

Rethinking policies for pastoralists – governing the rangelands

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ABSTRACT

Policies and governance arrangements are relevant in shaping livelihoods in the pastoral regions of the world. Institutions and rules that enable access to land, markets and investment for pastoralists and those that regulate their participation in the political arena are critical in fostering or constraining livelihoods and the capacities to respond adaptively to uncertainties. Decades of misconceived narratives leading to distorted policies around pastoralism have significantly undermined the capacity of formal institutions, state agencies and development organisations to deal with the complexity of pastoral systems and eroded their legitimacy vis-à-vis herding communities. Despite more recent scientific and policy debates, new generations of civil servants, local authorities and development agents firmly believe that dismissing the pastoral lifestyle is the necessary prerequisite for a transition to modernity. This in turn nurtures patterns of marginalisation, grievance and instability. As pastoral regions have become the focus of new economic interests and competing socio-political agendas, these tensions can be easily manipulated. This paper assesses the political framework in pastoral areas in four regions, with the aim of understanding how this affects the livelihoods of local communities and the implications for local decision-making and the broader political arena.

Keywords: grazing systems, livestock, pastoralism, policy, rangelands governance, resilience, uncertainty.

Introduction

The institutional and policy framework for rangelands across the world very often runs counter to how pastoralists use their lands. By imposing measures that restrict resource access and mobility patterns, the sustainable management of pastoral regions is undermined. Such policy approaches aim to control and limit uncertainty, rather than living with and from uncertainty, seeing variability as an opportunity (FAO 2021; Scoones and Nori 2023). The very features that make pastoralists successful and resilient, such as mobility, flexible resource management and transnational networks, for example, are frequently challenged by policies and institutions of nation states, and are often reinforced by development agencies.

Official data and figures in pastoral areas should always be taken with due caution, because they could be influenced by faulty measurement practices or partisan political interests. There is an extensive literature on these issues (Hesse and MacGregor 2006; Nori 2019; Kerven *et al.* 2021). Although the data are unreliable and inconsistent, for the purposes of our analysis, we consider indications emerging from medium-term trends.

Agricultural, food, land and trade policies across the world are often conceived in ways that disadvantage pastoralists, whose lands are considered empty, their labour unproductive and their livestock inadequately commoditised (Hesse and MacGregor 2006; APSS and RBM 2013). The consequences of the longstanding mix of misinformed policy actions and poorly conceived investments inspired by such narratives means that formal state institutions and development agencies are poorly suited and ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of pastoral systems. A World Bank assessment in the 1990s argued that the pastoral sector experienced the greatest concentration of failed development projects in the world. Neither productivity nor income improved for most herders;

for most rangelands, the sustainable capacity to produce was not enhanced and, for most donor and lending agencies, anticipated financial rates of return were not achieved (de Haan 1993).

Although there have been improvements in the past decades, failures recur. This paper asks why and suggests ways forward. In particular, the paper explores how prejudices against pastoralism and pastoralists endure as a persistent feature in many policies and institutions, legislative frames and investment patterns. It assesses the ways policy narratives in four world regions remain obstinately unfavourable to extensive livestock producers. The current crisis affecting rangelands across the world is, we argue, a reflection of the failure to challenge such narratives and reform institutions, policies and governance systems. The adequate recognition of pastoralists' rights and needs, including the protection of their assets, and their full political and legitimate representation, are a prerequisite to integrating pastoralists in a more inclusive society.

Policy disconnects

Rangelands cover more than half the world's land surface (ILRI *et al.* 2021). In these regions, pastoralism, i.e. the extensive use of rangelands through mobile livestock keeping, provides the most effective way to generate a livelihood and manage the natural resource base in highly uncertain settings (Scoones 2021). Scientific research has long demonstrated that through highly skilled herding, pastoralists maximise production by exploiting the variability of environments where other forms of food production are unfeasible (Behnke *et al.* 1993; Krätli and Schareika 2010; FAO 2021; Konaka and Little 2021). Translating good principles into effective practices proves to be a challenge, as the problem is not only technical, but also political.

There is a growing literature on lessons learnt and best practices to overcome past misconceptions and mistakes (FAFO 2016; IFAD 2018; FAO 2021). Opportunities to engage with and support pastoralists exist, but most conventional policy and investment frameworks continue to pursue stabilising and controlling approaches, resulting in the undermining of pastoral systems, instead of appreciating their capacities to perform under uncertain and variable conditions (Nori and Scoones 2019; Scoones 2023). Negotiating access to resources, navigating volatile markets and responding to conflict and complex political dynamics are essential if livelihoods are to be generated (Krätli 2019; Nori 2019; FAO 2021). What institutions and policies are appropriate in such settings?

The institutional and policy domains that impinge on pastoralists' livelihoods are many, ranging from management of

natural resources through production and marketing of animal products, issues of land rights and infrastructure development and regional integration and territorial security. In different regions, different historical, ideological and economic factors apply. Nevertheless, as discussed below, there is a convergence of institutional and policy positions across world regions. Pastoralist herding communities often operate through extensive, mobile and often transnational networks. National borders and frontiers often cut across pastoral territories, which are far from core areas where investments and state policies concentrate. Therefore, there is often a disconnect between pastoralists and the state, because pastoralists live in remote locations such as the mountainous areas and plateaux of Europe, central Asia and Latin America, and the semi-arid territories in Africa, in the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula. Pastoralist communities are often a minority in their national constituency, and so have little influence on state policies. This makes it difficult for central states to serve pastoralists, but also makes it difficult to control them.

This paper assesses how prejudices against pastoralism and pastoralists endure as a persistent feature in most institutions, legislative frames and investment patterns, and explores how alternative narratives might emerge based on evidence from four regions. It draws on an extensive review of literature, including many policy papers and associated commentaries (Nori 2019), from four regions where pastoralism is an important livelihood, namely, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.¹ This review was complemented by interviews with stakeholders and was combined with direct field experience. An approach to qualitative narrative analysis was taken, looking for common approaches in documents that influence the framing of policy in each region. Policy documents of course may reflect the intentions and ideals of policymaking rather than the reality on the ground following implementation (or the lack of it). For this reason, the narrative analysis of written documents is combined with reflections on outcomes documented in the critical literature and in evaluation assessments. The aim of the paper is to identify the narratives that frame policy and the outcomes that have emerged over time. Together, these analyses suggest ways forward both for reconfiguring policy narratives and for recasting implementation in ways that are more compatible with pastoral contexts.

Rangeland controversies

Pastoralism is a vitally important livelihood practice globally, because it supports many millions of people, often in

¹Other regions could have been covered, including North/South America and Australasia, but the chosen regions represent a significant proportion of pastoral areas globally (Fig. 1). The initial literature reviews are available in Nori (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). It might be added that these regions include an even larger proportion of the world's pastoralists.

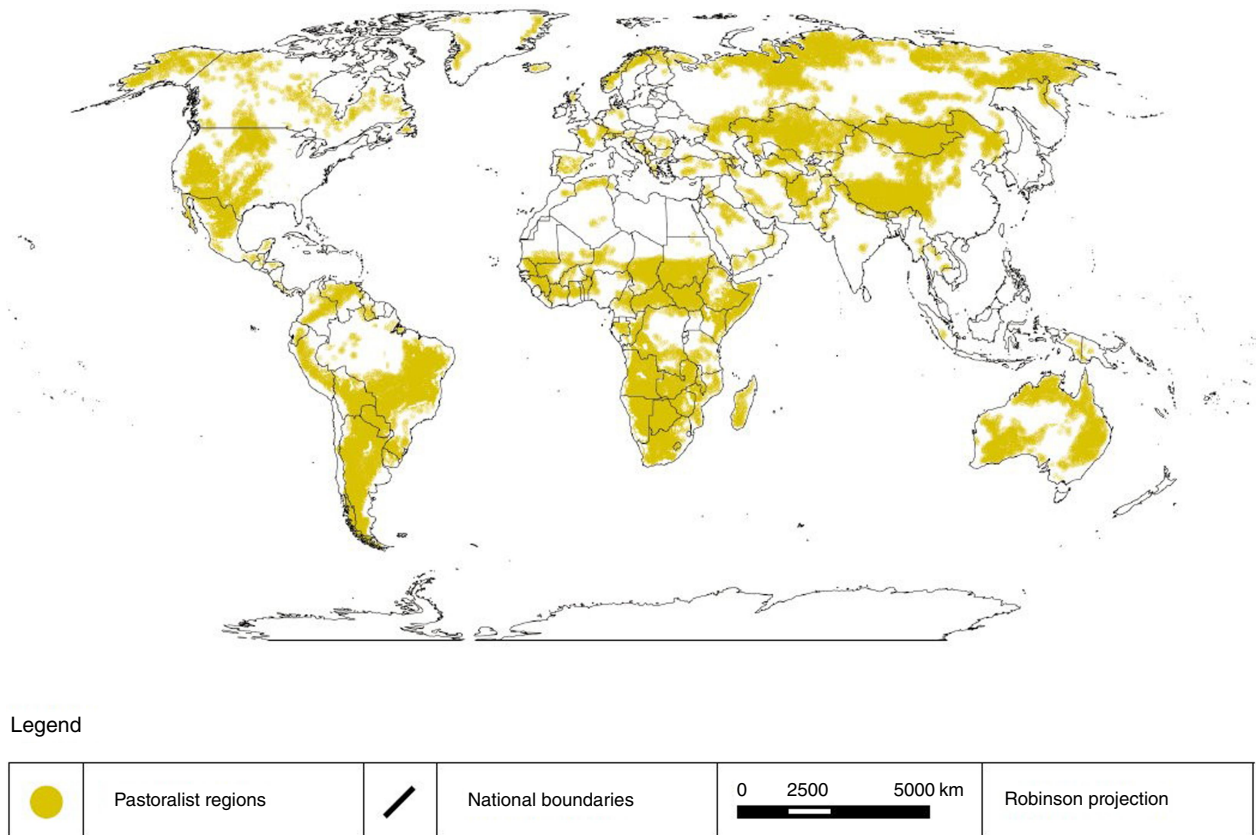


Fig. 1. The global distribution of pastoralism (own elaboration from IUCN and UNEP 2015).

harsh environments, and contributes to local economies and natural resource management (Hesse and McGregor 2006; ILRI *et al.* 2021; Scoones 2021, 2023).

Livelihoods in pastoral regions are characterised by the reliable management of variable resources to provide for food, income and services in settings continuously challenged by uncertainties (Roe 2020; Scoones and Nori 2023). Intense environmental change is taking place in most rangeland territories, driven by shifting climate demographic patterns, as well as the encroachment on pastoral lands by external investments. Most pastoral regions are considered as hotspots for climate change, whether the Hindu-Kush mountainous ranges, the Mediterranean region or the sub-Saharan Africa drylands (Schilling *et al.* 2012; IPCC 2014). These areas are also subject to extensive land and green grabbing through external investments in what are now seen as frontier areas for economic expansion (Nori *et al.* 2008; Lind *et al.* 2020; Sharma *et al.* 2003).

In the following sections, the institutional framework underpinning policymaking and governance systems that guide decision-making and investments in different pastoral regions of the world will be assessed. As the discussion below shows, different regional experiences converge, highlighting the challenges faced by formal institutions when dealing with pastoral populations and systems.

Results: converging policy narratives across four regions

Policies in a loop in sub-Saharan Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), pastoralism provides a main source of livelihood for significant numbers of people. Across the vast dryland belt stretching from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, extensive livestock production and cross-border mobility contribute to local food security, national economies and regional integration, and shape the socio-cultural patterns of distinct communities. Most pastoralists do not fit within the national institutional architecture, because the establishment of central states and the drawing of border frontiers converted pastoralists from regional majorities to national minorities.

The marginalisation of pastoralists in national politics and mainstream society is evident in most countries in the region. Poverty rates and food and physical insecurity rank highest in most drylands, while levels of public expenditure and investment and service provision are much below the national average (Odhiambo 2006; Wane 2006; AU 2010a; Catley and Aklilu 2013). Moreover, for decades, policies and investments have encouraged crop farmers to expand their livelihoods by encroaching on grazing lands. This leads to a

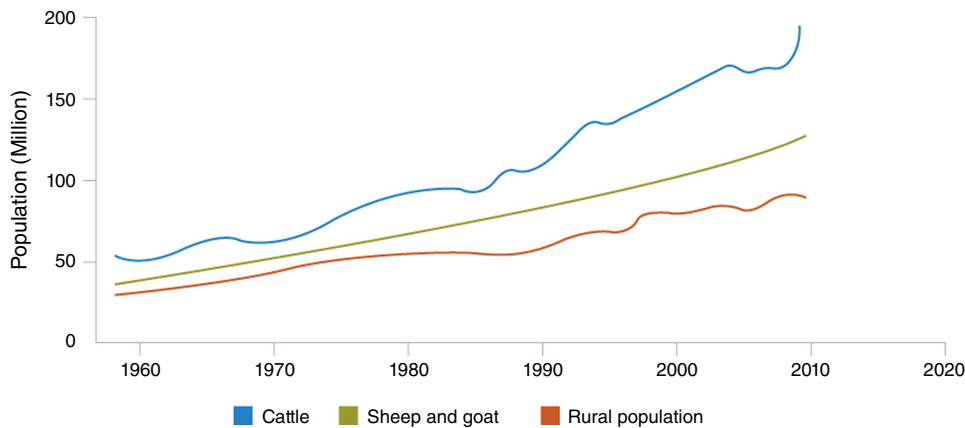


Fig. 2. Growth of livestock and rural human population in African drylands (own elaboration from De Haan *et al.* 2016).

blurring of land-use boundaries, reducing complementarity and increasing competition for land between crop farmers and herders. Pastoralists claim that, while crop farming encroachment has received support from national and international organisations, the expansion of grazing options has been prevented, thus generating a sense of inequity and frustration (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019; RBM 2021).

In the Sahel, a more favourable institutional set-up has provided opportunities for pastoralists' engagement in the policy arena, through either processes of decentralisation or regional integration. The development of Pastoral Codes across Sahelian countries in the early 2000, aimed to systematise and regulate pastoral land use, provides a good example (Nori *et al.* 2008; APSS and RBM 2013; RBM 2021). A more representative civil society has grown as a result, often evolving from local networks and customary systems. However, these openings are also exploited by local elites to engage in state structures and donor investment schemes, to the detriment of other groups (Nori 2022a).

The penetration of the market economy and the incorporation of rangelands into the wider political and commercial arena also impinge on the livelihoods of herding communities, as new economic and political agendas reconfigure pastoral territories, economies and societies. Trade in animal products has grown dramatically across and beyond

the regions, and milk markets are now widespread in most countries, often managed by skilful pastoralist women's networks (Catley *et al.* 2013; Nori 2023). The processes of rangeland encroachment, livestock commoditisation and youth emigration further contribute to patterns of social differentiation, stratification and exclusion, with poorer groups losing out from these processes and becoming more insecure and vulnerable (Catley and Aklilu 2013; Krätli *et al.* 2013). Broader land-use reconfiguration is also driven by intense environmental change in sub-Saharan African drylands, shifting climate patterns and the growing pressure from a fast-growing human as well as animal population (Fig. 2).

Access to land is a major challenge in most countries in the region, and state policy frequently exacerbates the problem. Most countries indeed sponsor policies to settle pastoralists and to convert their lands to crop farms and ranches. Whatever the prevailing narrative, most governments fail to harness the potentials of pastoral systems, pursuing instead dryland modernisation through strategies grounded in transforming pastoralists into sedentary, intensive and commercial producers (Nori 2022a). Policies may also disrupt pastoralist livelihoods by imposing large infrastructure schemes (such as the economic development corridors in eastern Africa) or by developing environmental and/or climate mitigation schemes in pastoral territories that

Box 1. The Great Green Wall (excerpt from Nori 2022a)

As mobile livestock are considered dangerous for rangeland ecosystems, the best way to 'prevent the expansion of the Sahara' is planting a vast wall of trees across 11 African countries, stretching from Senegal to Djibouti. Major criticisms of the plan address the limited sensibility for both ecological and socio-economic considerations. The key issue is again one of a 'sedentist' vision that hinges on tree plantings to stabilise an ecosystem that is by nature variable, whereas a non-equilibrium approach would indicate a more flexible perspective on the environment and making use of variability, including through mobile livestock. Once it is recognised that the Sahara extension depends largely on macro climatic factors, rather than on local practices, for about two-thirds, according to UNCCD (2014), it should be accepted that the challenge is not rolling back the Sahara by building barriers against deserts and fixing boundaries/tenures, but rather by recognising non-equilibrium dynamics and responding to the embedded variability.

The massive and costly Great Green Wall is just another large investment scheme that satisfies donors and governments rather than local communities, who are by the way already behind most of the localised and tailored afforestation and agro-forestry schemes. The slow and little advancements of this program receive massive funding and provide a glamorous picture of the ways misinformed environmental narratives feed exogenous policy interests, which do not address local concerns or tackle livelihood needs.

undermine livelihoods (such as the Great Green Wall in the Sahel) (Chome *et al.* 2020; Scoones and Toulmin 2021). These schemes perpetuate rigid perspectives that poorly fit pastoralists' needs for mobility and flexibility.

Even when policy efforts have tried redressing decades of marginalisation and neglect, such as through the African Union policy framework for pastoral areas (AU 2010b), or the declaration of Ndjamena and Nouakchott (Déclaration de N'Djaména 2013; Déclaration de Nouakchott sur le Pastoralisme 2013), which recognise the strategic role of pastoralist communities as allies in managing and securing the drylands, such well intentioned initiatives have mostly remained on paper, and so have contributed to furthering the disillusionment towards the formal institutional set-up (Faye 2008; Nori *et al.* 2008; Mohamadou 2009; UNECA 2017; RBM 2021).

Across sub-Saharan African drylands, pastoralists, nevertheless, struggle to keep pace with ongoing changes, seizing opportunities by expanding and diversifying their economy and elaborating new mechanisms to provide social support and cooperation (Little 2021; Mohamed 2022; Taye 2022). The longstanding and widespread processes of impoverishment and dispossession, together with the sense of exclusion from the policy arena, fuel frustration and political grievance among herding communities, especially the pastoralist youth, who may become attracted to illegal organisations or insurgent movements (Nori and Baldaro 2018; Benjaminsen and Ba 2019). Insecurity further affects pastoralists, who in turn pay the highest price in terms of rights and livelihoods (UNECA 2017; IOM 2019; Brottem and McDonnell 2020; RBM 2021).

Never-ending revolutions in Asian regions

Asian pastoralists inhabit extended territories that stretch from the borders of eastern Europe to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with a huge diversity in agro-ecological and socio-economic environments and political dynamics. Under diverse conditions, pastoralists across Asia have always had to negotiate a way through centralised policy frameworks that were established to facilitate their incorporation into the state or the market.

Chinese policies, for example, consider most rangelands strategic areas for regional watersheds. Herding and grazing are assumed to be a main driver of environmental degradation in these regions, and preserving rangelands is assumed to mean reducing the overall grazing pressure by dismantling extensive livestock breeding and dislocating pastoral communities. With a view to regulating livestock–rangeland interactions, Chinese rangelands have undergone intense social and territorial engineering during the past decades. Settlement programmes, large-scale fencing, and subsidy and loan schemes have been accompanied by state-sponsored migratory flows and large infrastructure development associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (Kerven 2006; Harris 2010; Ptackova 2011; Chies 2018).

Centralised programmes mixing economic growth, poverty alleviation and ecological concerns have informed different policy waves, which have typically swung through different forms of collective, communal and household-based control of land, livestock and labour (Li *et al.* 2014). Shifting policy measures, market-based reforms and investments significantly affect the ability of herding communities to respond to uncertainty. Caught between modernisation efforts and an environmental agenda, pastoralists have responded innovatively to centrally designed policies, in ways that exhibit considerable resilience through maintaining degrees of community governance. Today, forms of hybrid rangeland governance that are compromises between state-imposed policies and local context persist and evolve with the aim to support livelihoods in the midst of dramatic economic and environmental changes (Fernández-Giménez *et al.* 2012; Bauer and Gyal 2015; Gongbuzeren *et al.* 2018; Tsering 2022).

Other parts of central Asia had similar experiences during the Soviet period, when centralised planning reconfigured the institutional set-up and the management of land, livestock and labour in collectivised ways. During that time however pastoral mobility and the transboundary movement of animals, products and people were not problematic, which significantly facilitated pastoral economies in Soviet-controlled regions. The dissolution of the Soviet system and the collapse of the associated institutional and economic infrastructure generated huge uncertainties for pastoralists in central Asia. These have been exacerbated by the rapid pace of reform imposed by international organisations and financial agencies as states made the transition to a market economy (Robinson *et al.* 2012; Steinmann 2012; Kerven *et al.* 2021).

Today, policy trajectories vary from one country to another, spanning from a persistent presence of the state and central planning principles to more market-led reforms to forms of local devolution. Herding communities have been adapting to institutional changes through an array of diverse strategies and practices aimed at re-adapting herd dynamics, land rights and use, and at reorganising labour regimes, including through emigration, with the aim of taking advantage of policy flaws, institutional interstices and evolving trade opportunities (Robinson *et al.* 2017; Nori 2019; Kerven *et al.* 2021). Recent developments in Central Asian republics have seen a diversification of political agendas, resulting in financial interest in rangelands, with investments in pipelines, mining and crop farming schemes, challenging landscapes across the region. Herding communities inhabiting the vast arid and mountainous areas of the region are largely ignored by the policy arenas where national governments, international agencies and private investors decide over the conversion of rangelands to non-pastoral uses, while often also contributing to their degradation (Nori 2022b).

In South Asia, a main driver of institutional and territorial reconfiguration in pastoral regions stemmed from the Green Revolution. Large investment schemes, supported by

international agencies, contributed to converting extensive rangelands into areas of intensive irrigated cropping. Parallel and complementary to the expansion of farming, grazing lands in South Asian dryland or mountainous settings have also been converted into forestry plantations, national parks and protected areas or natural reserves, often through the displacement and dispossession of the local pastoralist communities (Agrawal and Saberwal 2004; Gooch 2004). Pastoralists have been perceived as oppositional to state interests and their rights have been neglected and their institutional arrangements dismantled (Sharma *et al.* 2003; Kreutzmann 2013a; Singh *et al.* 2013; Sheth 2021). However, through these dramatic territorial and policy transformations, pastoralist communities have nevertheless shown considerable resilience. Adapting to the evolving circumstances has meant reconfiguring social networks, herd management and mobility patterns through shrinking and increasingly fragmented landscapes and inconsistent institutional settings, with a view to successfully negotiating access to and use of critical resources (Mitra *et al.* 2013; Maru 2022).

Therefore, in Asia, different revolutions have contributed to reshaping pastoral landscapes. The centralised socialist command experience in central Asia and China or the liberal Green Revolution dictates in South Asia have proven challenging for pastoralist communities. Despite contrasting differences and shifts in ideological perspectives and development trajectories, the dismantling of pastoral resource management and governance systems has always been considered a prerequisite for modernisation. Policy frameworks mostly aim at

fostering the state- and market-driven incorporation of pastoral livelihoods and resources, and rarely consider the community dimension and the welfare of local populations, fostering in turn new forms of territorial polarisation and socio-economic inequalities (Kreutzmann 2011; Gongbuzeren *et al.* 2018; Sheth 2021). As the need to manage highvariability resources persists across regimes, pastoralists have proved skilled across regions in articulating their strategies through existing institutional interstices, supported by diversifying livelihoods and expanding social networks (Scoones 2021; Scoones and Nori 2023).

Serving consumers in the Middle East and Northern Africa

Ideological frameworks, historical paths and policy trajectories differ significantly among countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region, where a consolidated regional framework is lacking. However, when it comes to development approaches in the drylands, which constitute the largest portion of the region, commonalities are evident, because policy efforts have everywhere aimed at stabilising pastoral communities, weakening their institutional base and intensifying livestock production.

The intentions of such a strategy were multiple. On the one hand, the hardening of international borders and administrative boundaries that cut across pastoral routes and trade enabled a tighter control over herding communities who enjoy more a regional than a national identity, such

Box 2. The forbidden mountains (excerpt from Nori 2022b)

Indian Himalayan regions host about 13 national parks and 59 wildlife sanctuaries, covering about 10% of the total Himalayan zone. According to national park policy, all stakeholders dependent on park resources are displaced, and pastoralists' rights to access grazing denied for the purpose of biodiversity conservation. Since the establishment of the Great Himalayan National Park in Himachal Pradesh in 1984, pastoralists who used its vast alpine pastures in the summer months have been deprived of access to large swathes of traditional rangeland, without being allotted grazing rights in other regions. In neighbouring Himalayan states, the situation is similar, with the expansion of protected areas decreasing accessibility of pasture resources for local communities (Sharma *et al.* 2003).

Box 3. Re-educating and settling nomads as a path to modernisation in the Middle East

In the early 1950s, the League of Arab States, in collaboration with the United Nations (UN), organised a series of seminars on the subject of 'Social welfare in the Arab States of the Middle East'. The measures adopted evolved from the assumption that 'perpetuating nomadism would in the best of cases represent a waste of potential agricultural land' (ILO (1962), p. 15 – quoted in Bocco (2006)). 'We should proceed towards sedentarisation by giving a piece of land to each individual capable of engaging in agriculture, the surface area to be determined by each state and calculated in such a way as to ensure a rise on the standard of living, and to allow him to support himself and all his dependants' (ibid.: 80). 'It is necessary to make a serious effort to re-educate the nomads in order to explain the real nature of these projects to them, as well as the benefits and privileges inherent in a less nomadic lifestyle' (ibid.: 79).

It took several decades for the UN to reverse the perspective and develop more appropriate principles concerning dryland ecosystem dynamics, mobility management and pastoral production systems. Nomadic pastoralism represents the most efficient use of marginal drylands and pastoralists are today considered strategic allies in the UN Conventions on Biodiversity, Desertification and Climate Change (IFAD 2011, 2018; FAO 2021). However, despite the change in framing from the UN, the reality on the ground remains firmly embedded in the narratives from the 1950s across the MENA region.

as the Berbers, the Bedouins and the Kurds. On another hand, programmes aimed at sedentarisation and the individualisation of land rights ensured control over rangelands, and enabled imposing state legitimacy and the incorporation of pastoralist communities through forms of appointment and patronage. This approach proved strategic in enhancing the availability of animal products, with the aim of serving the needs of a growing consumption demand, resulting from intense population growth and the development of urban economies triggered by the oil boom (Nori 2022c).

The reconfiguration of pastoralist communities has taken place across the MENA region through three intertwined and complementary dimensions, namely, reorganisation of pastoralist communities in villages and cooperatives, reorienting of livestock production towards the market, and integration of drylands livelihoods into the broader state-led political and economic arena (Darghouth and Gharbi 2011; Ghorbani *et al.* 2015; Jemaa 2016). Support from international organisations and technological advancements, such as mechanised transport, water pumps and mobile phones, have been instrumental in the reshaping of territories and livelihoods in MENA drylands (Bocco 2006; Rachik 2009; Bourbouze 2017).

The modernisation of the agro-pastoral world in MENA countries materialised through the institutionalisation of the emergency and relief paradigm. The provision of external inputs justified to support producers during years of scarcity have become central to the production system. The steady supply of animal feed and water underpins more stable and increasing output levels for the growing consumption demand. Such policies are typically sustained by huge investments in production intensification and accompanied by sophisticated and costly control of market prices, subsidy regimes and loan schemes. The more extensive production of sheep, goats and camels that used to characterise the region was confined to more peripheral settings. Most rangelands were placed under the responsibility of forestry departments, whose main agenda was typically to curtail access to grazing pastoralists (Abaab and Genin 2004; Elloumi *et al.* 2006; Giray *et al.* 2015; Azimi *et al.* 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the implications of such an approach proved unsustainable in social, economic and ecological terms. The steady growth of local flocks (Fig. 3), their reduced mobility and their intimate incorporation in state and market dynamics contributed to reducing pastoralists' economic and political autonomy, while also triggering degradation of the resource base in the areas where animals were concentrated. As a result, rangeland degradation and ecosystem protection became the new policy foci for national and international agencies. With a shift from '*mise en valeur*' to '*mise en defense*', institutional concerns were reoriented towards protecting and rehabilitating rangelands, with multiple specific programmes and agencies established (Jaber *et al.* 2016; Azimi *et al.* 2020).

The costs involved in intensifying, stabilising and controlling the supply and marketing of livestock products proved unbearable for most countries in the region, specifically under the imposed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) regimes (Rachik 2009; Schilling *et al.* 2012; INRA 2015; Sadiki 2016). The reliance on mobile livestock was eventually replaced by the emigration of pastoral people in search of alternative sources of income in the growing urban economies in the region and abroad. Remittances have helped maintain and support livestock production at home, but under new institutional arrangements, where resources are acquired through finances generated elsewhere (Gertel and Breuer 2007; Boubakri and Khadija 2014; Mahdi 2014; Chattou 2016; Pappagallo 2022).

The recent history of policy making, investment and intervention in the MENA drylands is one that has substantially reconfigured the access and use regimes of land, livestock and labour, without necessarily having local communities' welfare as the policy objective. This has generated new opportunities as well as tensions along ethnic, gender and generational cleavages. New patterns of territorial and social polarisation have developed as the current livelihoods of most pastoralists are increasingly shaped by processes unfolding outside the realm of animal production, and very often also outside regional boundaries (Nori 2022c).

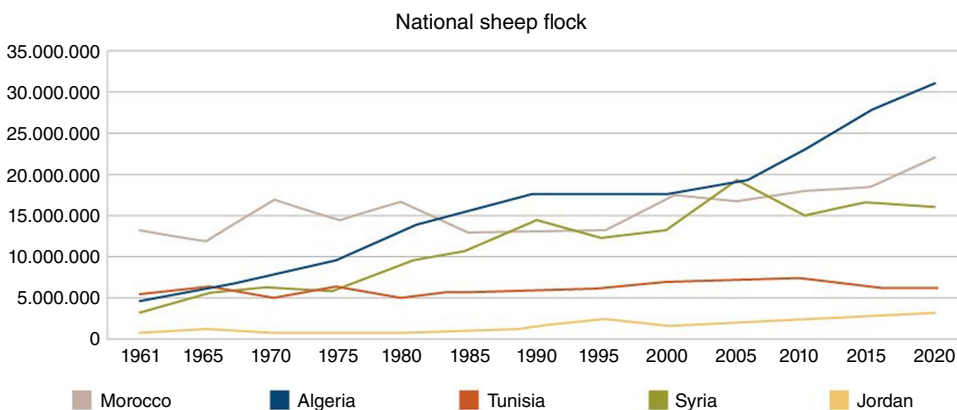


Fig. 3. Sheep and goat population trends in selected MENA countries (1962–2005) (own elaboration from FaoStat dataset).

Good principles but practical flaws under the European umbrella

The policy framework in Europe is one, in principle, favourable to extensive livestock farming, which provides for a quite unique case. European Union (EU) policies recognise the multiple values of pastoralism and pastoralists' contributions in terms of cultural heritage, environmental management and territorial cohesion through producing food sustainably and protecting biodiversity and the landscape (EP 2008, 2017; EU 2018). By acknowledging that these public goods are not sustainable without remuneration, the EU supports pastoralists with direct and indirect measures, including subsidies. These are considered as forms of compensation and reward for producers operating in less-favoured areas and managing high nature-value settings.

However, this seems to be the case only on paper, as evidence from the ground tells a quite different story. In fact, over recent decades, the number of extensive livestock farms has declined sharply. These trends are particularly dramatic in southern, Euro-Mediterranean countries, where about 30% of pastoral farms are lost every 10 years (Nori and Farinella 2019; EU 2021) (Fig. 4).

According to these figures, despite good intentions, the outcomes of European policies are evidently not in favour of pastoral farms. In fact, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which supports agriculture and rural development taking up about 40% of the EU budget, shows fundamental inconsistencies. Political allegiances, strategic incoherence

and market interests result in more support for the intensification of livestock farming than for investment in extensive pastoral systems. The emphasis on high-input supply, fixed land holdings and technological advances evidently prizes consolidated farms with intensive production systems and tight integration into market dynamics (Caballero 2011; Fréve 2015; Nori 2022d).

Although CAP reforms and EU policy evolutions, including the recent Green Deal and the Biodiversity Strategy, have aimed to address these shortcomings, the main trends have not reversed and pastoralists in Europe remain discriminated against in the complex system of EU subsidies, ranking among those receiving the lowest support (EP 2008, 2017). Moreover, the CAP operates in a broader policy framework influenced by trade and environmental agreements, which further expose pastoralists to the vagaries of ecological and market dynamics alike, and prioritise others' rights and interests over those of extensive livestock farmers.

The implications for the socio-economic conditions of farms are evident, as are those for the management of land, livestock and labour. Europe is facing serious problems of depopulation and socio-economic decline in its most fragile and biodiverse territories, including islands and mountains, where rangelands are being abandoned and labour is increasingly provided by an immigrant workforce (Pastomed 2007; Kasimis 2010; Caballero 2011; Farinella *et al.* 2017). Although the shift from family labour to a salaried system with immigrant herders is helping to tackle the gaps left by

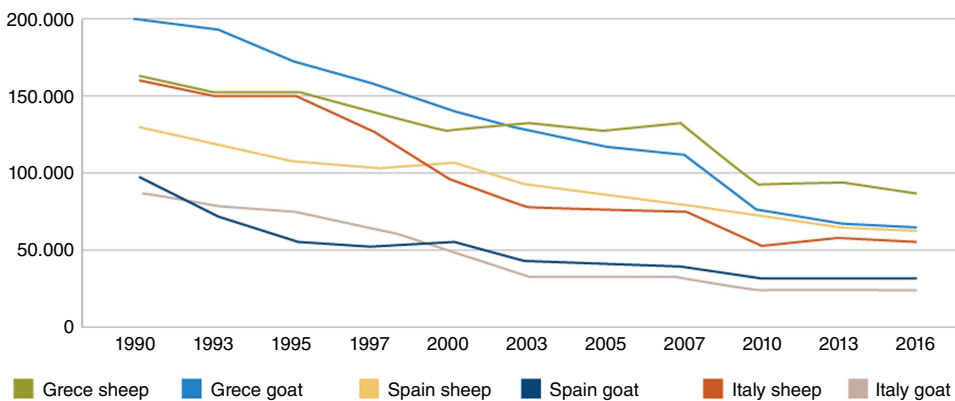


Fig. 4. Trends in sheep and goat farms in Mediterranean EU (1990–2016) (own elaboration from EuroStat datasets).

Box 4. Distortions due to a poor policy design

Recent CAP reforms are intended to encourage a growing consideration of environmental protection and the quality of products. Design limitations and administrative measures often result in unintended consequences for extensive farmers. Public funding is calculated on the farm size, with direct payments as a form of income support granted to EU farmers on a per-hectare basis, independent of the production processes or outputs. On the one hand, this generates lucrative returns and speculative interests for wealthy entrepreneurs who invest in leasing pasturelands so as to acquire public funding, effectively chasing away local pastoralists from their territories (Calandra 2017). Conversely, pastoralists grazing on common, public lands are often excluded from CAP support, despite the important environmental services they provide through the management of specific ecosystems (e.g. the *Dehesa* in Spain), including the prevention of fire events (PGE 2015).

the migration of local populations, in the current policy framework this phenomenon does not enable addressing the problems of generational renewal faced by pastoralists across Europe (Nori and Farinella 2019).

The EU policy framework is informed by contrasting principles, rigid measures and at times inconsistent rules concerning livestock management, land-use regulations, market arrangements and related subsidy schemes. Overall, these seem ill-suited to pastoral herding practices and the underpinning flexible decision-making and variability management on which pastoralism is based. In spite of seemingly good intentions, the technocratic approach of the CAP proves to be a source of disruption for European pastoralists, who continuously need to adapt to shifting policy measures, societal demands and market requirements by navigating through a multiple, fragmented and sometimes conflicting framework (Tchakerian 2013; Fréve 2015; Mattalia *et al.* 2018; Simula 2022).

Discussion – persisting narratives of control

Policy making, public investments and external interventions aimed at development in the rangelands are centred on stability and control, reflecting a perspective of modernisation that

is common across regions. These narratives tend to advocate sedentarisation of people and livestock, intensification of production, individualisation of resources and a growing engagement with the market. The extensive droughts of the 1970s and 1980s brought climate and food security crises to the top of the agenda and contributed to the rise of humanitarian interventions in rangelands. From the 2000s onwards, civil conflicts and political instability have reoriented development efforts to those linked to securitisation. These in turn affect how crises and disasters are constructed and responded to, often resulting in a dependency on aid flows in some regions where drought strikes frequently and state structures are weak, despite the rhetoric around resilience building, livelihood security and social protection (Mohamed 2022; Teye 2022; Scoones and Nori 2023).

Although varying across regions, common themes informing policy making in most pastoral settings emerge to justify state and development intervention, premised often on assumptions that pastoralists are at fault and need to be controlled. The perception persists that rangelands are empty, unstable and unproductive spaces, and pastoralism is backward, destructive and potentially threatening to states and their orderly development efforts.

Table 1 offers a summary of the narratives identified across the four regional reviews. Each storyline contains

Table 1. Main narratives informing policies and investments in pastoral regions (adapted from Scoones and Nori 2023)

Narrative	Assumption	Solution	Possible alternative narratives
Environmental degradation	Grazing is harmful for the environment. Rewilding is a way to reverse environmental degradation.	Livestock production is to be 'modernised, and pastoral practices dismissed. 'Wild' areas need to be preserved by excluding pastoralists.	Pastoralists are guardians of rangelands and need to be collaborators in conservation efforts.
Climate change	Livestock are a primary source of greenhouse gases and pastoral practices promote desertification.	Livestock production has to decrease. Rangelands need protection through afforestation, reseeding and other environmental schemes.	Not all livestock are the same. Pastoral systems have low emissions and are able to adapt to variable climates if supported to do so.
Conflict	Mobile herding and pastoralists are a primary trigger of conflict, including radical insurgency that challenges state security.	Herding communities must come under control through military actions and state interventions that transform their lifestyle and practices.	Pastoral communities are the best allies in securing vast dryland territories.
Governance	Pastoralists are not normal citizens as they operate across national borders and do not engage with state structures.	Pastoralists need to be sedentarised and integrated into the state's institutional and policy frame. Elites can be co-opted in state structures.	Institutional efforts towards regionalisation on the one hand and decentralisation on the other would better accommodate pastoralists' representation.
Investments	Extensive livestock systems are not efficient in production terms.	Rangeland potentials need to be unlocked through investments in irrigation, farming, livestock intensification, biofuels, etc.	Investments should support pastoral systems reliability (mobility, networking, animal health, etc.).
Markets	Pastoralists are unwilling to interface with markets.	Market offtake should be promoted and pushed through specific fixed market investments.	Whenever conditions are favourable, pastoralists are keen to engage with market exchanges, often informal and mobile.
Humanitarian	Pastoralists are unable to secure their food needs and protect their livelihoods in the face of recurrent climatic and insecurity events.	Dryland populations are in need of humanitarian assistance through the supply of food or cash transfers. Alternative livelihoods can be supported by external agencies.	Pastoral regions are particularly exposed to variability, including droughts. Social protection endeavours must integrate and complement local ones, including existing forms of moral economy.

both assumptions about the nature of the problem and the solutions offered. Different narratives are more or less prominent in policy debates in each of the regions discussed above. The final column of the table identifies possible alternative narratives that emerge from challenging the assumptions and proposed solutions of mainstream narratives. These are emerging in different places and suggest an alternative approach to pastoral development (Scoones and Nori 2023).

The mainstream narratives fail to appreciate the potentials and capacities of pastoralists to forge their livelihoods under extreme conditions, while also contributing to environmental management, national economies and regional integration. Existing discourses reinforce the suppression of pastoralist livelihoods and their incorporation into colonial and post-colonial states. If pastoralism and rangelands are to be supported, new policy thinking linked to a fresh perspective and new institutions is needed.

However, this will not be easy. The consequences of the longstanding mix of misinformed policies and poorly conceived investments inspired by the vision that pastoralism is inefficient and unsustainable has meant that formal institutions, state agencies and development agencies are ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of pastoral systems. This bias persists even among new generations of public officers, practitioners and policymakers at all levels, who firmly believe that dismissing the pastoral lifestyle is the necessary prerequisite for a transition to modernity.

As the regional overviews have shown, this transition often implies abandoning the mobile, flexible, adaptive features that underpin pastoralism reliability, sustainability and resilience (Gertel and Breuer 2007; Scott 2008; Kreutzmann 2013a; Scoones 2023). Translating evidence-based knowledge and good intentions into effective institutional and policy arrangements for pastoral areas is challenging, as most current practices remain embroiled in poor understanding, biased perspectives, bureaucratic approaches and distorted interests (Nori 2022a).

With the mismatch between inappropriate policies and existing practice, the socio-economic conditions for pastoralism have worsened. In most regions, the indicators of poverty, food and physical insecurity, emigration rates and land encroachment are at their highest, whereas the levels of public expenditure, primary service coverage and investment provisions are at their lowest (Hesse and MacGregor 2006; Odhiambo 2006; Wane 2006; AU 2010a; Catley and Aklilu 2013). Equally, as the cases have shown, rangelands have become the target of various forms of land, green and water grabbing. Public policies and private investments foster the encroachment of conservation areas, irrigated farming, mining and oil extraction, alternative energy schemes, commercial ranching and tourism. These result in the growing dispossession and sedentarisation of local communities, as governments favour settled farmers over mobile populations, and donors prefer to deliver aid to demographically dense

areas (Khazanov 2005; Fairhead *et al.* 2012; Lind *et al.* 2020; Little 2021).

Moreover, as the global demand for animal products grows, livestock production becomes increasingly commercialised, encouraging speculation and external investment. The related restructuring of herd and flock management often implies new social reconfigurations, with rising patterns of absentee ownership and hired herders, including from a migrant workforce, as the cases from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa have shown. Socio-economic differentiation is exacerbated by rapid environmental change, triggered by growing human populations and a highly variable climate. As pastoral areas change, so does the political economy in the pastoral periphery (Braudel 1985; Kreutzmann 2013b; Nori and Farinella 2019; Bourbouze 2000; Kerven *et al.* 2021).

The regional cases show that, although elite pastoralists may be co-opted into state structures and engage in economic speculation, pastoralist populations may feel abandoned and left behind by ongoing transformations. As pastoral regions become the foci of new and competing economic interests and political agendas, these tensions and the related grievances can be easily manipulated (UNECA 2017; Benjaminsen and Ba 2019; Brottem and McDonnell 2020; Lind *et al.* 2020). The fact that pro-pastoralist narratives and policy measures prove difficult to translate into actual benefits provides further elements of discouragement, as the cases of policymaking in Europe and Africa clearly testify.

Conclusions – enemies or allies?

Across the globe, the convergence in policy thinking and practice put in place by national and regional governments is indeed remarkable when it comes to pastoral regions. No matter the underlying principle, i.e. economic growth, poverty alleviation, environmental protection or security concerns, or the ideological perspective, namely from communism and state-direct capitalism to autocratic kingdoms to liberal democracies, or the territorial particularity, such as mountains, semi-desert areas, islands or plateaux, a similar pattern emerges. Whatever the region, time or approach, the argument persists that a pastoral lifestyle is backward and extensive livestock production is an unsustainable practice. Regardless of the starting point, the end point converges towards the argument that pastoral areas are ‘in need of development’, whatever this might imply for local communities. Even in those cases where official discourses acknowledge the contribution of pastoralism to the economy and/or to the environment and provide adequate recognition and support, the outcomes on the ground usually contradict the intended aims.

A project of suppression but also of incorporation has long been part of political discourses by colonial and post-colonial states. Repeated attempts have been made to convert pastoralists into settled, stable producers. This explains to a substantial degree the rationale behind public funding

increasingly supporting capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive farming systems even in rangelands. More broadly, the policy framework that informs governance in pastoral settings has largely evolved to serve others' interests, such as those of state officers, urban consumers, crop farmers, international agendas, rather than investing in the wellbeing of local communities.

International development assistance or private investments have developed as state resources decline. Pastoralists strive to adapt accordingly, by navigating environmental transformations, political inconsistencies, commercial opportunities and migratory options. Their economies are increasingly embedded in institutional and market dynamics, which in turn influence their capacities to operate in a highly variable resource setting; external aid often comes in form of humanitarian assistance and social protection, which rarely take into account pastoralists' skills (Caravani *et al.* 2022). The resulting patterns of growing territorial polarisation and socio-economic inequalities further the sense of marginalisation and displacement of pastoralists. A proper understanding of the dynamics at play therefore requires a socio-political sensitivity, looking through ethnic, class, gender and generational lenses.

The analysis of policy narratives across four regions presented in this paper suggests a challenge for policymakers across the globe. A new narrative for rangelands and pastoralism must recognise and include pastoralists in the decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods, providing enabling and coherent policy frameworks that can allow them to weather storms and take opportunities when they arise (Scoones and Nori 2023). A new social contract is therefore needed, one that recognises pastoralists as the best allies to manage, secure and develop remote and vast rangelands and one that protects and supports their livelihoods, particularly under current climate change dynamics.

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