide mobile and accessible services, and respect customary institutions.

Taken together, the stories show that pastoral territories of life are not marginal or outdated systems. They are dynamic, adaptive, and knowledge-rich territories that contribute to livelihoods, culture, biodiversity, restoration, and climate resilience.

3 Across Regions: Pastoral Territories of Life in Practice

The stories gathered for this report come from diverse pastoral territories across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. They reflect mountain, dryland, forest, wetland, steppe, alpine, Arctic, and agro-pastoral systems shaped by specific histories, governance institutions, ecological conditions, and political pressures.

This chapter identifies regional patterns and uses stories to illustrate how pastoral territories of life are sustained, challenged, and transformed in different contexts.

● Africa: Mobility Under Pressure



African pastoral territories of life are strongly shaped by dryland variability, seasonal rainfall, dispersed water points, and the need for flexible access to grazing resources. In East Africa and the Sahel, pastoral systems depend on mobility, herd diversification, customary institutions, and negotiated access to shared resources. Rather than being stable or uniform environments, these landscapes are dynamic systems in which pasture and water availability shift across space and time.

Mobility remains central. Pastoralists move cattle, goats, sheep, camels, donkeys, and other livestock according to rainfall, pasture conditions, water availability, security, and social agreements. In some contexts, animals able to travel longer distances move to distant grazing areas, while lactating, young, or sick animals remain closer to settlements. These practices reflect detailed ecological knowledge and social coordination. Mobility is also linked to conflict prevention and cooperation, as access to water points, dry-season refuges, and grazing territories often depends on negotiation among communities.

Governance systems are rooted in customary institutions, including councils of elders, age-set systems, kraal leaders, scouts, spiritual authorities, women's groups, community assemblies, and resource-sharing arrangements. These institutions regulate access to pasture and water, mediate disputes, organize seasonal movement, and support rotational use. In several stories, customary governance interacts with formal systems such as village councils, natural resource committees, communal land certificates, county policies, conservation organizations, and local government structures.

The region also shows significant pressure on pastoral territories of life. Climate change is intensifying drought, water scarcity, and pasture degradation. Land fragmentation, agricultural expansion, mining, protected area expansion, infrastructure development, conservancies, private ranches, conflict, and insecurity are reducing the space for mobility. These pressures can increase competition over resources and weaken customary systems. Yet the stories also show strong community responses: land tenure advocacy, restoration, women-led ecological initiatives, negotiated grazing, alliance farming, peacebuilding, and community-based planning.

The lesson from Africa is that resilience depends not on reducing mobility, but on securing the institutions, territories, and relationships that make mobility possible. Supporting pastoral territories of life requires collective tenure, recognition of customary governance, protection of corridors and dry-season refuges, investment in women and youth, and conservation approaches that strengthen rather than replace community authority.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 1

Karamoja, Uganda — Resource Sharing in Drylands

Pastoralism in Karamoja is practiced by semi-mobile communities whose livelihoods are rooted in livestock keeping and long-term interaction with rangeland ecosystems. Mobility, herd diversification, and access to pasture, water, salt licks, and secure grazing areas are managed collectively.

Governance is organized through customary institutions such as the akiriket council of elders and the etamam system of resource sharing. These arrangements support rotational use, resting of certain areas, inter-community dialogue, and conflict prevention. The story shows

how customary governance can sustain both livelihoods and biodiversity in drylands. It also shows the risks created by climate change, land grabbing, mining, protected area expansion, and weak recognition of pastoral land rights.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 2

Naramam–Chesra, Kenya — Women-led Restoration

In Naramam–Chesra, West Pokot, women-led groups are restoring degraded pastoral landscapes through Indigenous knowledge, collective labor, native species conservation, soil and water conservation, and the protection of water catchments. The wider pastoral system remains based on livestock mobility, communal rangelands, and customary governance through elders, but women's groups have become central actors in ecological restoration and community mobilization.

This story shows that women are not only supporting pastoral households; they are leading landscape recovery and strengthening climate resilience. It also highlights the importance of recognizing women's knowledge, leadership, and decision-making roles in pastoral territories of life.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 3

Mbororo Pastoralists, Cameroon — From Conflict to Cooperation

In the Bamenda Highlands of Northwest Cameroon, Mbororo pastoralists face pressures from armed conflict, displacement, climate stress, land competition, exclusion from decision-making, and tensions with farming communities. Customary leadership structures such as Lamidats and Ardos continue to guide pastoral relations, but they operate within a difficult political and social context.

Community organizations have supported dialogue, intergenerational exchange, and cross-community collaboration. One important response is “Alliance Farming,” in which cattle graze harvested farmland during the dry season, providing manure that improves soil fertility while reducing tensions between pastoralists and farmers. This story shows how pastoral governance can contribute to peacebuilding, restoration, and social resilience.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 4

Northern Tanzania — Collective Tenure and Community Governance

In northern Tanzania, Indigenous communities have used collective land tenure tools, including Communal Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy, to strengthen control over shared territories. These processes include participatory mapping, land-use planning, and community-defined management zones for grazing, farming, forest use, and conservation.

This story shows that legal recognition can support pastoral territories of life when it is grounded in collective rights and community governance. It also demonstrates that tenure security is not only a legal issue; it is a foundation for livelihoods, conservation, cultural continuity, and self-determination.

● Asia: Mobility across Diverse Landscapes



Photo credit: KRAPAVIS

Asian pastoral territories of life are shaped by wide ecological diversity, including the Central Asian steppes, the Tibetan Plateau, Himalayan and high-mountain systems, forested foothills, deserts, drylands, and semi-arid rangelands. These landscapes are often marked by climatic variability, uneven distribution of pasture and water, and strong seasonal change. In high-altitude systems, short growing seasons, snow, cold temperatures, and fragile vegetation shape pastoral livelihoods. In dryland and desert systems, drought, water scarcity, and uncertainty are central. Across these different environments, flexibility remains one of the foundations of pastoral life.

Mobility takes many forms across the region. It may include long-distance nomadism, seasonal transhumance between lowlands and highlands, movement between winter and summer pastures, rotational grazing, herd splitting, or semi-mobile systems in which only part of the household or herd moves. Livestock are also diverse, including sheep, goats, buffaloes, cattle, horses, camels, yaks, and other locally adapted animals. This diversity shows that mobility is not a single model, but a continuum of practices adapted to specific territories.

Governance systems are equally diverse. Many stories highlight customary institutions such as councils of elders, clan-based arrangements, sacred norms, community assemblies, and collective rules for pasture and water use. In other contexts, pastoral governance interacts with formal state regulation, protected area authorities, forest laws, land certificates, co-management agreements, or conservation programs. This creates both opportunities and tensions. Formal recognition can support pastoral territories of life when it secures collective tenure and community authority. It can also weaken pastoral systems when it imposes fixed boundaries, restricts mobility, or treats pastoralists as users rather than custodians.

The regional material also shows how pastoral communities are adapting to climate pressures, market change, sedentarization, and changing relations with state institutions. Some communities are restoring water systems, diversifying livelihoods, strengthening women's economic initiatives, monitoring wildlife, reviving customary institutions, or developing hybrid governance arrangements. At the same time, pastoralists face serious threats from drought, pasture degradation, conservation restrictions, infrastructure, weak legal recognition, shrinking mobility corridors, and the loss of traditional knowledge among younger generations.

The regional lesson from Asia is that pastoral territories of life depend on the protection of mobility, commons, customary governance, and flexible land-use systems. Policies that treat rangelands, mountains, forests, and drylands as fixed administrative units often miss the ecological logic of pastoralism. Supporting pastoral territories of life in Asia requires recognizing the relationship between mobility, customary governance, climate adaptation, and territorial continuity.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 1

Chahdegal and Kouh-e-Zنده, Iran — Mobility and Customary Governance

The Chahdegal pastoral territory of life, located between Kerman Province and Sistan and Baluchistan Province in Iran, is sustained by semi-nomadic Balouch Peoples whose livelihoods, identity, and culture are closely connected to arid and semi-arid landscapes. Seasonal mobility links wintering grounds in Chahdegal with summering pastures in Kouh-e-Zنده, allowing communities to manage scarce water, fragile rangelands, and climatic uncertainty.

The story illustrates how customary governance sustains pastoral territories of life. A council of elders, led by a Sardar and composed of representatives from different tribes, regulates access to resources, resolves disputes, and maintains social and ecological balance. Practices such as Gole-Kardan (assessing rangeland carrying capacity) and Keid-Kardan (controlling herd movement) show how ecological knowledge is embedded in everyday governance.

Chahdegal is a strong example of pastoralism as a living territorial system: mobility, camels, goats, sheep, small-scale agriculture, customary law, cultural identity, and collective responsibility are interwoven. It also shows why securing customary land rights and recognizing Indigenous governance are essential for sustaining pastoral territories of life in dryland and desert ecosystems.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 2

Muzhayo Commons, Pakistan — Commons Under Pressure

The muzhayo commons of Chitral include alpine and subalpine pastures, forests, water sources, mountain slopes, and highland grazing territories used by Kho and Gujur communities. These commons are not only resource areas; they are cultural landscapes shaped by clan identity, oral poetry, spiritual relations, livestock, wildlife, and intergenerational memory.

Customary governance includes rotational grazing, collective movement to high pastures, pasture inspections by elders, and rules for resource use. The story also highlights the deep disruption caused by the nationalization of commons, which transferred forests, grazing lands, riverbeds, mountains, and wastelands to the state without recognizing customary rights. The Chitral story illustrates a wider regional concern: when collective tenure is not recognized, pastoral territories of life become vulnerable to exclusion, bureaucratic control, conservation restrictions, and loss of mobility.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 3

Van Gujjars, India — Forest Rights and Mobile Pastoralism

The Van Gujjars are a semi-nomadic pastoralist and forest-dwelling community living in and around Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand, India. Their pastoral life is centered on the indigenous Gojri buffalo and seasonal movement between alpine meadows and the Shivalik-Terai forests. Forest settlements, migration routes, buffaloes, rivers, grasslands, oral traditions, and community memory are all part of their pastoral territory.

Their story shows how customary forest knowledge and rights-based advocacy can come together. Elders transmit rules on responsible forest use, while youth organizations and community mobilization support claims under the Forest Rights Act. The Van Gujjar story is important because it challenges exclusionary conservation approaches and shows pastoralists as forest stewards, rights-holders, and defenders of territories of life.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 4

Bayanbulag, Mongolia — Co-management for Pastoral Conservation

The Bayanbulag community in Mongolia combines traditional pastoral practices with formal co-management agreements over pasture and forest land. Community members rely on seasonal mobility, forest resources, water sources, and shared territorial identity. Through agreements with local authorities, they have strengthened use rights over seasonal pastures and forest areas.

The story shows how hybrid governance can support pastoral territories of life when it builds

on community decision-making. Herders have adjusted herd numbers, increased seasonal mobility, protected springs, monitored wildlife, prevented illegal logging and hunting, and strengthened milk marketing through women's leadership. Bayanbulag illustrates that pastoral conservation is not separate from livelihoods; it can emerge through mobility, community governance, forest protection, and locally grounded adaptation.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 5

Gaddi Transhumance, India — Mobility as Climate Resilience in the Western Himalayas

The Gaddi pastoralists of Himachal Pradesh sustain a vertically transhumant sheep-and-goat system across the Western Himalayas, moving between lowland winter ranges and high-altitude summer pastures. Seasonal mobility aligns forage availability and climatic conditions with livestock requirements and is guided by intergenerational knowledge of migration routes, vegetation, weather and animal behavior. Herding families collectively coordinate grazing sequences, temporary camps and shared responsibilities, while Gaddi livestock guardian dogs provide locally adapted, non-lethal deterrence against predators. The system is increasingly constrained by shrinking grazing areas, disrupted mobility corridors, climate variability, animal-health risks and human-wildlife conflict. Its continuity requires protection of migratory routes and shared rangelands, together with vaccination, breeding support and mobile veterinary services, to strengthen animal welfare, climate resilience and sustainable mountain livelihoods.

● Europe and the Mediterranean: Commons in Transition



Photo credit: Alys Cretie

Pastoral territories of life in Europe and the Mediterranean are shaped by long histories of land use, communal grazing, transhumance, mountain pasture systems, Indigenous reindeer herding, agro-silvo-pastoral commons, and strong formal policy frameworks. Compared with some other regions, pastoralism here is often more integrated into state law, agricultural policies, subsidies, conservation frameworks, municipalities, and private or communal land regimes. Yet the stories show that customary and collective practices remain central in many places.

Ecological conditions vary widely. Mediterranean pastoral landscapes include shrublands, grasslands, agroforestry systems, and upland commons. Alpine and mountain systems rely on seasonal movement to high-altitude pastures. Arctic and subarctic reindeer herding is shaped by boreal forests, tundra, peatlands, lichens, snow, and seasonal mobility. These different ecologies produce different forms of pastoralism, but they share a common dependence on access, continuity, knowledge, and adaptive management.

Governance arrangements are often hybrid. Some territories are managed through legally recognized commons, municipalities, intermunicipal bodies, cooperatives, pastoral associations, Indigenous institutions, or community assemblies. Others are shaped by family-based systems, local networks, and agroecological initiatives. This institutional diversity can provide opportunities for recognition and support, but it also creates tensions when policies are designed around individual ownership, lowland agriculture, tourism, infrastructure, or conservation models that do not fully value pastoral commons.

Common pressures include rural depopulation, declining economic returns, abandonment of traditional practices, lack of generational renewal, tourism pressure, mining, military projects, land fragmentation, forestry, infrastructure development, and climate change. In some areas, land abandonment can lead to vegetation overgrowth and increased wildfire risk. In others, external development projects threaten commons, water systems, sacred landscapes, or mobility routes.

The regional lesson from Europe and the Mediterranean is that pastoral territories of life should not be treated as remnants of the past. They are living systems that continue to maintain landscapes, biodiversity, food cultures, commons, and territorial identity. Supporting them requires legal recognition of commons, protection of transhumance, policies adapted to collective governance, and investment in generational renewal.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 1

Sinjajevina, Montenegro — Defending Mountain Commons

Sinjajevina is one of Europe's largest continuous mountain pasture systems. It is shaped by transhumant pastoralism, katuns, customary commons, tribal histories, seasonal gatherings, and collective water governance. Pastoral use has helped maintain open grasslands, biodiversity, and cultural continuity.

The story also shows the vulnerability of commons when formal recognition is weak. The designation of the area as a military training ground without local consultation triggered strong

community mobilization through the Save Sinjajevina movement. This story illustrates how pastoralists and allies can defend living commons against militarization and development imposed without consent.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 2

Covas do Barroso, Portugal — Commons Against Mining

The baldios of Covas do Barroso are legally recognized commons that support grazing, forestry, water management, beekeeping, gathering, and agro-silvo-pastoral livelihoods. Governance is organized through commoners' assemblies and elected management bodies, linking customary practice with formal democratic structures.

The territory faces pressures from rural depopulation, climate change, wildfire, and proposed lithium mining. This story shows how pastoral territories of life are connected to wider struggles over water, energy transition, mining, and community self-determination. It also demonstrates the importance of commons institutions in defending both livelihoods and landscapes.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 3

Áldujohka Sámi ICCA, Finland — Reindeer Mobility and Indigenous Governance

The Áldujohka Sámi Indigenous Community Conserved Area illustrates reindeer herding as an Arctic pastoral system rooted in Indigenous knowledge, seasonal movement, siida practices, and relationships with boreal forests, tundra, peatlands, lichens, and snow.

Reindeer herding is shaped by a dual governance system combining state-recognized cooperatives with Sámi customary practices. The story highlights pressures from climate change, forestry, mining, infrastructure, tourism, and insufficient recognition of Sámi land rights. It shows why pastoral territories of life must be understood through Indigenous governance and mobility, not only through agricultural or conservation categories.

• Latin America: Water, Territory, and Indigenous Governance

Pastoral territories of life in Latin America are shaped by high-altitude Andean ecosystems, semi-arid rangelands, wetlands, forests, protected areas, and Indigenous territorial relationships. The stories show pastoralism as part of wider biocultural systems that include livestock, seasonal movement, water governance, gathering, small-scale agriculture, spiritual values, food sovereignty, and collective memory.



Transhumance is central in several territories. Seasonal movement between lowland winter pastures and high-altitude summer grazing areas allows pastoralists to use dispersed resources while maintaining cultural continuity and ecological balance. In Andean and high-altitude systems, wetlands, springs, and water channels are essential to camelids, sheep, cattle, biodiversity, and community life. In southern territories, forests, wetlands, Araucaria trees, and gathering practices are integral to pastoral livelihoods and identity.

Governance systems combine customary practices, Indigenous authorities, community assemblies, reciprocity, co-management arrangements, and formal land tenure systems. In some contexts, communities engage with protected area authorities or state agencies while seeking to maintain their own territorial governance. These hybrid arrangements can create opportunities for participation, but they can also reproduce tensions when state policies fail to recognize Indigenous knowledge, mobility, or collective decision-making.

The main pressures include insecure land tenure, climate change, declining water availability, mining and water extraction, protected area restrictions, low profitability, rural outmigration, aging pastoral populations, labor shortages, and erosion of traditional knowledge. These pressures affect both livelihoods and territorial continuity. Yet the stories also show strong responses: participatory livestock planning, wetland restoration, water redistribution, community monitoring, diversification of livelihoods, collective labor, and the continued use of Indigenous knowledge.

The regional lesson from Latin America is that pastoral territories of life are deeply biocultural. Supporting them requires recognition of Indigenous and community governance, secure access to seasonal grazing areas, protection of wetlands and water systems, respect for transhumance, and conservation approaches negotiated with communities rather than imposed on them.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 1

Lof Kinxikew, Argentina — Indigenous Governance in a Protected Area

The Mapuche community of Lof Kinxikew lives within Nahuel Huapi National Park in Argentina. Its pastoral system combines livestock, small-scale agriculture, forest use, tourism, and cultural practices rooted in Kvme Felen, or Good Living. Governance is organized through Mapuche authorities, community assemblies, and intercultural engagement with park institutions.

The ongoing participatory livestock planning process shows both the potential and complexity of co-management. This story demonstrates that conservation in protected areas can support pastoral territories of life only when it respects Indigenous self-governance, territorial rights, and community-defined livelihoods.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 2

Aymara Wetlands, Chile — Water, Camelids, and Restoration

In the high Andean Altiplano of northern Chile, Aymara communities sustain pastoral systems closely linked to wetlands above 3,000 meters. These wetlands support llamas, alpacas, sheep, biodiversity, and community life in one of the world's driest regions.

Through the Más Agua initiative, communities are restoring wetland functions using ancestral practices, collective labor, water redistribution, canal maintenance, and participatory monitoring. The story highlights the central role of water governance in pastoral territories of life and the threats posed by climate change, water scarcity, mining, rural outmigration, and loss of traditional knowledge.

FROM THE TERRITORIES 3

Pewenche Territory, Chile — Transhumance and Living Territory

The Pewenche mountain territory in Lonquimay is shaped by transhumant agropastoralism, seasonal movement between invernadas and veranadas, livestock, forests, wetlands, Araucaria trees, gathering practices, and the principle of Itxofill Mogen—the interdependence of all forms of life.

This story shows pastoralism as more than production. It is part of a living territorial relationship involving food sovereignty, spiritual values, ecological knowledge, and cultural continuity. It also highlights pressures from climate change, low profitability, youth outmigration, state restrictions, and limited recognition of Indigenous governance.

4 Thematic Spotlights

This chapter highlights five themes that recur across the stories gathered for this report: mobility, commons governance, cultural identity, women and youth, and pastoral contributions to biodiversity and restoration. These themes are closely connected. Mobility supports adaptation to variable environments; commons governance provides the institutional basis for collective resource management; cultural systems give meaning and legitimacy to pastoral ways of life; women and youth sustain knowledge and renewal; and pastoral stewardship contributes to resilient landscapes. The purpose is not to repeat the regional analysis or summarize each story, but to examine selected dimensions that are central to pastoral territories of life.

● Mobility as Adaptation



Mobility is one of the central adaptive principles of pastoral territories of life. Movement is not simply a way to find forage. It is a broader strategy for living with ecological variability, distributing risk, maintaining social relationships, supporting landscape recovery, and sustaining cultural continuity.

Pastoral mobility takes many forms. In mountain and dryland systems, seasonal transhumance remains central, with households and herds moving between ecological zones according to pasture, water, temperature, snow, rainfall, and seasonal conditions. These movements may be vertical, such as movement between lowland winter pastures and high-elevation summer grazing areas, or horizontal, such as movement across grasslands, rangelands, forests, wetlands, or drylands in response to rainfall and vegetation patterns.

In other contexts, mobility has become more constrained. Some systems are semi-mobile, with only part of the household or herd moving seasonally while others remain settled. Elsewhere, mobility continues through short-distance seasonal grazing, hired herding, temporary camps, herd splitting, or informal movement between available grazing areas. Some pastoral livelihoods have become more sedentary because of land fragmentation, policy restrictions, livelihood diversification, or changing labor arrangements. Even in these contexts, residual forms of mobility often remain important.

This diversity matters. Pastoral mobility should be understood as a continuum of practices, not as a single model of nomadism. What matters is not only the distance traveled but also the degree of flexibility that pastoralists retain to respond to changing conditions.

Mobility enables pastoralists to link resource use to spatial and temporal variability. Rainfall, snowmelt, vegetation growth, water availability, animal health, and seasonal risks are rarely evenly distributed across pastoral territories. Movement allows households and herds to adjust timing, location, herd composition, and grazing pressure in response to changing conditions. It reduces dependence on a single ecological zone and allows pastoralists to respond dynamically rather than relying only on fixed infrastructure or static land-use patterns.

Mobility also structures social organization. Routes, camps, water points, dry-season refuges, and seasonal pastures are not only ecological spaces but also social and cultural spaces where cooperation, exchange, knowledge transmission, and collective rules are renewed.

Pastoral mobility is increasingly under pressure from land privatization, fencing, agricultural expansion, infrastructure, mining, tourism, conservation zoning, settlement policies, and state-led tenure reorganization. These processes fragment rangelands and restrict access to seasonal pastures, migration corridors, forests, wetlands, water points, and dry-season refuges. When movement is constrained, grazing pressure may concentrate in smaller areas, vulnerability to drought can increase, and the social agreements that sustain shared resource use may weaken.

Recognizing mobility as a right, a livelihood strategy, and a governance practice is therefore essential. Policies that protect pastoral territories of life must go beyond recognizing fixed plots. They need to secure routes, corridors, water points, seasonal pastures, resting areas, forests, wetlands, and dry-season refuges, as well as the customary institutions that allow mobility to function.

● Commons Governance



Photo credit: Loupa Pius RCI Africa

Pastoral territories of life are often grounded in commons-based governance. Pastures, water sources, forests, wetlands, mobility routes, dry-season refuges, and seasonal camps are not managed only as individual assets or fixed administrative units. They are often governed as shared territories through collective rules, negotiated access, customary responsibilities, and community decision-making.

Commons governance provides the institutional foundation that allows pastoral systems to function in variable environments. It organizes who can access which resources, when movement can take place, how water and grazing areas are shared, how conflicts are resolved, and how responsibilities are distributed among households, clans, herding groups, neighboring communities, and local institutions. In this sense, commons governance is a condition that makes mobility possible.

In many territories, councils of elders play a central role in regulating grazing access, seasonal movement, water distribution, and conflict resolution. Their authority is often based on social legitimacy, experience, ecological knowledge, and collective trust rather than formal enforcement alone. However, pastoral governance is not limited to elders. Community assemblies, herder groups, Indigenous authorities, women's organizations, youth initiatives, spiritual leaders, pastoral associations, cooperatives, local committees, and legally recognized commons institutions may all contribute to decision-making.

These systems are flexible because pastoral environments are variable. Rules may be adjusted according to rainfall, snow, vegetation recovery, drought, animal health, water availability, conflict risks, and seasonal needs. This flexibility is one of the strengths of pastoral commons. Fixed rules imposed from outside often fail to capture the ecological and social complexity of pastoral territories of life.

Commons governance is expressed through everyday resource management. Grazing areas may be regulated through rotational use, seasonal closures, temporary resting of pastures, emergency reserves, and negotiated access to dry-season refuges. Water governance is especially important in drylands, mountain regions, wetlands, and high-altitude systems. Springs, wells, rivers, canals, wetlands, and other water sources may be maintained through collective labor, customary rules, and shared responsibilities. Norms governing water access often aim to prevent privatization, contamination, overuse, and exclusion.

At broader scales, inter-community agreements regulate shared rangelands, migration corridors, border areas, and seasonal grazing territories. These agreements may include rules for pasture access, timing of movement, fire management, conflict prevention, and reciprocal use. In some pastoral-agricultural landscapes, reciprocal arrangements with farming communities also support shared livelihoods, for example when livestock graze harvested fields and contribute manure to soil fertility.

The relationship between customary governance and formal state systems varies widely. In some territories, customary institutions remain central but lack legal recognition, leaving communities vulnerable to land appropriation, conservation restrictions, infrastructure, mining, or regulatory exclusion. In others, co-management arrangements, forest rights mechanisms, communal land certificates, Indigenous governance structures, or legally recognized commons institutions allow pastoral practices to continue within formal systems. These arrangements are most effective

when they recognize communities as rights-holders and decision-makers, rather than absorbing customary institutions into external frameworks.

Commons governance is therefore central to the future of pastoral territories of life. Where customary and collective systems are recognized and supported, pastoral commons can remain adaptive, resilient, and socially legitimate. Where they are weakened or ignored, both ecological management and social cohesion are undermined.

● Culture, Identity, and Territorial Memory

Pastoralism is not only a livelihood system. It is also a source of identity, belonging, knowledge, memory, and responsibility. Livestock, mobility, seasonal camps, water sources, grazing territories, sacred places, oral traditions, and customary institutions are part of how pastoral communities understand and sustain their relationships with their territories.

Livestock are often central to pastoral identity. They are not only economic assets but also part of household security, social organization, cultural status, food systems, exchange, and intergenerational continuity. Animals may be connected to marriage relations, alliances, compensation systems, ceremonies, clan identity, and expressions of wealth or responsibility. Specific breeds and herd compositions can also carry cultural significance. Indigenous Peoples' breeds and other locally adapted breeds are often valued not only for production but also for their ability to live in particular landscapes and climates. Maintaining these breeds can therefore support both ecological adaptation and cultural continuity.



Seasonal movement is also a cultural practice. Routes, camps, resting places, water points, forests, mountain pastures, wetlands, and dry-season refuges carry memories of past generations and their relationships with territory. Through repeated movement, communities renew their knowledge of landscapes and maintain social relations across space.

Pastoral knowledge is often transmitted through direct experience, oral histories, observation, songs, stories, rituals, and participation in daily work. Knowledge of vegetation, rainfall, snow, water, animal behavior, animal diseases, predators, and seasonal change is learned through practice and refined through long-term engagement with specific territories. Oral traditions also function as cultural archives, preserving memories of migration routes, droughts, conflicts, alliances, sacred places, and past decisions.

In many pastoral territories of life, sacred mountains, springs, forests, wetlands, trees, burial places, ancestral sites, and ritual spaces shape how communities relate to territory. These places may regulate access, guide seasonal behavior, and define obligations of restraint, respect, and care. Spiritual and cosmological relationships can influence decisions about grazing, water use, hunting, forest access, restoration, or protection of particular sites.

Pastoral cultural systems are also changing. Youth outmigration, formal education disconnected from pastoral realities, urbanization, market pressures, land fragmentation, and reduced livelihood viability can weaken knowledge transmission and cultural participation. At the same time, many communities are documenting oral histories, revitalizing traditional knowledge, strengthening intergenerational learning, adapting pastoral products for new markets, using media and digital tools, and creating new spaces for youth participation.

Culture should not be treated as decoration or as heritage detached from livelihoods. Cultural identity, territorial memory, customary knowledge, and spiritual responsibility are part of how pastoral territories of life function.

● Women and Youth

Women and youth are essential to the continuity and renewal of pastoral territories of life. Their roles are often underrecognized in formal governance systems, policy spaces, and external representations of pastoralism, yet they are central to livestock care, food systems, knowledge transmission, restoration, cultural continuity, and adaptation to change.

Women's contributions are especially visible in the daily functioning of pastoral livelihoods. In many territories, women are responsible for milking, dairy processing, household food systems, animal care, seed and plant knowledge, medicinal plants, water use, handicrafts, local markets, and household-level adaptation to climate and economic uncertainty. These activities require detailed knowledge of animal health, milk quality, seasonal production, vegetation, water, and household nutrition. They also sustain local economies through value-added products such as cheese, butter, yogurt, dried dairy products, wool products, handicrafts, natural soaps, and other locally produced goods.



Women are also important actors in ecological restoration and territorial care. In several stories, women's groups conserve native species, protect water sources, participate in tree planting, restore degraded areas, maintain knowledge of medicinal plants, and mobilize community participation. Examples include women-led restoration in Naramam–Chesra, savings groups in northern Tanzania, women's participation in Banni's self-help groups and forest resource committees, and traditional handicraft cooperative in Gyatong.

In many pastoral societies, customary gender roles have historically assigned men greater responsibility for external relations and public decision-making, while women's work has been centered on livestock products, household management, food systems, childcare, and domestic economies. This has often meant that women's essential contributions have not been fully reflected in formal governance structures. In response, women have created or strengthened their own spaces for organization, including savings associations, restoration committees, self-help groups, handicraft cooperatives, processing groups, and local advocacy platforms.

Some stories also show governance systems in which women's authority is embedded more directly in community institutions. In the Lof Kinxikew Mapuche community in Argentina, women participate through a technical working group that supports planning, training, project development, management, and administration. The role of a woman Werken as an intercultural political authority shows how gender-inclusive governance can be grounded in Indigenous philosophy, territorial responsibility, and community-defined principles.

Youth occupy a critical position in pastoral territories of life. They are central to knowledge transmission, the future of livestock systems, and the renewal of community institutions. At the same time, youth outmigration is a serious challenge in several stories. Formal education is often disconnected from pastoral realities, and young people may be encouraged to see herding as

physically demanding, economically uncertain, or socially undervalued. Outmigration can reduce pastoral labor, weaken knowledge transmission, and contribute to cultural erosion.

Youth are also agents of adaptation and innovation. Younger generations use social media and digital tools, engage in documentation and community-based tourism, develop direct-marketing and quality-certification initiatives, and pursue new forms of advocacy to support pastoral livelihoods and cultural pride. They can also contribute to ecological monitoring, community mapping, climate awareness, restoration, and rights advocacy. Intergenerational exchange is especially important: elders transmit knowledge of grazing, seasons, animals, and customary governance, while youth bring new tools, networks, and perspectives.

Supporting women and youth requires recognizing existing knowledge, labor, authority, and creativity. It also requires making pastoral futures viable, dignified, and meaningful through relevant education, mobile services, livelihood opportunities, cultural recognition, participation in governance, and support for community-defined initiatives.

● Pastoralism, Biodiversity, and Restoration

Pastoral territories of life can contribute to biodiversity conservation, ecosystem resilience, and restoration when mobility, customary governance, collective responsibility, and local ecological knowledge remain active. These contributions are neither automatic nor uniform. They depend on the health of pastoral institutions, the degree of mobility communities retain, the security of collective rights, and the wider political and ecological conditions in which pastoralists live.

In many pastoral systems, conservation is not separate from use. It is embedded in the ways communities move with their herds, regulate access to pasture and water, rest certain areas, protect sacred sites, maintain local breeds, and adjust resource use according to seasonal conditions. This challenges conservation models that assume ecological protection must be based on excluding people and livestock from landscapes.



Pastoral mobility can help align grazing with ecological variability. Movement decisions are often guided by rainfall, snowmelt, vegetation growth, water availability, animal health, and seasonal risk. When mobility remains flexible, grazing pressure can be distributed across landscapes and seasons, reducing prolonged stress on any single area and allowing vegetation to recover. Rotational grazing, seasonal closures, drought reserves, temporary resting of pastures, and customary restrictions are examples of how communities regulate resource use.

Many pastoral communities are not only maintaining landscapes; they are also actively restoring them. Restoration practices include reseeding native grasses, protecting water sources, rehabilitating wetlands, restoring springs and canals, managing invasive species, planting trees, stabilizing gullies, protecting sacred groves, maintaining firebreaks, and recovering degraded rangelands. Examples include rangeland recovery in Mongolia, invasive species management and grassland restoration in Banni, seasonal pasture regulation in Jordan's Hima system, wetland restoration in the Andean Altiplano, and landscape rehabilitation initiatives in East Africa.

Pastoral ecological contributions are closely linked to cultural systems. Sacred mountains, springs, forests, wetlands, burial places, ritual sites, and ancestral territories often shape rules of restraint, respect, and protection. Local breeds are also part of this biocultural value. Breeds maintained by Indigenous Peoples and other locally adapted animals carry genetic, ecological, cultural, and livelihood significance. Protecting pastoral territories of life therefore also means protecting relationships between communities, animals, plants, water, and landscapes.

At the same time, pastoral systems are not automatically sustainable in all circumstances. Their ecological contributions can be undermined by land fragmentation, restricted mobility, insecure tenure, climate change, market pressures, conflict, inappropriate conservation policies, sedentarization, and the weakening of customary governance. When movement is restricted, grazing may become concentrated in smaller areas. When commons are privatized or fragmented, communities lose the ability to manage resources collectively across wider territories. When conservation or restoration programs exclude pastoralists, they may disrupt the very practices that have sustained ecosystems over time.

Climate change adds further uncertainty. Shifting rainfall, drought, extreme weather, changing snowmelt, water scarcity, invasive species, disease, and wildfire can make established ecological indicators less predictable and increase the burden on communities. These pressures often interact: climate stress becomes more damaging when mobility is restricted; land fragmentation becomes more harmful when customary governance is weakened; and restoration becomes more difficult when communities lack secure rights.

Supporting biodiversity and restoration in pastoral territories of life therefore requires more than technical interventions. It requires protecting mobility, securing collective tenure, recognizing customary governance, supporting women and youth, respecting cultural and spiritual relationships with territory, and ensuring that conservation policies are developed with pastoral communities rather than imposed on them. Pastoralism can contribute powerfully to biodiversity, restoration, and climate resilience, but only when the conditions that make pastoral stewardship possible are recognized and protected.

5 A Call to Action: Placing Pastoralist Communities at the Center

The stories in this publication do not suggest that pastoralism needs to be rescued, modernized, or managed by external institutions. They demonstrate that pastoralist peoples and communities already possess the knowledge, governance systems, relationships, and practices through which they care for their territories, sustain livelihoods, respond to ecological variability, and contribute to the wellbeing of wider societies.

The starting point must therefore be pastoralist agency, self-determination, and collective responsibility for territories of life. Policies, laws, funding, research, and conservation initiatives have value when they remove barriers, redress historical injustices, and strengthen community-defined priorities. They become harmful when they replace customary institutions, impose external solutions, fragment collective territories, restrict mobility, or turn communities into beneficiaries of projects designed by others.

The task is not merely to include pastoralists in existing systems. It is to transform the relationships of power, knowledge, governance, and finance that continue to marginalize them.

• Global Processes: Move from Representation to Influence

Actors involved in global processes and initiatives—including the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, and related climate, food, and human rights processes—should recognize pastoralist peoples and communities as rights-holders, knowledge-holders, and governance actors.

Participation should go beyond invitations to meetings or consultation on decisions already framed by others. Pastoralist movements, organizations, women, youth, and customary leaders must be able to shape agendas, define priorities, produce knowledge, and participate in implementation and accountability.

Global Institutions Should:

- place pastoralist self-determination, mobility, collective tenure, and customary governance at the center of rangeland, dryland, biodiversity, climate, and food-system initiatives;
- recognize pastoral territories of life as living social, ecological, cultural, and spiritual systems, not merely as production areas, carbon sinks, restoration sites, or conservation units;
- support pastoralist-led knowledge, monitoring, documentation, advocacy, and exchange rather than extracting knowledge for externally controlled research and policy processes;
- establish safeguards against initiatives that restrict mobility, dispossess communities, undermine customary institutions, or commercialize land, biodiversity, carbon, water, and knowledge without community consent; and
- direct resources toward lasting pastoralist institutions and networks beyond individual global events and project cycles.

● **National Governments: Recognize Self-Governance**

Governments should not attempt to govern pastoral territories solely through fixed boundaries, individual property, sedentary service models, or centralized land-use systems. Pastoralism requires governance arrangements capable of responding to movement, seasonality, negotiated access, overlapping rights, and ecological uncertainty.

States should recognize and respect the authority of pastoralist peoples and communities to govern their territories, institutions, livelihoods, and relationships according to their own laws, knowledge, values, and aspirations. This includes:

- secure collective and customary rights to territories, grazing areas, water sources, forests, migration corridors, seasonal refuges, and culturally significant places;
- recognize mobility as a right and a foundation of ecological adaptation, rather than treating it as a temporary exception or an outdated way of life;
- create legal space for customary and community institutions while avoiding bureaucratic recognition processes that transfer authority to the state or force communities into externally defined organizational forms;
- prevent enclosure, fragmentation, privatization, extractive development, forced settlement, and land-use change without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of affected communities;
- restitution lands and access routes that have been unjustly taken or restricted;
- support women's and youth leadership while respecting communities' own processes of dialogue, renewal, and institutional change; and
- provide mobile, culturally appropriate, and community-designed health, education, veterinary, communication, and market services.

Recognition should not mean absorbing pastoralist institutions into state administration. It should protect the political, territorial, and institutional space that communities need to pursue appropriate forms of autonomy and self-determined development.

● **Donors and Development Partners: Move Resources and Decision-Making Power**

Donors should shift from funding projects for pastoralists toward providing long-term, flexible, and direct support to pastoralist organizations, movements, networks, customary institutions, women's groups, and youth initiatives.

Too much conservation and livelihood funding continues to flow through large international organizations and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) that define priorities, retain substantial resources, and speak for communities. These organizations may play useful solidarity, technical, or fiduciary roles, but they should not become permanent substitutes for local institutions or control programs in the name of pastoralist development.

Donors Should:

- increase direct and accessible funding to community institutions and pastoralist-led organizations;
- allow communities to define priorities, activities, timelines, indicators of success, and appropriate forms of accountability;
- provide long-term institutional support rather than a succession of short, narrowly restricted projects;
- fund self-strengthening, governance renewal, territorial defense, legal action, intergenerational learning, women's leadership, community media, peer exchange, and movement building;
- simplify application, compliance, and reporting requirements, and support oral, visual, and local-language forms of communication;
- cover the real costs of community participation, internal deliberation, safeguarding, administration, and collective decision-making; and
- require intermediaries to demonstrate community mandate, transparency, downward accountability, equitable resource sharing, and a clear contribution to strengthening—not replacing—local institutions.

The objective should not be to make pastoralist organizations resemble international NGOs. It should be to enable them to sustain their own forms of organization, solidarity, care, accountability, and collective action.

● **Conservation Actors: Support Custodianship, Do Not Take It Over**

Pastoral territories should be recognized as territories of life whose biodiversity has been shaped and sustained through mobility, customary use, restraint, care, knowledge, and collective governance.

Conservation actors must move beyond models that separate people from nature, criminalize customary practices, or transfer authority from communities to protected-area agencies, private organizations, tourism operators, carbon projects, or external experts. Pastoralists are not simply stakeholders in conservation landscapes; they are often their historical custodians and legitimate governors.

Private conservation organizations and funders should publicly adopt and operationalize UNEP's Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders. This requires respecting human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other communities; conducting human rights due diligence and good-faith consultation; preventing and remedying abuses, including those linked to partners and law-enforcement actors; and reporting transparently.

In Practice, Conservation Actors Should:

- recognize pastoralist governance authority and collective territorial rights;

- obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent before supporting conservation, restoration, carbon, biodiversity credit, tourism, or rewilding initiatives;
- establish independent, accessible, and culturally appropriate grievance and remedy mechanisms;
- ensure that human rights obligations apply throughout funding chains, partnerships, subcontracting arrangements, and relationships with rangers or security forces;
- support community-defined conservation, restoration, and monitoring priorities;
- return decision-making power and a fair share of conservation finance directly to custodians; and
- withdraw from initiatives that depend on displacement, coercion, criminalization, or restrictions on customary access and mobility.

Recognizing pastoral territories as conservation landscapes is not sufficient if power, finance, and decision-making remain in external hands. Meaningful recognition must reinforce communities' ability to govern, defend, restore, and sustain their territories according to their own knowledge, institutions, responsibilities, and visions of living well. Pastoral territories of life will endure only if pastoralist peoples and communities have the rights, resources, political space, and freedom to care for them on their own terms across generations.



● Closing Remark

Pastoral territories of life remind us that living well with the Earth is not an abstract aspiration. It is already practiced through movement, reciprocity, collective responsibility, customary governance, and relationships of care among people, animals, waters, plants, and landscapes.

The stories gathered in this publication do not present pastoralism as a single or unchanging way of life. They reveal diverse communities continually adapting to ecological uncertainty, political pressure, economic change, and intergenerational transformation. Their resilience does not come from isolation from change, but from the capacity to respond through knowledge, solidarity, mobility, and self-governance.

The future of these territories cannot be secured by romanticizing pastoralism, nor by reducing it to livestock production, climate adaptation, or conservation service delivery. It depends on respecting pastoralist peoples and communities as political actors, knowledge holders, and legitimate custodians of their territories.

This publication is therefore both a recognition and an invitation: to listen more carefully, to challenge the structures that restrict pastoral life, and to stand in solidarity with communities defending their lands, cultures, institutions, and futures.

Pastoral territories of life will endure not because others speak for them, but because pastoralist communities retain the rights, resources, relationships, and freedom to continue shaping their own paths, on their own terms and across generations.



Photo credit: Qiubi

Pastoral Territories Of Life Catalogue



Pastoral Territories of Life Catalogue

Africa

📍 Naramam–Chesra, Kenya — Women-Led Restoration

In Naramam–Chesra, West Pokot, Kenya, the Pokot pastoralist community maintains a livelihood system based on livestock herding and small-scale agro-pastoralism, supported by communal rangelands and seasonal mobility. Cattle, goats, sheep, and donkeys are central to food security, cultural identity, and social organization. Seasonal transhumance enables sustainable access to pasture and water while reducing pressure on grazing areas.

The community's Territory of Life is governed through customary institutions, particularly councils of elders (kokwo), which regulate resource use, resolve conflicts, and safeguard communal lands. These governance systems are increasingly strengthened through collaboration with local authorities and conservation partners. Women's groups, alongside elders and youth, play an important role in collective decision-making and ecosystem restoration.

Facing drought, land degradation, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity, the community has initiated locally led restoration efforts based on Indigenous knowledge and collective stewardship. Actions include restoring degraded rangelands, planting indigenous trees, managing grazing areas, protecting water catchments, and using locally adapted materials for erosion control. Women contribute significantly through seed conservation, food systems, water management, and biodiversity protection.



These initiatives demonstrate how pastoral communities sustain their Territories of Life by integrating customary governance, ecological knowledge, and collective action to strengthen resilience under changing environmental conditions.

The agriculture team restoring biodiversity and working on ecosystem services of rangeland. Photo provided by: Indigenous Information Network

Contributors & sources:

*The Pokot Pastoralists Indigenous Community
Indigenous Information Network*

9 Karamoja, Uganda — Resource Sharing in Drylands

In Karamoja, Uganda, semi-mobile pastoralist communities sustain their Territories of Life through livestock-based livelihoods, customary governance, and collective resource management. Indigenous zebu cattle, goats, sheep, and donkeys are adapted to dryland conditions, while seasonal mobility enables access to dispersed pasture and water resources. Livestock movements are guided by ecological knowledge and negotiated agreements among communities.

Customary institutions, especially the Akiriket council of elders, play a central role in regulating resource use, resolving conflicts, and maintaining social norms. The Etamam system supports collective management of grazing lands and water through shared access, rotation, and ecosystem recovery practices. Inter-community assemblies (ekokwa) strengthen coordination and rule-making across pastoral territories.

Pastoral livelihoods are closely connected with biodiversity conservation. Communities protect wetlands, dry-season grazing areas, and wildlife corridors through customary practices, cultural values, and restrictions on resource use. Local ecological observation (Aripiripi) and interpretation (akirip) support adaptive management under changing conditions.

Today, these pastoral Territories of Life face increasing pressures from drought, land appropriation, mining, invasive species, and restrictions on mobility. Communities continue to strengthen customary governance, safeguard pastoral mobility, and maintain collective stewardship systems to enhance ecological and social resilience.



A Turkana kraal leader giving traditional prayers during Etamam dialogue meeting between Karamojong and Turkana pastoralists at Loyoro River, Kaabong District in Uganda. Photo provided by: Loupa Pius/RCI Africa.

Contributors & sources:

Karamojong pastoralists

Rangelands Community Initiative Africa (RCIA)

9 Simanjiro, Tanzania — Maasai Stewardship of a Shared Landscape



Pastoralist Maasai home in Northern Tanzania. Photo provided by: PESA

Contributors & sources:

*Maasai pastoralist communities of Simanjiro District
Pastoralist Economic and Social Advancement (PESA)*

The Maasai pastoralist communities of Simanjiro District in northern Tanzania steward a pastoral Territory of Life within the ecologically significant Maasai Steppe, a landscape of savannahs, seasonal wetlands, and acacia woodlands that supports both wildlife and pastoral livelihoods. Pastoralism follows a transhumant system, with cattle, goats, and sheep moving seasonally according to rainfall and forage availability. Mobility, communal access to grazing lands, and continuous environmental observation are central to sustaining this dryland ecosystem.

Governance is rooted in customary institutions, particularly the Laigwanan (Council of Elders), which guides collective decisions on land use, grazing management, and livestock movements. The age-set system organizes social responsibilities, while women's groups increasingly contribute to resource management. These customary systems are complemented by Village Councils and Natural Resource Committees, forming a multi-layered governance framework.

Livestock remain central to Maasai livelihoods, culture, and identity. Communities strengthen resilience through livelihood diversification, including milk processing, beadwork, and eco-tourism. Conservation practices include restoring olopololi (traditional grazing reserves), protecting key grazing areas, and maintaining wildlife corridors, reflecting the close relationship between pastoral livelihoods and biodiversity conservation.

The territory faces growing pressures from climate change, drought, agricultural expansion, land fragmentation, and declining mobility routes. In response, communities are strengthening land tenure, enforcing grazing regulations, restoring ecological connectivity, and improving water and land management. Traditional ecological knowledge continues to guide adaptive stewardship of the landscape.

9 Turkana Communities, Kenya — Adaptation in a Changing Dryland

The Turkana pastoralist communities of northwestern Kenya sustain a pastoral Territory of Life shaped by arid conditions, resource variability, and environmental uncertainty. Livestock—including cattle, goats, sheep, camels, and donkeys—are central to livelihoods, cultural identity, and social organization. The Turkana practice highly adaptive nomadic pastoralism, moving seasonally in response to rainfall, pasture, and water availability. During dry periods, herders travel longer distances toward permanent water sources, while herd division strategies allow communities to balance household needs and risk management. Fishing, wild resource use, and small-scale trade further complement pastoral livelihoods.

Governance of Turkana pastoral territories is rooted in customary institutions and collective resource management. Councils of elders regulate access to grazing areas, water points, and migration routes through social norms, reciprocal agreements, and conflict resolution mechanisms. Mobility itself functions as a governance practice, enabling rotational grazing, resource sharing, and rangeland recovery.

Resilience is strengthened through herd diversification, especially the use of drought-adapted species such as camels and goats, as well as Indigenous ecological knowledge guiding grazing decisions and drought responses. Kinship networks and reciprocal relationships provide critical support during periods of stress.

The territory faces increasing pressures from climate change, prolonged droughts, land fragmentation, infrastructure development, extractive activities, and resource conflicts. In response, communities are strengthening customary governance, maintaining negotiated resource-sharing systems, restoring rangelands, and improving collective water management. The combination of traditional knowledge and new tools, including climate information services, supports adaptive stewardship of this pastoral landscape.

Contributors & sources:

Turkana Communities

Turkana Indigenous People Action for Development (TIPD)

Turkana communities. Photo provided by: TIPD



9 Leparua Rangelands — A Pastoral Commons System in Northern Kenya

The Leparua rangelands in Isiolo County, northern Kenya, represent a pastoral Territory of Life where Maasai communities sustain livelihoods through a combination of settled homesteads and seasonal livestock mobility in a semi-arid savanna ecosystem. Households rely mainly on cattle, goats, and sheep, moving herds across wet-season pastures, dry-season grazing areas, water points, and fallback zones according to rainfall and forage availability. Mobility and flexible access to shared resources are central to resilience in this variable environment.

Governance of Leparua rangelands is rooted in customary institutions and collective management of pastoral commons. Councils of elders, age-set systems, and community assemblies regulate grazing access, coordinate livestock movements, and resolve conflicts. Resource use is maintained through negotiated access, reciprocity, and locally recognized norms rather than fixed ownership boundaries. These institutions enable communities to adaptively manage shared landscapes and engage with neighbouring communities and external users.

Livestock provide food, income, and social value, while sustainability depends on herd diversification, mobility, and adaptive grazing practices that support vegetation recovery and ecosystem functions. Traditional management systems contribute to maintaining landscapes that sustain both pastoral livelihoods and wildlife.

The pastoral commons of Leparua face growing pressures from land fragmentation, privatization, fencing, and climate change-induced droughts. Expanding conservancies present a particular challenge, as their boundary demarcations and use restrictions directly interfere with commons governance and the negotiated access arrangements on which the system depends. In response, communities continue to strengthen customary governance, negotiate resource-sharing arrangements, and participate in land-use processes to safeguard their pastoral territory and sustain collective custodianship.



Community meeting under acacia trees. Photo provided by: Samuel Weissman, University of Bern

Contributors & sources:

*The Maasai community of Leparua
University of Bern, Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development*

9 Mbororo Pastoralists, Cameroon — From Conflict to Cooperation

The Mbororo pastoralists of the Bamenda Highlands in Northwest Cameroon sustain a pastoral Territory of Life shaped by nomadic and semi-nomadic herding with their cows across grasslands, valleys, gallery forests, and seasonal watercourses. As part of the wider Fulani (Fulbe) cultural group, the Mbororo maintain a strong pastoral identity centered on cattle, which gift them livelihoods, social status, and cultural continuity. Seasonal mobility enables access to dispersed grazing areas and water sources, but climate variability, land competition, and conflict have increasingly constrained traditional movement patterns.

Governance is rooted in customary structures within the Fulani culture. Traditional leaders, including Lamidats and Ardos, guide community decisions, mobility, access, and social relations. Community organizations, including COMAID (Community Assistance In Development) and MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association), support elder-centred dialogues that restore cultural memory, strengthen collective skills, resolve conflict, and ripple out to engage allies.

Livelihoods remain primarily based on cattle herding, supported by mobility, shared grazing areas, and Indigenous ecological knowledge. Innovative practices such as “Alliance Farming” promote cooperation between pastoralists and farmers by integrating grazing on harvested fields, improving soil fertility, supporting cows' nutrition, and reducing tensions by sharing lands and waters.

The Mbororo pastoral Territory of Life faces pressures from armed conflict, displacement, land degradation, water scarcity, restricted grazing access, and social marginalization. In response, communities are strengthening dialogue, knowledge exchange, collaborative land management, and customary governance. These efforts demonstrate how pastoral peoples can foster social resilience and ecological stewardship amid changing conditions.



Africa Cameroon Elders and young people on an exchange visit between Santa and Njong. Photo provided by: Gaia Foundation

Contributors & sources:

Mbororo pastoralists
Community Assistance In Development (COMAID)
Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA).
The Gaia Foundation

9 Northern Tanzania — Collective Tenure and Community Governance

In northern Tanzania, Indigenous communities, including the Maasai, Hadzabe, Akie, and Datoga, sustain their pastoral Territories of Life through mobility, seasonal resource use, and communal land tenure. These landscapes include biodiverse rangelands and forests that support pastoralism, agro-pastoralism, and hunting-gathering livelihoods. However, agricultural expansion, land commodification, and external perceptions of communal lands as “unused” have contributed to land loss, displacement, and ecological degradation.

Community governance efforts supported by the Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) focus on securing collective land rights and strengthening local institutions. Through Communal Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCROs), enabled under Tanzania's Village Land Act, communities gain legal recognition of shared land ownership. Participatory boundary mapping, village land-use planning, and the designation of grazing, farming, and conservation areas help communities establish and enforce resource management rules. Village land councils and natural resource committees integrate customary knowledge with statutory frameworks to strengthen local decision-making.

Secure tenure has supported livelihood resilience and ecological stewardship. Pastoral communities maintain mobility through grazing plans that promote rangeland recovery and drought resilience, while hunter-gatherer communities such as the Hadzabe continue forest-based livelihoods with reduced pressure on natural resources. Women-led savings groups, beekeeping, eco-tourism, and crafts further diversify incomes while supporting conservation outcomes.

Despite progress, communities continue to face pressures from land appropriation, conservation restrictions, and climate variability. In response, they are strengthening inter-village agreements, restoring grazing systems, protecting wildlife habitats, and maintaining ecological connectivity. These efforts demonstrate how Indigenous land rights, customary governance, and traditional practices can sustain both livelihoods and biodiversity.



CCROs help safeguard the land rights of all community members, including widows, elders, and people with disabilities. Photo provided by: UCRT

Contributors & sources:
Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT)

9 Ferlo, Senegal — Mobility as the Foundation of Pastoral Life

The Ferlo region in northern Senegal is a key Sahelian landscape where Fulɓe (Peul) communities sustain their pastoral Territories of Life through mobility, ecological knowledge, and collective stewardship. In this semi-arid environment of variable rainfall and dispersed resources, seasonal livestock movements across grazing lands, water points, and transhumance corridors are central to sustaining livelihoods and adapting to uncertainty. Mobility is not only a livelihood strategy but also a foundation of social organization, cultural identity, and relationships with the landscape.



A herder shares a pastoral watering trough with his cattle in the Ferlo. Photo provided by: Raphaël Belmin / Cirad

Governance is based on a combination of customary institutions and formal structures. Lineage leaders, customary authorities, pastoral communities, and local organizations regulate access to shared resources through negotiated agreements, reciprocity, and social norms. Rangelands, wells, boreholes, and mobility corridors are collectively managed as pastoral commons, supported by local governments and pastoral associations.

Livelihoods are centered on mobile livestock keeping, guided by Indigenous ecological knowledge of forage, climate conditions, and herd management. Seasonal transhumance helps distribute grazing pressure, sustain vegetation, and strengthen social networks for risk sharing and adaptation.

The Ferlo pastoral Territory of Life faces increasing pressures from drought, climate variability, agricultural expansion, land fragmentation, and restrictions on mobility. Communities are responding by strengthening resource-sharing arrangements, restoring rangelands, managing water collectively, and engaging in participatory mapping and territorial planning. These efforts highlight the importance of mobility and collective governance in sustaining pastoral resilience and dryland ecosystems.

Contributors & sources:

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The Ferlo communities

Asia

9 Abolhassani Tribal Confederacy, Iran — Coping with Climate Change and Droughts

The Abolhassani Tribal Confederacy is a nomadic pastoral community living on the north-eastern margin of Iran's central desert, where they practice seasonal migration. Their livelihoods are based on sheep and goat pastoralism, combined with agro-pastoral practices. Fodder such as barley, pistachio, and saffron are grown to provide income and livestock feed, thereby reducing dependence on rangelands. The community also integrates seasonal grazing with strategic supplementary feeding to allow vegetation recovery and improves livelihoods.

Governance combines customary institutions with formalized collective structures. Traditional decision-making is led by tribal elders, drawing on long-standing ecological knowledge, while a formally registered Council of Elders strengthens internal coordination and represents the community in interactions with external actors. This dual system enables both the continuity of tradition and effective engagement with modern institutional frameworks.

Challenges are primarily driven by climate change, including prolonged droughts, water shortages, declining livestock numbers and productivity, and rangeland degradation. In response, the community implements water storage systems, restores qanat systems, diversifies feeding strategies, and adopts flexible migration, fodder storage, and the use of agricultural by-products. The community has also engaged with external institutions to secure support.

These initiatives demonstrate how community governance and traditional ecological knowledge are central to ecosystem resilience, biodiversity conservation, and flexible and timely responses to ongoing climatic and ecological challenges.

Contributors & sources:

*The Abolhassani Tribal Confederacy,
Centre for Sustainable Development &
Environment (CENESTA)*

*Alternative livestock feed options utilizing
locally available resources—such as
pistachio shells and watermelon rinds—
to reduce pressure on rangelands during
periods of drought. Photo provided by:
CENESTA*



9 Zagros Mountain, Iran — Livelihoods and the Resilience of Nomadic Pastoralists

The Zagros Mountains of Iran are home to diverse nomadic pastoralist communities, including Bakhtiari, Qashqai, Lur, Lak, and Kurdish groups, who sustain livelihoods through seasonal migration between summer highlands and winter lowlands. Sheep and goats, and in some areas buffalo, remain central to these systems, although climate change has increasingly led communities to rely on supplementary feeding.

Governance is rooted in customary institutions based on collective norms, shared responsibilities, and intergenerational ecological knowledge. Community agreements regulate migration routes, grazing timing, and access to water and pastures, balancing resource use with ecosystem recovery. Elders and collective decision-making processes continue to guide pastoral management, although customary systems often lack formal recognition in state policies.

Nomadic communities face increasing pressures from drought, rangeland and forest degradation, poverty, marginalization, declining mobility, and the erosion of pastoral identities. In response, they maintain flexible migration strategies, apply traditional knowledge of climate and grazing management, diversify livelihoods, adopt renewable energy, and restore traditional water systems.

The Zagros pastoral system highlights the importance of recognizing pastoral mobility, Indigenous knowledge, and community-based management in sustaining mountain ecosystems and strengthening resilience under social and environmental change.

Contributors & sources:

The Nomadic pastoralist communities of the Zagros Mountains
Centre for Sustainable Development & Environment (CENESTA)

9 Indigenous Knowledge, Glaciers, and Nomadic Pastoral Territories of Life in Iran

Nomadic pastoralist communities in Iran's mountains, such as the Bakhtiari, Shahsevan, Kurdish, Turkmen, and Kermānj, practice seasonal mobility between lowland wintering areas and highland summer pastures. Their pastoral systems are based primarily on sheep and goat herding, underpinned by knowledge of cryospheric processes such as snow depth, meltwater flows, and the emergence of vegetation. Barf Andil—the intentional storage of snow in shaded areas for later use—helps pastoralists adapt to seasonal variability.

Governance is rooted in customary, community-based systems that regulate access to land, water, and seasonal resources. Collective decision-making is guided by elders, knowledge-holders, and social norms embedded within kinship structures. The systems function through strong social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transmission, shaping a relational rather than institutional form of governance.

Challenges include accelerated glacial retreat, reduced snow cover, and growing water scarcity, exclusive conservation approaches, the erosion of traditional knowledge, and insufficient recognition of indigenous knowledge systems in policymaking. In response, communities adjust migration timing, maintain knowledge transmission through oral traditions, and develop localized innovative practices such as snow storage techniques.

This story illustrates how sustainability is achieved through mobility, resource regulation, and ethical practices that emphasize restraint and respect for natural cycles. It also highlights the importance of traditional knowledge and innovation in navigating drastic changes.

Contributors & sources:

Nomadic pastoralist communities of the Zagros, Alborz, and Kopet Dag mountain ranges

Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment (CENESTA)

A Bakhtiari tribal leader in the Zagros Mountains, heading out to collect and preserve snow. Photo provided by: CENESTA



9 **Chahdegal and Kouh-e-Zنده, Iran** — **Mobility and Customary Governance**

The Chahdegal pastoral territory of life is inhabited by semi-nomadic Balouch Indigenous Peoples, who migrate between wintering grounds in Chahdegal and summering pastures in Kouh-e-Zنده. Their livelihoods are based on semi-nomadic pastoralism of goats, sheep, and camels, alongside small-scale agriculture. Sustainability is achieved through mobility and diversified resource use. Practices such as Gole-Kardan, or assessing rangeland carrying capacity, and Keid-Kardan, or controlling herd movement, represent advanced ecological management practices rooted in ecological knowledge.

Governance is rooted customary institutions and collective decision-making. The council of elders, consisting of representatives from different tribes and led by a Sardar, is the central authority that governs resource use, resolves disputes, and maintains social and ecological balance. Governance practices emphasize traditional mechanisms such as Tir-Andakhtan for equitable land allocation, ensuring alignment with environmental limits while reinforcing social cohesion and collective responsibility for territorial stewardship.

Challenges include prolonged droughts, desertification, climate variability, lack of formal recognition of customary land rights, modernization, and shifting livelihood patterns. Communities respond with collective customary governance, mobility, and sustainable ecological management. Strengthening these indigenous governance systems and securing territorial rights are essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of this pastoral territory of life.

The story reflects a sophisticated socio-ecological relationship in which mobility, biodiversity, and cultural practices are inseparable, and where territory is a system of memory, spirituality, and collective belonging.



Contributors & sources:

*Balouch Indigenous Peoples of Chahdegal;
Nina Aminzadeh*

*Women in Chahdegal are responsible for
livestock feed, except camel. A balouch
woman shows the amount of feed of a
Baluchi cow. Photo provided by: Nina
Aminzadeh*

9 Muzhayo Commons, Pakistan — Commons Under Pressure

The pastoralist commons, or muzhayo ghari, of Chitral District in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, are collectively governed by local pastoralist communities -- the Kho / Chitrali boomki people and the Gujur people. Their livelihoods depend on goats, sheep, cattle, horses, yaks, and historically, donkeys, which serve both as economic assets and as social and cultural mediators. Seasonal mobility and traditional knowledge are central to sustainability and social cooperation.

Governance of commons is based on three overlapping customary systems: clan-based ownership, proximity-based rights, and gram-based rights. These systems are maintained through practices such as sotsiri or communal rotational grazing, heti or seasonal livestock migration, and sotkorik, where elders enforce customary exclusion of outsiders' livestock. Cultural beliefs in nangini, or mountain fairies, as custodians of the highlands, along with rituals such as dokhna, reinforce governance and regulate respectful entry into pastures.

Central to all challenges is the 1975 nationalization of Chitral's commons as state property, which has led to exclusion through conservation enclosures, trophy-hunting regimes, and the denial of pastoralists' political legitimacy. In addition, women face further exclusion and reduced authority due to male-dominated assemblies and the shift to hired herders. In response, communities continue to document their customary knowledge and implement customary governance practices to maintain sustainability.

The governance of the muzhayo commons demonstrates how conservation outcomes arise from customary governance itself, reflecting a view of the commons as a shared territory for livestock, wild animals, plants, spirits, and people.

“Common pastures are more valuable than private cultivated lands. We gather firewood from there and graze our cattle there. It is also beneficial for our mental well-being. Our minds feel revitalized when we visit. It is the place where I have spent many treasured moments of my life, as I once lived as a shepherd in those pastures. At one point, I kept eight oxen there, which I later sold to fund my sons' weddings.” (Dust, Yarkhun Valley, 2022)

Photo of the territory of life. Photo provided by: Abdul Wahid Khan

Contributors & sources:

The Kho (Chitrali) people of Chitral, the Gujur people, Abdul Wahid Khan



9 High-Mountain Kyrgyzstan — Women at the Frontline of Resilience

High-mountain pastoralist systems in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan are shaped by extreme environmental conditions. Livelihoods are heavily dependent on mobile livestock herding of sheep, goats, cattle, and horses. Seasonal mobility between winter settlements and summer pastures, along with associated value-added activities, remains central to livelihoods. Women play a central role, contributing to daily herd management, dairy products processing, traditional goods production, and household-level resource arrangements.

Municipal Enterprises constitute the primary formal institution managing seasonal pasture use and grazing rights, while informal norms continue to guide day-to-day decision-making. Meanwhile, local initiatives are strengthening sustainability through education, community engagement, and the integration of traditional knowledge with modern environmental awareness. These efforts aim to build the governance capacity of youth and facilitate intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Challenges include pasture degradation, climate change, economic marginalization, limited livelihood diversification opportunities, gender inequality with women often underrepresented in decision making, and outmigration. In response, communities are promoting rotational grazing, strengthening environmental awareness, advocating for sustainable resource management, and enhancing women's participation in local initiatives.

This story highlights that empowering women, supporting local knowledge systems, and fostering participatory governance are key to building community resilience. Emerging local leadership is facilitating more inclusive and participatory governance by promoting collective awareness, although structural barriers to equitable participation persist.

Contributors & sources:

High-mountain pastoralist communities of Naryn region



Members of "Son Kul" community media center - discussing, learning together – Burul Mairambek kyzy, operating at the intersection of education, environmental stewardship, and community leadership, is in the center. Photo provided by: the archive of "Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy (ISDS)", Kyrgyzstan

The Hima System in Jordan **— A Community-Based Approach for Pastoral Territories of Life**

The traditional Hima system in Jordan, particularly among Bedouin and pastoral communities in drylands and rangelands, represents a pastoral territory of life rooted in Arab and Islamic heritage. Livelihoods are mainly based on sheep, goats, and sometimes camels. Seasonal mobility remains important for rangeland recovery and sustainability, as it reduces pressure on degraded rangelands.

Governance of Hima is based on community participation, customary institutions, and collective decision-making among herders, elders, tribal leaders, and local communities. Grazing periods, access rules, seasonal rotation, and conservation measures are agreed upon through local norms. Although the system strengthens collective stewardship, it still requires greater recognition within formal policy and land-management frameworks.

Challenges include prolonged drought, desertification, land degradation, overgrazing, weak recognition of customary governance, urban expansion, land-use change, and the decline of traditional knowledge among younger generations. In response, communities, civil society organizations, and local institutions have committed to awareness raising, restoration activities, community-based governance, rotational grazing, and renewed recognition of traditional stewardship.

The story shows how grazing lands are treated as shared pastoral territories governed through social responsibility, collective rules, and ecological restraint, where livestock production, cultural identity, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience are closely connected.

Contributors & sources:

Bedouin and pastoral communities, Ministry of agriculture, Seeds foundation, National Land Coalition, International Land Coalition

9 Munzur Valley, Turkey — Sacred Landscapes and Pastoral Heritage

The Munzur Valley in eastern Turkey is home to Alevi Kurdish communities whose pastoral traditions are deeply connected to mountains, rivers, and sacred landscapes. For generations, communities have combined village-based agriculture with transhumant pastoralism, moving sheep, goats, and cattle between valley settlements and high mountain summer pastures (yaylas). Livestock provides food, income, and cultural continuity, while pastoral mobility maintains relationships with ancestral lands and collective memory.

Governance of pastoral commons has traditionally relied on customary institutions, kinship relations, and collective decision-making. Elders, respected community members, and Alevi spiritual leaders (dedes) have guided resource use, mediated conflicts, and transmitted ecological and cultural knowledge. Alevi values also emphasize respect for mountains, rivers, springs, and sacred natural sites (ziyarets), shaping a strong ethic of care toward the landscape.

The transhumant system supports sustainable pasture use by distributing grazing pressure between valley and highland areas. Local ecological knowledge of vegetation cycles, water sources, weather patterns, animal care, and dairy production remains central to sustaining the valley's biocultural diversity.

The Munzur pastoral Territory of Life faces pressures from depopulation, declining pastoral livelihoods, access restrictions, hydropower projects, extractive activities, and climate change. Communities continue to defend sacred landscapes, protect river ecosystems, document traditional knowledge, and advocate for locally grounded conservation approaches that respect cultural and collective rights.



Munzur in winter. Photo provided by: Michael Benanav

Contributors & sources:
Alevi communities
Traditional Cultures Project

9 Van Gujjars, India — Forest Rights and Mobile Pastoralism

In the Shivalik and Terai forests of Uttarakhand, India, the Van Gujjars—a semi-nomadic Muslim pastoral community—maintain a traditional way of life centered on their indigenous Gojri buffaloes. The community practices transhumance, moving seasonally between lowland winter forests and alpine summer pastures. Their nomadic movements are guided by traditional ecological knowledge, oral customary norms, and folk songs (Bainths) that transmit environmental and conservation values across generations. Women hold vital, recognized roles in herd management, dairy processing, and maintaining extensive knowledge of forest medicinal plants.

Pastoral practices directly enhance forest biodiversity and ecosystem health. Controlled seasonal grazing prevents vegetation overgrowth, seed dispersal is facilitated through herd movement, and hand-dug water ponds (suta) store water for both livestock and wild fauna. Additionally, buffaloes traveling along designated forest paths naturally create fire lines that prevent the spread of seasonal wildfires. Annual cultural traditions, such as the Sela Parv tree plantation festival, further reinforce community-led reforestation efforts.

However, Van Gujjar pastoral territories of life face mounting pressures: shrinking migration corridors caused by infrastructure development, local land grabbing, invasive plant species like Lantana, and climate-induced disruptions to seasonal pasture growth. In response, the community—supported by the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan (VGTYS)—is actively asserting statutory rights under the Forest Rights Act by submitting Community Forest Rights (CFR) claims. Furthermore, they are expanding constructive dialogue with government officials, strengthening formal education for youth, and diversifying sustainable livelihoods through nature guiding and women-led handicrafts.

Contributors & sources:

Amanat Ali (Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan)

Neha Negi (Kalpavriksh)

A small Van Gujjar forest settlement (deras) at Kunao Chaur, Uttarakhand, India, showing traditional conical thatched-roof huts built from mud, wood, and straw. Photo provided by: Neha Negi, Kalpavriksh



9 Banni Grasslands, India — Pastoral Commons and Community-Led Restoration

The Banni Grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat, India, represent one of Asia's largest tropical savanna ecosystems and a pastoral Territory of Life stewarded for over 450 years by Maldhari communities. Comprising diverse Muslim pastoral groups alongside Meghwal Hindu and Vadha Koli communities, the landscape supports livestock-based livelihoods centered on the indigenous Banni buffalo. Seasonal herd mobility across the 2,500-square-kilometer commons follows rainfall and pasture availability, supported by inter-village reciprocity, customary institutions, and traditional virda water-harvesting systems.

Governance is rooted in communal tenure systems and covenant-based norms that regulate resource use and prevent privatization. Women play important roles in livestock management, dairy production, and cultural practices such as embroidery.

The Banni Grasslands support rich biodiversity, including native grasses and threatened wildlife species. However, invasive *Prosopis juliflora* has degraded large areas of native pasture, while climate variability and insecure tenure arrangements have further increased pressures.

In response, Maldhari communities have strengthened collective governance through the Banni Pashu Uchherak Maldhari Sangathan (BPUMS), advanced Community Forest Rights claims, and partnered with Sahjeevan to restore degraded grasslands. Community-led actions include invasive species removal, native pasture regeneration, and innovative restoration financing mechanisms. These efforts demonstrate how customary governance, pastoral livelihoods, and ecological restoration can work together to sustain a living grassland ecosystem.

The pastoralists of Banni grasslands have gathered in the grasslands near Pannavari village restoration plot for hand weeding of invasive species, immediately post monsoons, as a part of community led restoration of grasslands. Photo provided by: Nirav Mehta, Sahjeevan Archives

Contributors & sources:
Kavita Mehta, Mansi Gor (Sahjeevan);
Banni Pashu Uchherak Maldhari
Sangathan (BPUMS - Banni Breeders'
Association).



9 Orans of Thar, India — Sacred Commons and Community Conservation

The Orans of the Indian Thar Desert, especially in Rajasthan, represent sacred pastoral commons and agro-silvopastoral Territories of Life sustained by communities including Raika, Sindhi, Rajput, and Gujar groups. In one of the world's most arid environments, Orans provide essential grazing areas, woody vegetation, water resources, and refuge for both livestock and wildlife. Beyond common lands, they are culturally protected landscapes dedicated to local deities, saints, ancestral figures, or natural elements, where customary rules regulate resource use and protect key ecological features.

Governance is rooted in customary laws, sacred values, and community stewardship. Elders, religious custodians, village institutions, and local organizations guide the management of Orans through traditional norms, including restrictions on tree cutting and collective protection of resources. While some Orans have formal recognition, many remain legally insecure and vulnerable to land conversion.

Pastoral livelihoods in the Thar depend on livestock mobility and access to diverse resources, including grasses, browse species, and traditional water systems. Native vegetation and water structures within Orans support drought resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable livestock production.

Orans face increasing pressures from land diversion, renewable energy development, mining, invasive species, groundwater decline, and climate variability. Communities and KRPAVIS are responding through participatory mapping, ecological restoration, revival of water systems, and legal advocacy. Recent legal recognition efforts have strengthened the role of communities as custodians of these sacred landscapes, demonstrating how cultural values and pastoral stewardship can sustain biodiversity in dryland ecosystems.

Contributors & sources:

Aman Singh & Sitaram Verma (KRPAVIS)

A pastoralist with his herd in Oran of Indian Thar Desert. Photo provided by: KRPAVIS



9 Gaddi Transhumance, India — Mobility as Climate Resilience in the Western Himalayas

The Gaddi pastoralists of Himachal Pradesh, India, maintain a transhumant livestock system in the Western Himalayas, moving seasonally between lowland wintering areas and high-altitude summer pastures. Primarily based on sheep and goats herding, this pastoral way of life is sustained by generations of knowledge about mountain landscapes, forage availability, weather patterns, and animal behaviour. Mobility enables herders to match livestock needs with seasonal ecological conditions while sustaining livelihoods in a highly variable environment.

Governance is based on community coordination among herding families, who negotiate migration routes, grazing sequences, temporary camps, and shared responsibilities. These customary arrangements operate alongside formal institutions that influence access to rangelands and provide targeted support. Recognition of migratory corridors as working landscapes is essential for sustaining this pastoral system.

Gaddi pastoralism relies on low-input husbandry, skilled herd management, traditional veterinary knowledge, and close observation of animal health. Livestock guardian dogs play an important role in protecting herds from predators while supporting coexistence with wildlife.

The system faces growing pressures from shrinking grazing areas, climate variability, changing land use, animal health risks, and human–wildlife conflict. Communities respond by adapting migration timing, maintaining traditional practices, and adopting supportive measures such as vaccination, breeding assistance, and mobile veterinary services. The Gaddi experience demonstrates how pastoral mobility supports climate resilience and sustainable mountain livelihoods while highlighting the need for accessible animal-health and welfare services.



Vaccination of Gaddi goat during seasonal migration. Photo provided by: Dr. Brij Vanita

Contributors & sources:

Dr. Ankaj Thakur, Dr. Nishant Verma; Dr. Brij Vanita

Institution: DGCN COVAS, CSKHPKV, Palampur, India

9 Changthang, India

— Mobility and Commons Governance on the High-Altitude Plateau

The Changpa pastoralists of Changthang in eastern Ladakh, India, steward a high-altitude pastoral Territory of Life shaped by mobility, shared rangelands, and deep relationships between people, livestock, and the landscape. In this cold-arid plateau of extreme climatic conditions, pastoralism is not only a livelihood system but also the foundation of Changpa cultural identity, social organization, and adaptation. Livestock, especially Changra goats, sheep, and yaks, sustain local economies while connecting communities to ancestral grazing territories.

Governance is rooted in customary institutions and collective management of commons. Pastures, water sources, and seasonal migration routes are managed through shared norms regarding grazing timing, herd movement, resource access, and responsibilities. Local institutions, including Yulpas (village councils) usually headed by Gobas (village head), facilitate decision-making, conflict resolution, and equitable resource sharing. These flexible governance systems enable communities to adapt to ecological and social changes while maintaining the integrity of their territories.

Changpa sustainability depends on seasonal mobility, rotational grazing, herd management, and detailed Indigenous knowledge of pastures, water, weather, and animal behavior. Communities are also adapting through pashmina value chains, community-based tourism, and livelihood diversification while seeking to maintain their pastoral identity and territorial relationships.

The Changthang Territory of Life faces increasing pressures from climate change, changing land-use policies, infrastructure expansion, development projects, and youth outmigration. In response, Changpa communities continue to strengthen customary governance, maintain mobility practices, monitor ecosystems, and promote coexistence with wildlife. The case demonstrates how pastoral commons and Indigenous governance systems sustain both biodiversity and resilient livelihoods in fragile high-altitude landscapes.

A Changpa pastoralist sitting beside a traditional stone corral in the Kharnak region of Changthang as the Changra pashmina goats gather nearby, against the backdrop of the trans-Himalayan mountains, Ladakh, India.

Photo provided by: Aman Dedhia

Contributors & sources:

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(Rights for Ecological Belonging
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9 Western Himalayas, India — Ecological Guardians

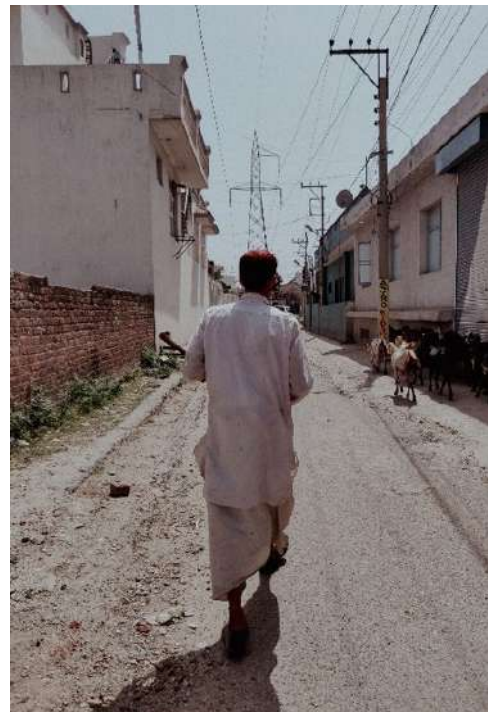
The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities of Raika village, located on the periphery of Jammu city in Jammu and Kashmir, India, steward a pastoral Territory of Life shaped by forests, pastures, water sources, and shared ecological commons of the Western Himalayas. Gujjars practice agro-pastoralism centered on buffalo herding, while Bakarwals maintain transhumant pastoralism based on sheep and goats, moving seasonally between foothill areas and high Himalayan pastures. Both communities sustain strong cultural identities, customary knowledge, and relationships with their ancestral landscapes.

Governance of the territory is rooted in customary institutions and collective stewardship practices. Communities regulate access to forests, grazing areas, water sources, and traditional pathways through shared norms, reciprocal arrangements, and locally embedded knowledge. These customary systems interact with formal governance structures, including panchayats and forest authorities, creating a multi-layered governance landscape.

Pastoral practices contribute to maintaining ecological integrity through seasonal mobility, rotational grazing, and the collective care of common resources. Community actions such as maintaining traditional water structures, preserving forest pathways, managing vegetation, and reducing fire risks reflect long-standing relationships between pastoral livelihoods and ecosystem stewardship.

The Territory of Life faces growing pressures from urban expansion, infrastructure development, shrinking commons, and changing land-use patterns. In response, Gujjar and Bakarwal communities are strengthening collective organization, asserting cultural and territorial rights, and promoting community-led stewardship. Their experience highlights the role of Indigenous and local communities in sustaining biodiversity, ecological resilience, and living landscapes through customary governance and traditional knowledge.

*Liminal spaces of Existence*A member of the Gujjar community traverses across peri-urban spaces of Jammu city. To find grazing sites and foliage for his flock, the herder must search for empty plots of land in between built spaces. Photo provided by: Afreen Gani Faridi



Contributors & sources:

Afreen G Faridi: Communication and Critical Thinking at JK LakshmiPat University

Altaf Hussain: Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University

9 Bayanbulag, Mongolia **— Co-management for Pastoral Conservation**

The Bayanbulag ICCA in Mukhar Valley, Tuv Province, Mongolia, is a semi-nomadic pastoral Territory of Life sustained by ancestral kinship, seasonal mobility, and customary resource governance. The community of 12 pastoral households relies on sheep, goats, cattle, and horses, with social institutions such as khot ail (herding camps), sakhalt ail (neighbor networks), and neg nutgiinkhan (people sharing the same territory) maintaining collective relationships with the landscape.

Governance combines customary institutions with legally recognized co-management arrangements. Through agreements with local governments, the Bayanbulag community has secured recognized management responsibilities over 1,130 hectares of seasonal pasture and 1,175 hectares of forest resources. Traditional decision-making continues to guide pasture rotation, resource sharing, and conservation practices.

Mobility remains central to ecological resilience. By extending seasonal movements and adjusting herd sizes to ecological capacity, herders support natural rangeland recovery. Community conservation actions include protecting water sources, managing forests, and conducting participatory wildlife monitoring, contributing to the recovery of species such as Siberian roe deer and Pallas's cat.

Facing climate-driven water scarcity, land-use pressures, and youth outmigration, the community has strengthened livelihood resilience through women-led dairy initiatives and improved market access. Voluntary herd reduction by 50 percent, combined with increased milk production, has improved household incomes while reducing pressure on ecosystems.

The Bayanbulag experience demonstrates how customary governance, mobility, and co-management can sustain pastoral livelihoods while restoring rangeland ecosystems.



Bayanbulag community members at autumn pasture, Photo provided by: JASIL

Contributors & sources:

Environment and Development Association JASIL

9 Gyatong grassland, China —Community-led Sustainable Development

In Chengduo County, Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, Tibetan pastoralists of Zhenqin No. 2 Village steward the Gyatong Grassland, a high-altitude alpine meadow within the Sanjiangyuan National Ecological Protection Pilot Zone. The landscape includes the Zhaqu River, a major headwater tributary of the Yangtze River, and supports diverse alpine species such as the Saker Falcon, Black-necked Crane, Kiang, and Chinese Mountain Cat.



Women's handicraft cooperative. Photo provided by: Shan Shui Conservation Center

Pastoral livelihoods are based on yak herding, complemented by sheep and horses. Guided by customary knowledge, sacred landscape values, and seasonal observations, herders collectively manage four seasonal pastures through rotational grazing practices.

Facing climate impacts and grassland degradation, the community developed a co-management approach with Shan Shui Conservation Center and local authorities. Elders, herder representatives, and a community co-management committee coordinate conservation actions, while local herders participate in biodiversity monitoring using camera traps, transects, and GPS tracking. Since 2021, the community has restored more than 150 hectares of degraded alpine meadow through reseedling, soil improvement, and seasonal protection measures.

The community has also strengthened livelihood resilience through women-led wool handicraft initiatives and improved climate adaptation measures such as winter fodder storage. The Gyatong experience demonstrates how pastoral communities can combine traditional ecological knowledge, participatory conservation, and livelihood innovation to restore fragile alpine ecosystems.

Contributors & sources:

Shan Shui Conservation Center; Gyatong Community Co-Management Committee.

9 Chagannuur, China — Pastoral Stewardship for Migratory Bird Conservation

The Chagannuur community in Abaga Banner, Xilingol League, Inner Mongolia, China, stewards a pastoral Territory of Life where grasslands, wetlands, and migratory bird habitats are closely interconnected. Located at the northern edge of the Hunshandake Sandy Land, the landscape includes Chagannuur Lake, saline-alkaline wetlands, sandy grasslands, and diverse pasture ecosystems. It provides important breeding and stopover habitats for species such as White-naped Crane, Red-crowned Crane, and migratory waterbirds, while remaining a traditional pastoral landscape steward by local pastoralists.

Governance is supported by gacha committees, local government, community organizations, and the AEI Ecological Environment Volunteers Association. Through herder meetings, participatory monitoring, nature education, and collaborative planning, communities work to balance grazing, biodiversity conservation, and development pressures.

Local livelihoods are based mainly on livestock husbandry, especially cattle and sheep. Since the 1990s, most herders have shifted to settled pastoralism with allocated seasonal pastures. Traditional ecological knowledge and cultural ethics continue to guide grazing practices and coexistence with wildlife. Local customs, such as avoiding disturbance to birds and protecting nests, have contributed to long-term people–wildlife coexistence.

Facing drought, wetland degradation, sand desertification, renewable energy expansion, and tourism disturbance, local herders have actively restored ecosystems by planting native vegetation and rehabilitating degraded saline lakebeds. Over two decades, more than 6,800 hectares of dried lakebed have been re-vegetated. Communities also participate in bird monitoring, habitat mapping, ecological education, and livelihood diversification through handicrafts, homestays, and nature-based tourism. The story demonstrates how pastoral communities can sustain biodiversity through everyday stewardship and adaptive co-management.

Community members monitoring birds. Photo provided by: AEI



Contributors & sources:

AEI Ecological Environment Volunteers Association, Chagannuur Town Government

9 Jiangbutas Village, China — A Kazakh Pastoral Territory of Life in a Changing Climate

Located on the southern slopes of the Altai Mountains in Qinghe County, Xinjiang, China, Jiangbutas Village is a traditional Kazakh pastoral community adjacent to the Liangheyuan Nature Reserve and the historic Sandaohaizi alpine wetland ecosystem. Herders maintain an ancient transhumance system, moving livestock—including cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and camels—across seasonal pastures between spring, summer, and autumn, complemented by settled winter sites. This seasonal mobility preserves alpine wetland biodiversity, supports traditional milk and meat processing, and sustains rich Kazakh nomadic traditions rooted in kinship units (Auwle), seasonal slaughter rituals, and customary ecological knowledge.

Governance integrates household grassland-use contracts specifying carrying capacities with a multi-stakeholder community co-management committee linking herders, local government, reserve authorities, and environmental NGOs. Local Kazakh herders serve as ecological rangers, conducting joint patrols, monitoring wildlife, operating camera traps, and implementing grassland fire prevention.

Facing extreme climate events, pasture degradation, shrinking wetlands, and market pressures, the community actively strengthens climate adaptation and cultural transmission. Kazakh women lead diversified eco-cultural initiatives—such as forage-themed embroidery, traditional felt craft, black soap making, and homestays—with a community development fund reinvesting tourism revenue into village public affairs. By combining traditional ecological wisdom, youth environmental education, and co-management, Jiangbutas demonstrates a resilient model for desert-alpine rangeland conservation and sustainable pastoral livelihoods.



Grass-themed embroidery crafted by local women. Photo provided by: Green Xinjiang Environment Protection and Sustainable Development Center

Contributors & sources:

*Green Xinjiang Environment Protection and Sustainable Development Center;
Jiangbutas Village*

Europe and the Mediterranean

Sinjajevina, Montenegro — Defending Mountain Commons



Sinjajevinan pastoral landscape. Photo provided by: Pablo Dominguez

Sinjajevina in central Montenegro is one of Europe's largest mountain pastoral Territories of Life, shaped by centuries of transhumant pastoralism organized through *katuns*—seasonal highland settlements connected with shared grazing areas. Around 240 pastoral households continue to use these summer pastures, where sheep, cattle, goats, and horses are managed through seasonal mobility, collective labor, and cultural practices deeply connected to the landscape.

Governance is rooted in customary commons institutions historically maintained by eight tribes. Community assemblies and elders regulate access to grazing areas, pasture rotation, mobility, and conflict resolution. Water resources, which are particularly scarce in the highlands, are managed through collective rules that ensure equitable access and prevent privatization. Although these governance systems remain active, they operate alongside state ownership frameworks established after the nationalization of common lands in 1945.

Sinjajevina faces growing pressures from rural depopulation, declining knowledge transmission, and competing land uses. In 2019, plans to establish a military training ground without community consultation sparked the Save Sinjajevina movement, through which local communities successfully challenged, halted and finally forced the government to cancel the project. New proposals, including large-scale wind energy development, continue to raise concerns over external decision-making and impacts on pastoral landscapes.

The experience of Sinjajevina demonstrates the importance of recognizing pastoral commons, customary governance, and community participation in sustaining biodiversity and resilient mountain landscapes.

Contributors & sources:

Pablo Dominguez, Save Sinjajevina, Montenegro

9 Lagorai, Italy – A Territory of Dairy Resistance



Lagorai landscape. Photo provided by: The Free Association of the Lagorai Shepherds and Herdsmen

The Lagorai region in northern Italy is an alpine pastoral Territory of Life shaped by centuries of transhumant mobility between valley settlements and high-altitude summer pastures. Traditional practices centered on *malghe* (alpine huts), livestock herding, and dairy production remain closely connected with local identity, biodiversity, and landscape stewardship. These systems are historically rooted in commons institutions, including the Magnifica Comunità di Fiemme, which has regulated collective land use since the 14th century.

Governance combines communal ownership, private use, and public regulation. Pastures are managed by civic-use bodies (ASUC), municipalities, and local associations, including the Free Association of the Lagorai Shepherds and Herdsmen. Customary rules continue to guide grazing practices, stocking levels, pasture rotation, and access, while adapting to changing economic and policy contexts.

Pastoral livelihoods depend on seasonal mobility, local breeds, low-input production, and traditional dairy systems. These practices maintain diverse alpine habitats, support soil and ecosystem functions, and sustain cultural heritage. Community initiatives to revitalize traditional cheese-making and strengthen local value chains have contributed to pastoral renewal.

The territory faces challenges from pastoral abandonment, limited economic returns, tourism pressures, and demographic change. In response, communities are promoting quality labels, Slow Food initiatives, and stronger collective organization to maintain alpine pastoral traditions and the landscapes they sustain.

Contributors & sources:

The Free Association of the Lagorai Shepherds and Herdsmen

9 Cattani Farm, Italy – The Continuity of Traditional Droving Practices

Cattani Farm represents a living example of pastoral practices in central Italy where traditional droving practices continue to connect livestock, landscapes, and rural communities. Located within the “Via Amerina e delle Forre” Bio-District, the farm is shaped by seasonal livestock movements, small-scale production, and agroecological practices. Established in 1949, the farm integrates livestock herding, dairy production, cropping, and forestry through low-input methods.

Governance is based on family stewardship, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and participation in the Bio-District, supported by local networks and relationships with consumers. Seasonal droving to high-altitude pastures remains central to livestock health, product quality, and landscape management. Traditional dairy products, including Ricotta Romana and Pecorino Romano, reflect the link between pastoral practices, cultural heritage, and local value chains.

Facing pressures from intensive agriculture, climate change, and declining pastoral knowledge, Cattani Farm adapts through product diversification, direct marketing, and youth engagement. Its experience demonstrates how mobility, ecological knowledge, and community-based value chains can sustain traditional pastoral systems in contemporary contexts.

Cattani Farm with sheep, lambs, calves. Photo provided by: Ruspantini Roberto

Contributors & sources:
Ruspantini Roberto, volunteer of Schola Campesina.



9 Covas do Barroso, Portugal — Commons Against Mining



Shrub gathering in the commons for livestock bedding. Photo provided by: the RHE INITIATIVE

The baldios (commons) of Covas do Barroso in northern Portugal represent a pastoral Territory of Life shaped by centuries of collective land stewardship and agro-silvo-pastoral practices. Covering around 2,000 hectares of upland commons, these territories integrate grazing, forestry, water management, and small-scale agriculture. Sheep, cattle, and horses are managed through seasonal and itinerant movements that sustain local livelihoods, biodiversity, and traditional ecological knowledge.

Governance is based on a legally recognized commons regime combining customary practices with democratic institutions. Land-use rights are held collectively by “compartes” (commoners), who manage the territory through the Assembly of Compartes and elected management bodies. This sui generis property system, distinct from private and state ownership, enables collective decision-making on grazing, forestry, water, and resource use.

Local livelihoods rely on diverse agro-silvo-pastoral practices, including livestock keeping, beekeeping, forestry, gathering, and communal water management. These practices maintain ecological functions while supporting food security, biodiversity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

The commons face increasing pressures from rural depopulation, climate change, wildfires, and proposed lithium mining projects. In response, commoners have mobilized to defend their territory through legal action, advocacy, fire prevention, and sustainable land management. Covas do Barroso demonstrates how legally recognized commons governance can sustain pastoral landscapes, biodiversity, and community resilience.

Contributors & sources:

RHE INITIATIVE - social enterprise for rural heritage and community resilience (www.rhe-initiative.pt)

Intangible cultural heritage inventory of the traditional knowledge and practices of commons in the cultural landscape of Barroso. & Commoners of Covas do Barroso.

9 Áldujohka Sámi ICCA, Finland — Reindeer Mobility and Indigenous Governance

The Áldujohka Sámi ICCA in northern Finland represents a pastoral Territory of Life where Sámi communities sustain reindeer herding across Arctic and sub-Arctic landscapes of boreal forests, tundra, and peatlands. Unlike grass-based pastoral systems, reindeer herding depends on natural vegetation, especially lichens, and follows seasonal ecological cycles. Beyond livelihoods, reindeer herding is central to Sámi cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge, and relationships with ancestral territories.

Governance combines formal institutions with Sámi customary systems. Reindeer herding cooperatives are legally responsible for herd management and grazing areas, while traditional *siida* structures continue to guide decision-making, knowledge transmission, and relationships among people, reindeer, and landscapes. This hybrid governance system enables communities to adapt customary practices within contemporary regulatory frameworks.

Reindeer herding supports local livelihoods through meat and other products while maintaining cultural continuity and ecological stewardship. Low-intensity grazing practices and close observation of environmental changes contribute to sustainable use of northern ecosystems.

The Áldujohka Sámi ICCA faces increasing pressures from climate change, forestry, mining, infrastructure, and tourism development. Changing snow conditions, vegetation shifts, and habitat fragmentation affect grazing access and mobility routes. In response, Sámi communities continue to strengthen Indigenous governance, protect grazing areas, and promote the integration of traditional ecological knowledge into conservation approaches.



Photo provided by: Tero Mustonen, Snowchange Cooperative

Contributors & sources:

Tero Mustonen, Snowchange Cooperative, Finland

9 Xiberoa, France — Shared Mountains, Shared Responsibilities

The pastoral Territory of Life of Xiberoa in the northern Basque Country represents a long-standing system of collective stewardship shaped by seasonal transhumance and deep relationships between communities and mountain landscapes. Each year, sheep and cattle move between valley farms and high-altitude pastures, maintaining open grasslands, supporting biodiversity, and sustaining local livelihoods. Central to this system are *olha* (mountain huts), which function as socio-ecological institutions connecting shared grazing areas, pastoral practices, and collective responsibilities. The Basque concept of *etxe* reflects enduring relationships between land, lineage, and obligations toward the territory.

Governance combines territorial institutions and local pastoral organizations. The Commission Syndicale du Pays de Soule, representing 43 municipalities, manages around 14,000 hectares of mountain pastures and forests, including infrastructure, water systems, and access to common lands. At the local level, pastoral groups linked to individual *olha* coordinate herd management, shared labor, and maintenance. Customary practices such as *txotx* and *aldikatz*en reinforce reciprocity, fairness, and collective decision-making.

Pastoral livelihoods rely on shared labor, ecological knowledge, and adaptive practices, including communal grazing, rotational management, and controlled burning. These practices maintain pasture quality and biodiversity while sustaining cultural continuity.

Facing demographic change, labor shortages, tourism pressures, and changing agricultural policies, communities continue to adapt through new organizational models. Xiberoa demonstrates how collective responsibility and continued pastoral use can sustain living landscapes where conservation and livelihoods remain inseparable.

Contributors & sources:

Alys Cretier, University of Lausanne

Pastoralists working together to prepare the olha before the summer grazing season. Photo provided by: Alys Cretier



9 Longmynd Common, England — Customary Commons and Collaborative Stewardship in Upland Landscapes

The Longmynd Common in Shropshire, UK, represents a long-established socio-ecological regime in which customary tenure, livestock grazing rights, and ecological outcomes are tightly interlinked. Commoners on the Longmynd hold documented grazing rights dating to the 13th century. Unlike surrounding enclosed lands, the Longmynd Common has maintained communal access to grazing areas, with common rights vested in the local commoning community represented by the Longmynd Commoners' Association (LCA).

Governance reflects a multi-actor system combining customary grazing rights, statutory conservation regulation, and estate management. The National Trust has owned the Longmynd since 1965, while agri-environment agreements introduced since 1999 have integrated livestock management with ecological conservation objectives.

The Longmynd is characterised by heathland, acid grassland, and remnant woodland. Extensive grazing by sheep and ponies maintains habitat heterogeneity through low-intensity grazing. Traditional livestock management relies on “hefts”, in which sheep develop spatial knowledge of grazing areas through maternal lineage, creating “invisible boundaries” without physical infrastructure.

In response to increasing grazing pressure, reduced stocking densities, rotational heather management, and habitat enhancement have contributed to vegetation recovery and the Longmynd Common's current favourable ecological condition.



The Longmynd demonstrates how customary tenure, community grazing practices, and formal conservation frameworks can work together, showing that upland biodiversity can be co-produced through local knowledge, livestock management, and collaborative governance.

The importance of Hefting on Common Land. Photo provided by: the Longmynd Commoners' Association

Contributors & sources:

Adrian Cullis

The Longmynd Commoners' Association (LCA)

Latin America

9 Malargüe, Argentina — Transhumance in the Southern Andes

The pastoral territory of Malargüe, located in Mendoza Province in the Southern Andes of Argentina, is shaped by the seasonal mobility of puesteros (pastoralist families) who have maintained transhumant practices across arid mountain landscapes for generations. Livestock keeping, primarily goat herding alongside cattle, sheep, and horses, is organized around movement between lowland winter pastures (invernadas) and high-altitude summer grazing areas (veranadas). This mobility-based way of living relies on natural pastures, local ecological knowledge, and collective family participation, while complementary activities such as rural tourism, artisanal production, and off-farm work contribute to household resilience.

Governance of the territory is primarily based on customary institutions, social agreements, kinship networks, and locally recognized access rights. Through these informal arrangements, families coordinate seasonal movements, grazing practices, and resource use across shared landscapes. However, the lack of secure formal land tenure creates ongoing uncertainty, increasing vulnerability to competing land uses and external territorial pressures.

The Malargüe pastoral territory of life faces multiple challenges, including prolonged droughts, climate variability, limited market access, low livestock prices, infrastructure expansion, predator conflicts, and rural outmigration. In response, puesteros continue to adapt through maintaining mobility, diversifying livelihoods, and applying traditional ecological knowledge to manage fragile dryland ecosystems.

The experience of Malargüe highlights that transhumance is not only a livestock production strategy but also a cultural and territorial practice that sustains social organization, ecological resilience, and connections between communities and landscapes. Recognizing pastoral mobility, securing land access, and supporting community-based governance are essential for sustaining this living pastoral territory of life.

Contributors & sources:

Communities of Malargüe; Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria

*Puesteros rounding up the goats.
Photo provided by: Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria*



9 Lof Kinxikew, Argentina — Indigenous Governance in a Protected Area

The Mapuche Community Lof Kinxikew, located within Nahuel Huapi National Park in Neuquén Province, Argentina, sustains a pastoral system based on cattle, sheep, goats, and horses, complemented by small-scale farming, artisanal production, cultural tourism, and controlled hunting. Sustainability is grounded in Mapuche traditional ecological knowledge (kimvn), cosmovision, and adaptive management practices that maintain relationships between people, livestock, and the land.

Governance is rooted in Mapuche customary institutions and collective decision-making. Traditional authorities, including the Logko (leader), Werken (spokesperson), and Genpin (spiritual authority), guide community affairs, while major decisions are made through assemblies (Xawn). The community also participates in intercultural governance through co-management with Nahuel Huapi National Park and regional Mapuche organizations, combining Indigenous self-governance with collaborative conservation.

The community faces challenges including insecure land tenure, limited access to winter grazing areas, invasive species, overgrazing risks, infrastructure constraints, and labor shortages. In response, Lof Kinxikew is developing participatory livestock management plans supported by mapping, technical assessments, and collaboration with conservation authorities. These efforts integrate Mapuche knowledge with conservation practices to strengthen both ecological integrity and community resilience.

Lof Kinxikew demonstrates how Indigenous governance and participatory livestock management can support resilient pastoral systems within protected landscapes.

Contributors & sources:

the Community Lof Kinxikew; Nahuel Huapi National Park and the Northern Patagonia Regional Directorate of the National Parks Administration (APN)

Herding. Photo provided by: the Community Lof Kinxikew



9 Aymara Wetlands, Chile — Water, Camelids, and Restoration

In the high Andean Altiplano of northern Chile, Aymara indigenous communities maintain pastoral systems closely linked to wetlands in the Tarapacá and Arica-Parinacota regions. Livelihoods are based primarily on small livestock herding of llamas, alpacas, and sheep, organized through seasonal mobility across ecological zones. Sustainability depends on community participation, traditional ecological knowledge, and ancestral water management practices including water redistribution, canal maintenance, and vegetation management.

Governance is grounded in the Aymara principles of collective organization, particularly *ayni*, or reciprocity. Community leadership and external partnerships create a hybrid system that integrate traditional institutions with technical and scientific support, and implement community-based practices such as collective labor and mutual aid that support the maintenance and restoration of wetlands and grazing areas.

Pastoral systems face pressures from climate change, declining water availability, mining and water extraction activities, rural outmigration, aging populations, and the erosion of traditional knowledge systems. In response, communities are implementing ancestral wetland restorations and participatory monitoring that combine local observation with technical tools that strengthen community organization, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and the recognition of Aymara communities as key stewards of high-Andean ecosystems.

The Más Agua initiative view wetlands not only as productive spaces but also as living entities central to community continuity and cultural identity, providing experiences in supporting wetland restoration, improving forage availability and livestock productivity, while reinforcing the biocultural link between water, biodiversity, and pastoral livelihoods.

Contributors & sources:

Indigenous Aymara Communities ; Corporación de Estudios y Desarrollo Norte Grande

Ancestral Aymara management practices for distributing and optimizing water use in high Andean wetlands (above 3,800 meters above sea level), aiming to improve the productivity of the vegetation that feeds livestock. Photo provided by: Corporación Norte Grande



9 Pewenche Territory, Chile **— Transhumance and Living Territory**

The Cordillera Pewenche territory in Lonquimay, southern Chile, is a pastoral territory of life shaped by Mapuche-Pewenche communities through transhumant agropastoral practices and deep relationships with mountain ecosystems. Guided by Itxofill Mogen—the interdependence of all forms of life—communities move cattle, sheep, goats, and horses seasonally between *invernadas* (lowland winter pastures) and *veranadas* (high-altitude summer pastures). This mobility-based way of living integrates Indigenous knowledge, ecosystem stewardship, and livestock production, sustaining both livelihoods and cultural identity.

Governance combines formal land arrangements with customary practices. Access to state-owned summer pastures is negotiated through agreements with government institutions, while private lands are accessed through ownership, leases, or local agreements. Daily management relies on reciprocal monitoring, shared labor, and collective decision-making, reflecting community responsibilities toward the territory.

The Pewenche pastoral territory faces challenges from climate change, economic pressures, youth outmigration, aging pastoralists, and policies that often fail to recognize Indigenous governance systems. Communities respond through flexible land access, collaborative labor, supplementary forage, and the continued use of traditional ecological knowledge.

The Cordillera Pewenche experience demonstrates that transhumance is not only a livestock practice but also a form of Indigenous territorial stewardship. Seasonal mobility supports pasture regeneration, prevents overuse of fragile ecosystems, sustains local economies, and enables intergenerational knowledge transmission. Recognized by FAO as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System, the territory highlights the importance of Indigenous governance and mobility-based approaches for resilient conservation.

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*Livestock. Photo provided
by: Juan Pablo del Valle*





Photo credit: Qiubi



Photo credit: Qiubi



About ICCA Consortium

The ICCA Consortium is an international association rooted in the movement for ICCAs—territories of life: territories and areas governed, conserved, and sustained by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The Consortium supports the self-determined priorities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, promotes appropriate recognition of their territories, and works to transform conservation, development, and policy systems toward justice, rights, care, and collective responsibility.

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