



# Position Paper

## **PASTORALISM AND PROTECTED AREAS**

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The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists Global Alliance (IYRP Global Alliance) calls upon States, protected-area authorities, organisations of the United Nations system, other international and regional organisations, including global conservation organisations, and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and academia, **“for action to uphold the rights of pastoralists, recognise their role in sustainable rangeland management and biodiversity conservation in protected areas and wider landscapes, and support conservation measures that contribute to pastoral livelihood resilience, including indigenous and community-conserved areas that support pastoral livestock systems.”**

## Introduction

Although mobile pastoralists play an important role in maintaining and conserving rangelands and other ecosystems (McGahey et al., 2014; Yilmaz et al., 2019), many responses to the biodiversity and climate crises, such as the establishment and expansion of protected areas across the world, cite pastoral activities as a key threat that needs to be tackled.

When pastoralists’ traditional capability to develop sustainable solutions in the face of new crises cannot cope with such externally imposed conditions, they are forced to either abandon pastoralism completely or diversify and change their management systems. This can lead to responses that, in some cases, create conflict with wildlife or institutionalised conservation mechanisms, resulting in overgrazing and other negative impacts (Yilmaz et al., 2019).

Not addressing the root causes of such conflicts and driven by other motivations, some governments have opted for hard-line strategies, such as restricting pastoral activities and creating inviolate (no-go) zones, which often have undesirable results not only for the communities but also for the environment (Studley, 2018; Homewood & Rodgers, 1984). The creation of state-governed protected areas that limit mobility, sedentarise, or forcibly evict pastoralists undermines their traditional ecological knowledge and governance systems, which are crucial for sustainable rangeland management (Naghizadeh et al., 2021). Such measures have often led to adverse consequences, including land degradation and the disruption of ecological connectivity, as highlighted in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Technical Guide on Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) integration (UNCCD, 2022).

Accordingly, the establishment of protected areas has been a significant driver in the decrease of mobile pastoralism, as these areas, in many cases, restrict livestock access and therefore herd mobility, changing governance systems from customary land-use to State-led conservation governance systems or even land grabbing—dispossession by either expropriation or privatisation—of lands, territories, and resources traditionally and collectively used by mobile pastoralists (Toutain et al., 2004).

Over the past decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the number and extent of protected areas established globally (UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2016a). Yet the commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to expand the global network of protected areas so far have been achieved mostly with a preventive and alienating approach by States, violating the land, territories, and other natural resource-related rights of mobile pastoralists, as has also been the case for many other indigenous and local communities (Ykhanbai et al., 2014; Toutain et al., 2004; UN, 2024).

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, through the adoption of Target 3, if applied with the same preventive and alienating approach, could further exacerbate this conflict through its goal of conserving 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas through systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures by 2030.

However, recognising and securing customary and collective tenure rights for mobile pastoralists is essential for sustaining rangelands. As highlighted in the VGGT, securing land tenure and access

rights, along with Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), is critical to promoting sustainable land management and preventing displacement or land grabbing (FAO, 2012). Accordingly, policies must promote collaborative governance models between pastoralist communities and conservation authorities, aligning with the VGGT's emphasis on inclusive decision-making processes and conflict management (FAO, 2012).

Unfortunately, by not addressing the root causes of such conflicts, the general view among the majority of conservationists has been that pastoralism is environmentally harmful and incompatible with nature conservation. Thus, many conservation organisations, including some globally leading ones, have unfortunately contributed to justifying policies and enforcements that restrict or ban mobility and access to rangelands and transform sustainable pastoralism into intensive livestock production. These policies often imposed top-down, prioritise issues other than the rights of communities (Yılmaz et al., 2019). In line with this neglect, many conservation organisations also evaluate rangelands using indicators that are not suited to a managed and therefore semi-natural system, which, in turn, misguides the design and application of conservation actions.

Recognising the long-standing role of mobile pastoralist communities in the conservation and maintenance of the world's rangelands and other ecosystems, the lack of proper collaboration in most formal protected-area systems is a missed opportunity. Further, acknowledging the rich body of traditional ecological knowledge held by mobile pastoralist communities and their continual interaction with and dependence on the landscape, the development of a rights-based approach and more symbiotic relationships and respectful exchange would certainly be mutually beneficial.

Instead of knee-jerk responses by protected-area managers to issues of pastoral activities, the critical role of mobile pastoralists as "mobile agents of change and preservation in ecosystems" needs to be integrated into protected-area strategies to ensure effective in situ conservation (Yılmaz et al., 2019). Finding win-win solutions for pastoralists and wildlife should become an urgent priority in areas where the two coexist (Niamir-Fuller et al., 2012).

## Therefore, the IYRP Global Alliance

Recalling Resolution 76/253 of 17 March 2022, by which the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026, that invites all Member States, organisations of the United Nations system, other international and regional organisations, and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and academia, to observe the International Year through activities aimed at directing attention to the relevance of the sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralism and its contribution to achieving sustainable development; acknowledges that efforts aimed at achieving sustainable rangelands and pastoralism need to be rapidly upscaled so as to have a significant impact on the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

Recalling Resolution 61/295 of 13 September 2007, by which UNGA adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which calls upon States to recognise the right of indigenous peoples to the lands, territories, and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired, and to give legal recognition and protection to the lands, territories, and resources and shall not forcibly remove the indigenous peoples from their lands or territories;

Recalling Resolution 73/165 of 17 December 2018, by which UNGA proclaimed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, that calls upon States to take appropriate measures to ensure the effective participation of peasants and other people working in rural areas in decision-making in matters that may affect their lives, land, and livelihoods; to provide legal recognition for land tenure rights, including customary land tenure rights not currently protected by law, recognising the existence of different models and systems; to protect legitimate tenure and ensure that peasants and other people working in rural areas are not arbitrarily or unlawfully evicted and that their rights are not otherwise extinguished or infringed, and to recognise and protect the natural commons and their related systems of collective use and management;

Recalling the UNCCD's decision 26/COP.14, which encourages Parties to recognise legitimate tenure rights, including customary rights, consistent with the national legal framework, and to ensure that measures to combat desertification, land degradation, and drought are carried out in a non-

discriminatory and participatory way so that they promote equal tenure rights and access to land for all, in particular vulnerable and marginalised groups, within the national context;

Recalling that particularly Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) also urges Parties to provide appropriate recognition to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities over their traditional territories, while implementing this target;

Emphasising that recognition of mobile pastoralists and the lands, territories, resources, and migration routes they govern and manage within the Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Mechanisms (OECM) framework can contribute to achieving Target 3 of the KMGBF in ways that uphold human rights and avoid harm to livelihoods with an equitable and inclusive conservation approach;

**Calls upon States, protected-area authorities, organisations of the United Nations system, other international and regional organisations, including global conservation organisations, and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and academia:**

- **To uphold the rights of pastoralists, recognise their role in sustainable rangeland management and biodiversity conservation in protected areas and wider landscapes, and support conservation measures that contribute to pastoral livelihood resilience, including indigenous and local community-conserved areas that support pastoral livestock systems.**

And accordingly:

- To govern and manage existing and establish future protected areas in full compliance with the inherent rights of mobile pastoralist communities, especially by recognising and securing their customary land tenure rights over their land, territories, and other natural resources, with their free, prior, and informed consent, avoiding policies that harm the physical, cultural, and spiritual integrity of these communities, such as forced evictions, sedentarisation, and restrictions on their mobility.
- To develop robust policies, mechanisms, and measures to ensure that human rights violations—such as abuses, forced evictions, and other injustices against pastoralists—are not enabled or tolerated in protected areas and new forms of conservation areas, and that collaboration is forbidden with any entity, whether a private company or a government, that engages in such violations.
- To develop robust policies, mechanisms, and measures that ensure the effective participation and representation of mobile pastoralist communities in the designation, governance, and management of protected areas with an inclusive approach that recognises the traditional ecological knowledge of mobile pastoralists, including customary common property and governance systems, as an integral part of new collaborations going forward.
- To develop good practice guidelines, fully informed by mobile pastoralist communities, in order to find mutually beneficial solutions regarding the governance and management of protected areas.
- To assess and recognise the beneficial role of mobile pastoralists in maintaining rangeland and other ecosystems, including but not limited to ensuring ecological connectivity between protected areas and with wider landscapes.
- To explore and apply new conservation approaches and frameworks, such as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Mechanisms (OECMs), in both securing the access and tenure rights of mobile pastoralists over their land, territories, and other natural resources, and ensuring in situ conservation of biodiversity.

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