

WHY WE NEED PRO-PASTORALIST POLICIES

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In this brief, we explore the importance of pastoralism in Eastern Africa (section 1). We identify the main challenges faced by pastoralists today (section 2) and present our vision for pastoralists' future (section 3). We detail seven measures that African states and the EU can implement to support pastoralism (section 4).



KEY POLICY MESSAGES

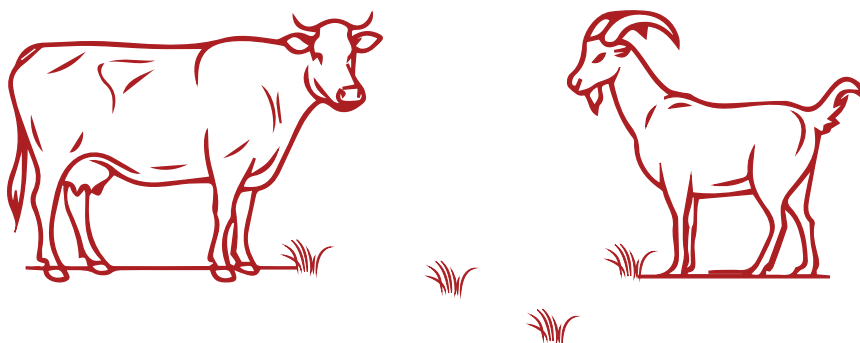
- Pastoralism holds tremendous socio-economic significance while contributing to territorial and climatic resilience, ecological balance and cultural diversity. Yet pastoralism continues to be misunderstood and undermined. 2026 is the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. Let's support pastoralists!
- European policies and projects in the areas of biodiversity, nature conservation, agriculture, trade and climate change have a significant impact on pastoralism and on the human rights of pastoralists in Eastern Africa.
- We call on European institutions and policymakers to recognise, valorise, protect and support pastoralism. By investing in pro-pastoralist policies and programmes, European institutions can promote social and political stability, environmental resilience and economic inclusion in Eastern Africa.
- We call on Eastern African countries to include pastoralism-based strategies in their national climate and biodiversity strategies.
- We identify 7 pro-pastoralist measures and call on the EU and Eastern African States to: (1) Protect pastoralists' lands and livestock mobility; (2) Support food and water security and economic resilience; (3) Invest in decentralised infrastructure development and ensure people-led service delivery in pastoral areas; (4) Ensure socio-ecological and climate resilience; (5) Enhance pastoralist institutions, voices and culture; (6) Raise awareness and address negative stereotypes; (7) Finance public research on pastoralism.

1. WHAT IS PASTORALISM?

Pastoralism is a livelihood centered on herding and managing domesticated livestock that relies mostly on extensive and communal land use. Pastoralists use strategic mobility to take advantage of natural environments characterised by variability to make a living. Strategic mobility also supports biodiversity and rangeland health.

- **Effective land use systems** that support local communities' resilience and ensure ecological integrity. Pastoralists have institutions and strategies, such as reciprocal and controlled grazing arrangements, to take advantage of highly unpredictable opportunities².
- **Food security** and nutrition of both high- and low-income households, producing almost 90% of the meat consumed in Eastern Africa.³ Pastoralists supply protein-rich foods by managing low-input systems that have provided stable livelihoods for generations.

- **Economic value** and the provision of employment and livelihood for up to 20 million people in Eastern Africa, as well as significant contributions to GDPs⁴. Pastoralism also helps raise crop-farming productivity by providing manure, animals for draught and transport, seasonal labour and technical knowledge.
- **Environmental value** by shaping the ecology of rangeland landscapes in Eastern Africa through grazing, controlled fire, and control of bush encroachment⁵, which help maintain biodiversity and sequester carbon⁶.
- **Climate change adaptation and mitigation** because pastoralists are better positioned to accommodate climate change than are livestock keepers and crop farmers tied to sedentary land uses. The pastoralists' low-external-input system⁷ shows the way to a future of climate-neutral agrifood systems.
- **Social and cultural value** reflecting a rich tapestry of Indigenous knowledge and social institutions and an irreplaceable intangible heritage.



2. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES FOR PASTORALISTS IN EASTERN AFRICA?

Pastoralists in Eastern Africa are facing several interconnected challenges that generate impoverishment and disenfranchisement:

- **Induced land scarcity and reduced mobility:** As a result of colonisation and post-independence sedentarisation, modernisation and rural development policies, many pastoralists have lost access to a large part of their grazing areas, including access to permanent water in the dry season.⁸ Restrictions on herd mobility have hurt pastoralists' ability to make productive use of the drylands and have generated conflicts.⁹ The impacts of these changes are highly gendered.
- **Human rights violations:** Pastoralists are often stereotyped as “backward” or “unproductive,” which has justified decades of policy neglect, underinvestment, and social and political exclusion. Key abuses include violations of the rights to health, education and food, as well as violations of their civil and political rights. Land-use changes—whether for cultivation, conservation, tourism or carbon-offset projects—are often undertaken without Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).¹⁰ In some cases, militarized security forces – in collaboration with private tourism or conservation interests – are used against unarmed pastoralists.¹¹
- **Drought and extreme climatic variations:** For pastoralists, droughts are not just temporary crises—they compound into long-term impoverishment by significantly reducing herd sizes, income and food security.¹² While pastoral mobility is well positioned to take advantage of climate variations, this adaptability is increasingly undermined by land loss, limited mobility and inappropriate policies.
- **Invasive species:** *Prosopis juliflora* crowds out indigenous grasses essential for livestock,¹³ and its spread is exacerbated by drought and ecological changes.¹⁴ Consequently, rangelands now face reduced productivity.¹⁵
- **Contradictory climate and biodiversity strategies and carbon credit projects:** Pastoralism is not recognized as a valid mitigation strategy in current climate and biodiversity plans at the national level. In most documents, the emphasis is on improving livestock management as part of crop-based systems rather than on pastoralism. At the same time, pastoral areas are increasingly targeted by private actors for the development of soil and biodiversity carbon credit projects, leading to land alienation and loss of control over communal resources.¹⁶
- **Lack of recognition of pastoralist culture:** The commodification of culture through tourism, top-down heritage designations and integration into neoliberal conservation frameworks often result in the appropriation of pastoralist identities, while state-led governance structures undermine customary mechanisms for land use, conflict resolution and resource allocation.
- **Structural discrimination, racism and epistemic injustice:** Negative stereotypes and state discrimination explain the lack of attention to pastoralism in international policy. There has been a lack of people-led interdisciplinary research on pastoralism, creating a form of epistemic injustice.

3. WHAT IS OUR VISION?

We want to see a world where pastoralists are fully recognised citizens, whose human rights are respected and protected, and who are able to gain a decent livelihood. Pastoral livelihood systems are to be valued and understood as valid and rational land-use systems in the drylands, not as remnants of the past.

Our holistic vision encompasses the following dimensions:

- **Land:** Pastoralists' customary arrangements regarding ownership and tenure of natural resources (such as water and rangeland) are recognised and protected. Land-tenure systems are based primarily on the concept of the commons rather than private and exclusive land ownership. Any development, investment or extractive project is subject to FPIC as per international human rights law. Multiple- and communal land use is facilitated.
- **Mobility:** Pastoral mobility is acknowledged as an asset for overall sustainable development, in both socio-economic terms and environmental terms. Herd mobility over extensive areas, also across borders, is enabled through the development and implementation of appropriate legal frameworks and investments
- **Human rights of pastoralists** to food, health and education guaranteed. State social and economic services are compatible with mobile systems of production. Respecting and supporting pastoralist institutions and self-organisation is key to making this happen.
- **Socio-ecological resilience:** Grazing lands continue to sustain the necessary conditions for pastoral systems to flourish, including through adequate climate action, rangeland restoration and drought prevention. Measures to mitigate climate change in drylands enable pastoralism through supportive policies and removing barriers.
- **Pastoralist customary institutions** and civil society organisations actively contribute to policy design, implementation and evaluation¹⁷ and Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination.
- **Cultural heritage** is thriving and pastoralists' rituals, symbols and different forms of knowledge are maintained thanks to their foundational relationships to livestock and grazing lands.

in relevant infrastructure.



4. HOW CAN THE EU SUPPORT PASTORALISM?

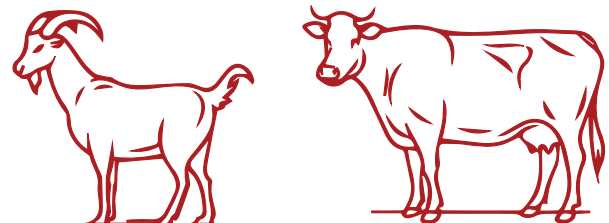
MEASURE 1 - Protect pastoralists' lands and livestock mobility

- **Take action to protect and reduce pressure on rangelands** by avoiding conversion to inappropriate land uses, e.g., crop monocultures, tree plantations, afforestation¹⁸.
- **Keep rangelands as commons** to allow flexible, productive and sustainable use of the drylands. Ensure that conservation policies promote co-existence rather than the separation of humans and nature¹⁹. **Enable multiple land uses** through appropriate planning and statutory tenure. Provide for the development and maintenance of livestock corridors, including the establishment of bylaws for their flexible use.
- **Identify and protect strategic land areas for pastoralists.** Ensure FPIC and conduct human rights-based impact assessments prior to any investment or development project, including those under the "green transition"²⁰. Recognise and address the historical and political drivers of environmental degradation and overgrazing, such as induced land scarcity.
- **Facilitate transboundary movements** of pastoralists with their herds, including through transboundary agreements²¹. Contribute to regional and continental integration and security by supporting the implementation of African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) relevant policies and protocols.
- **Hold companies accountable** if they disrupt pastoralist livelihoods or human rights, be it for the extraction of minerals, conservation, tourism, carbon credit projects or through the import of milk powder that destroys pastoralists' dairying activities. Support and facilitate pastoralists' **access to courts and**

justice in case of land alienation, human rights abuse and all other infringements on their rights as citizens.

MEASURE 2 - Support food and water security and economic resilience

- Re-assess and **reform economic policies** that harm rangelands and pastoralists. For example, supplemental feed subsidies can be replaced by risk management, livestock insurance and mobile abattoirs. Facilitate pastoralists' access to reliable information on biomass availability, biomass quality, surface water availability, herd concentration and market prices.
- **Promote diversity of opportunities and livelihoods** through adequate investments in human resources such as access to information, education, vocational training, alternative skills, etc. Help develop the marketing and local trading of milk during the wet seasons, by developing context-appropriate milk standards and promoting investment in services and decentralised infrastructure such as mini-dairies and local processing facilities.²²
- **Protect the rights of pastoralists as local smallholder producers** in the context of trade liberalisation agreements. **Provide assets to**



women and youth, such as dairy cows, sheep or goats: this is a powerful way to provide valuable, and valued, start-up capital.

MEASURE 3 - Invest in decentralised infrastructure development and ensure people-led service delivery in pastoral areas

- **Facilitate access to livestock services** and improve veterinary services, especially for poor pastoralists.²³ Animal-health services must be adapted to the herders' mobile lifestyle.
- **Support pro-pastoralism investments** to help redress the historical under-investment and malinvestment in the rangelands including mobile slaughterhouses.
- **Support initiatives to improve local service delivery** (formal education, health services, access to water) that are compatible with mobile systems of production and pastoralist knowledge systems.
- **Promote and implement gender-responsive programmes** and policies. Support education, health and other social services adapted to the needs of women and girls.²⁴

MEASURE 4 - Ensure socio-ecological and climate resilience

- **Include pro-pastoralism strategies in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**²⁵ for their ability to address biodiversity loss, climate change land degradation, and wildfires²⁶ through communal grazing land management.
- **Implement approaches to biodiversity conservation that do not rely on the separation of humans and nature**²⁷. Uphold the rights of pastoralists in protected areas including indigenous and local community-conserved areas that support pastoral livestock systems.²⁸ Design rangeland restoration projects that strengthen the resilience of pastoralist livelihoods as part of the "green transition".²⁹

- **Do not support or invest in carbon or biodiversity credit projects** because these are not properly regulated, do not ensure FPIC and may have negative impacts on pastoralism and mobility.

MEASURE 5 - Enhance pastoralist institutions, voices and culture

- **Support initiatives to strengthen and amplify pastoralists' voices** and legal empowerment.
- **Finance the participation** of pastoralists in international processes, with an emphasis on supporting women-only and women-led groups.³⁰
- **Eliminate gender-based violence** and address its drivers through education programmes.

MEASURE 6 - Raise awareness and address negative stereotypes

- Explicitly recognise the value of pastoralism in EU policies regarding Africa, especially for ecologically oriented production of protein-rich food.
- Contribute to a more nuanced/balanced narrative in global climate debates about the role of sustainable livestock systems, including pastoralism, in transforming agri-food systems.

MEASURE 7 - Finance public research on pastoralism

- **Address research gaps** by supporting the gathering of adequate data and information around pastoralism and pastoralists to inform people-led planning, policy and resource sharing.
- Make sure pastoralists are **key actors who frame the research** and its objectives, and not just objects of research, and **integrate pastoralist women and girls** into participatory action research.

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