

### Background:

In 2015, the South Asia Pastoralist Alliance (SAPA) was established as a regional platform for pastoralists in South Asia, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) during the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Pastoralists (WAMIP) regional process. The formation of SAPA aimed to amplify the voices of pastoralists at the regional level and promote long-term collaboration. Since 2016, the International Land Coalition (ILC) has provided support to SAPA through global rangeland initiatives.

Pastoralism is a traditional way of life centred around herding livestock and utilizing rangelands. In South Asia, pastoralists follow various patterns of rangeland use, protection, management, preservation, and conservation. Many pastoralists continue to practice their traditional lifestyle, which involves moving with their herds. They possess expertise in breeding and maintaining highly adapted breeds of camels, cattle, domestic buffaloes, sheep, goats, yaks, pigs, horses, and donkeys.

By constantly moving with their herds, pastoralists have honed the ability to be in the right place at the right time. Unlike food production systems that rely on predictability and struggle to control natural environments, pastoralists benefit from the high variability of the natural environment. They choose their locations based on the availability of grazing resources for their herds. This sustainable use of the environment depends on the freedom to move. To ensure the sustainability of pastoralism, it is essential to guarantee the mobility of pastoralists.

**Pastoralist mobility in South Asia** reflects a unique and time-honoured way of life, shaped by the region's diverse geography and climatic conditions. Preserving this traditional practice while addressing the challenges it faces is crucial for maintaining the ecological balance and cultural diversity of the region.

In South Asia, pastoralist communities can be found in various countries, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and parts of Afghanistan and Bangladesh. They are an integral part of the region's cultural and social fabric, and their way of life has been shaped by diverse geographic and climatic conditions.

### Key features of pastoralist mobility in South Asia:

- **Seasonal Movement:** Pastoralists in South Asia follow a cyclical pattern of movement, often driven by seasonal changes. During the dry season, when pastures become scarce, they move to higher altitudes or regions with better water availability. In the wet season, they descend to lower areas where fresh vegetation is abundant.
- **Traditional Knowledge:** Pastoralists possess a wealth of traditional knowledge about the land, weather patterns, and animal behavior, accumulated over generations. This knowledge enables them to make informed decisions about when and where to move their herds.

- **Livestock-Based Livelihood:** Pastoralists' livelihoods revolve around their livestock. They rely on their animals not only for milk, meat, and other products but also for trade and cultural ceremonies. As a result, the health and well-being of their herds are of utmost importance.
- **Resource Management:** Pastoralist mobility is, in essence, a form of resource management. By moving their livestock, they allow the pastures they leave behind to regenerate, reducing overgrazing and ensuring the sustainability of natural resources.

### The Importance of Pastoralists and Mobility:

In recent decades, the mobility of pastoralists has been restricted by the establishment of political and administrative boundaries within rangelands, widespread industrialization, erosion of control over traditional institutions, and the dismantling of local practices. Additionally, pastoralists and indigenous communities, who heavily rely on common property resources such as land and forests to sustain their way of life, have been continuously marginalized and alienated from these resources. Including measures for safe and dignified passage in policies can recognize the valuable contributions of pastoralists to nature.

Different viewpoints exist regarding the pastoralist population (estimated to range from 22 million to 500 million worldwide), the extent of rangeland coverage (ranging from 18% to 80% of the world's surface), the impacts of land use policies on pastoralists' way of life and land use patterns, the effects of climate change on pastoralist livelihood strategies and rangelands, and how the international community can support tenure security and sustainable management and governance of rangelands. This webinar aims to address the challenges faced by pastoralists in terms of mobility and highlight various regional initiatives that align with the thematic priorities of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026.

### Pastoralist Mobility and Challenges:

Pastoralists in South Asia face numerous challenges that threaten their traditional way of life and livelihoods. One of the most significant challenges is the encroachment of their rangelands/commons and water sources due to expanding agricultural and urban areas. This often leads to conflicts over land rights and access to resources. Additionally, climate change poses a considerable threat to pastoralist mobility as irregular rainfall patterns and extreme weather events disrupt traditional migration routes and affect the availability of pasture and water. Government policies may not always align with the nomadic lifestyle of pastoralists, leading to restrictions on their movements and access to resources rather it motivates pastoralists towards a sedentary lifestyle. One of the major challenges faced by pastoralists is the cross-border and inter-state mobility with their livestock. During their journeys, they encounter difficulties with regard to maintaining their identity and accessing markets at their destination points and along the routes. Existing policies and schemes do not adequately support such nomadic practices, and legal restrictions often prevent cross-border mobility, pushing pastoralists towards a sedentary lifestyle. Moreover, infrastructural development, such as dams and highways, can further disrupt their migration routes. Socio-economic pressures, driven by globalization and modernization, may also push some pastoralist communities towards sedentary lifestyles, leading to the loss of traditional knowledge and

cultural heritage. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure the sustainability of pastoralist communities and preserve the ecological and cultural diversity of South Asia.

### Contribution of Pastoralists through Mobility

Pastoralism's mobility plays a pivotal role in climate mitigation and economic chains through breed and grass biodiversity conservation, as well as the production of milk, meat, wool, and other essential goods. By cyclically moving their herds to fresh grazing areas, pastoralists not only ensure sustainable resource management and ecosystem preservation but also contribute to climate mitigation through the sequestration of carbon in well-managed grazing lands. Their nomadic lifestyle also encourages the conservation of diverse breeds of livestock, fostering genetic diversity and resilience in the face of environmental challenges. Furthermore, by maintaining traditional grassland practices, pastoralists protect biodiversity and prevent the loss of valuable grass species. In economic chains, pastoralists' production of milk, meat, wool, farming sector and other goods is vital for local and regional economies, providing livelihoods and sustaining food security for numerous communities. Thus, pastoralism's mobility and contributions are essential for fostering environmental sustainability, preserving biodiversity, and supporting vibrant economic systems.

### Expected Outcomes of the Webinar:

- Enhanced understanding of pastoralist agendas and mobility, in line with the twelve thematic priorities of the IYRP 2026.
- Strengthened regional networking and improved collaboration among stakeholders to promote the recognition of pastoralists and their mobility.