



# WISP

## World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism

A GLOBAL INITIATIVE  
TO PROMOTE  
PASTORALISM AS  
AN EFFECTIVE  
AND EFFICIENT  
LAND USE AND  
PRODUCTION SYSTEM  
FOR THE DRYLANDS  
OF THE WORLD

The World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (WISP) is a global initiative that supports the empowerment of pastoralists to sustainably manage drylands resources. WISP enables pastoralists to demonstrate that their land use and production system is an effective and efficient way of harnessing the natural resources of the world's drylands.

Pastoralist communities are often socially and politically marginalised. Their livelihoods are continuously undermined by inappropriate policies and laws and by pressures on their resources from more politically powerful neighbours and other competitors. WISP therefore works to empower pastoralists and pastoral institutions by enabling them to gather knowledge and influence policies that impinge on their livelihoods and their ability to sustainably manage their land and resources.

WISP provides the social, economic and environmental arguments for pastoralism to improve perceptions of pastoralism as a viable and sustainable resource management system. WISP also advocates for an enabling environment for sustainable rangeland management, improved pastoral livelihoods and pastoral empowerment.

## DRYLANDS AND DEGRADATION

Drylands cover about 40 percent of the Earth's surface and have one overriding feature: they have low, but highly variable, precipitation in the form of rain or snow. It is this variability, as much as the low quantity of precipitation, which gives drylands their special features. Dryland ecosystems are constantly in flux, making it difficult, if not impossible, to define an "average" condition for rangelands.

Drylands are particularly sensitive to land degradation, with 10-20% of drylands already degraded. At various times in the past, policy makers have tried to lay the blame for this degradation with the local communities that use drylands resources: namely the pastoralists. Negative perceptions of pastoralism are strongly influenced by images of overgrazing and soil erosion around water sources, or by livestock death and food insecurity during some droughts. These extensive production strategies seldom fit government's concept of the nation-state or its vision of development and pastoralism is usually portrayed as a national problem and an archaic form of land use.

However, few of these accusations have any technical merit. "Overgrazing" is usually a convenient and more palatable scapegoat for other causes of land degradation and although land degradation may be evident around permanent settlements and water points, where livestock mobility is reduced, it is much less evident in open rangelands where mobility is unrestricted. Where mobility and locally owned institutions for land management are maintained, the results are biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management. Where mobility is constrained it has led to serious over-grazing and land degradation.

## MOBILITY: AN ECOLOGICAL NECESSITY

Of all the government policies since the 1970's, settlement of pastoralists and restriction of mobility has had the worst environmental consequences. The policy of 'sedenterisation' was based on a profound misunderstanding of the logic behind pastoral production, favouring production systems imported from developed countries and inappropriately supported by the theory of the 'tragedy of the commons'. Movement was restricted by providing stationary settlements, replete with services and resources, especially water, ignoring the wider ecological necessity behind mobility in grazing-dependent ecosystems.

Not surprisingly, the imposition of sedentary life failed miserably and was resisted by herders who needed grass and water for their animals and had to move to find it. Services were not delivered or maintained and pastoralists were accused of being anti-development. Eventually, the big pastoral livestock projects of the 1970s and early 1980s were halted as donors abandoned the sector, but not before large swathes of drylands were degraded as a result of the experiment. Simultaneously, the small but resource-rich buffer zones that enable pastoralism were expropriated and converted into irrigation schemes for settled agriculture, or fenced off for wildlife and



Pastoralists are the best custodians of drylands environments, but their stewardship is undermined by inappropriate policies and strong competition over their natural resources

forest reserves. This combination of bad policy and resource loss has profoundly compromised pastoralism and dryland environments and has led to violent conflict in many pastoral areas.

It is now more widely understood that, where rainfall is subject to a high degree of spatial variability, mobility is an ecological necessity. Mobile pastoralism provides a highly efficient way of managing the sparse vegetation and relatively low fertility of dryland soils. In essence, pastoralists accept the variability of productive inputs (pasture and rainfall) and adapt their social and herding systems accordingly. As a result, biological diversity is enhanced and ecosystem integrity and resilience is maintained.



## **PASTORALISTS**

In fact, dryland ecosystems are much more ecologically resilient than has previously been accepted, as long as some degree of livestock mobility or general resource-use rotation is retained in their management. Mobile pastoralism is an ancient form of land use, well adapted (both ecologically and socially) to the challenges of maintaining sustainable and productive livelihoods in dryland ecosystems. Indeed, dryland landscapes have been shaped over the centuries through the flexible and opportunistic use, by pastoralists, of this unpredictable natural resource base.

Mobile pastoralists are a large and significant minority, and often an ethnic minority, in many countries around the world. Precise figures are hard to come by, but when all types of mobility are considered, nomadic and transhumant pastoralists may number between 100 and 200 million people globally. If extensive agro-pastoralists are included, the number rises very sharply, and such people are a clear majority of dryland inhabitants.

Pastoralists constitute an estimated 16% of the population of the Sahelian Zone, but in a few countries such as Somalia and Mauritania, they are the majority of people. In parts of southern Europe, and even more in central Asia following de-collectivization, there is an ongoing resurgence of transhumant pastoralism.

## **THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT**

Mobile pastoralists the world over are subject to an astonishing number of myths and misconceptions. These misconceptions have led to inadequate, often hostile, development policies and interventions which have resulted in major barriers to sustainable land management and have entrenched pastoral poverty. In order to achieve the twin goals of dryland environmental sustainability and pastoral poverty reduction it is necessary to overcome anti-pastoral prejudice and bring an end to damaging policy and practice.

Although mobile pastoralism is the most viable form of production and land use in most of the world's fragile drylands, it is increasingly under threat from legal, economic, social and political disincentives and barriers to mobility of livestock. State of the art findings on the viability of pastoralism are not communicated effectively to decision makers and alternative policy options still need to be formulated.

Key policy gaps include regulation of transhumance, investment in production, mobile (or otherwise appropriate) service delivery, conflict resolution, decentralisation and democracy adapted to mobile populations, alternative and complementary income generation opportunities and “exit strategies” for those pastoralists wishing to leave the system. Pastoralists also need to be enabled to capture the economic benefits of their livelihood, for example through improved marketing of livestock, processing and marketing of non-timber forest products and being able to benefit more responsibly from tourism.

### **PASTORALISTS’ ROLE IN WISP**

Many of the misunderstandings surrounding pastoralism stem from a consistent failure to engage pastoralists in the decision making processes that affect their lives. Many of the misunderstandings surrounding pastoralism stem from a consistent failure to engage pastoralists in the decision making processes that affect their lives. Development agents are now beginning to recognise the urgency of enabling pastoralists to organise themselves in order to assert their influence over such processes. To ensure that pastoralists are not further sidelined in WISP’s own implementation, groups of pastoralists are routinely consulted over major decisions, through a Pastoral Advisory Group.

WISP also actively promotes the strengthening of pastoralists’ ability to organise, through its partnership with various national partners around the world. WISP conducts capacity building to enhance policy dialogue and strengthen pastoral advocacy and the main targets of this work are pastoralists and the institutions that represent them.



### **THE BACKGROUND TO WISP**

WISP is a GEF-funded project of three to four years, implemented by UNDP and executed by IUCN. It is an advocacy and capacity building project that seeks a greater recognition of the importance of sustainable pastoral development for both poverty reduction and environmental management. WISP works in a consultative manner through global, regional and national partnerships to ensure that appropriate policies, legal mechanisms and support systems are established to enhance the economic, social and ecological sustainability of the pastoral livelihood system.

Enthusiasm for WISP has been built up through a series of high-profile events and conferences, including side events organised at the World Parks Congress (2002), the UNCCD<sup>1</sup> CRIC I<sup>2</sup> meeting in Rome (2002), COP6<sup>3</sup> in Havana (2003) and the “pastoralist manyatta” at COP7 in Nairobi (2005). These events demonstrated the need for a new “global thinking” on mobile pastoralism, combining interdisciplinary scientific findings with the real life experiences and needs of pastoralists themselves.

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

<sup>2</sup>Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

<sup>3</sup>Conference of the Parties

Mobile pastoralism is clearly a viable and modern livelihood and people are reverting to ways of living which a generation ago were thought to have disappeared



It is important to note however that the project neither supports “turning the clock back” nor “freezing” pastoralists in their current state. Tremendous losses of rangelands have occurred in the past that simply negate such a strategy. Whatever the future of pastoralism, it has been shaped by many distinctive twentieth century influences, which confound a return to some prior or imagined condition. Such influences include, for example, losses of prime grazing land to cultivation, gazetting of pastoral lands for conservation and political, economic and social marginalization. It is possible nonetheless to ensure that appropriate policies, legal mechanisms, and support systems are in place to enable pastoralists to enhance the economic, social and ecological sustainability of their livelihoods. WISP’s role is to facilitate this process by gathering and managing knowledge, developing advocacy tools, building capacity to influence policy, supporting advocacy processes and networking to enhance learning and strengthen policy debate.

#### **ACTIVITIES OF WISP**

The goal of WISP is to achieve sustainable rangeland management through empowerment (social and economic) of pastoralist communities. WISP aims to enhance sustainable rangeland management by pastoralists through advocacy (knowledge and understanding) and capacity building (empowerment and governance) by promoting partnership between pastoralists, government agencies, NGOs, International Organisations and the private sector.

WISP will develop innovative analytical and advocacy tools in key areas, such as rights, economics and marketing and organisation of pastoralists, and will use these tools to build capacities for local level advocacy by pastoralists. To enhance this, WISP will improve knowledge management to make literature resources more readily available to practitioners and pastoralists and to improve networking of pastoralists and their representatives.

WISP supports the strengthening of institutions relevant to pastoralism through improved access to information, skills development and experience sharing. This is achieved through capacity building programmes, with emphasis on enabling partners to build and share advocacy and communication skills and to link pastoralists more directly with policy debates. WISP will strengthen advocacy for pastoral rights and development both indirectly through targeted capacity building of national partners and through direct advocacy action at global and regional levels.

WISP works with government, inter-government, non-government and multilateral organisations, at national and regional levels, to make the case for pastoralism in macro-economic planning, policy and legislation so as to develop a more enabling environment for pastoralism. This will include presenting the case at global initiatives, including global pastoralist gatherings and UNCCD and other conventions. WISP will also support government interactions between countries that have a less-enabling environment for pastoral development and those countries where new pro-pastoralist policies have been approved.



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### RESOURCES

WISP is a catalytic partnership that enhances knowledge management and policy dialogue around the world and is thus dependent on the contribution of its partners. WISP will gather and distribute various literature resources, consisting of contributions from WISP members as well as the products from studies and meetings. Details can be found at the WISP website which will be online from April 2006 at the following url: [www.iucn.org/wisp/](http://www.iucn.org/wisp/). Details of advocacy tools developed through the WISP programme can also be found at the web site. WISP has, on its own, limited resources to achieve its ambitious goals. However WISP has already demonstrated that it can act as an important means of leverage for other funding at global, regional or national levels.

For any other information please contact the Global Coordinator at:

[Jonathan.Davies@iucn.org](mailto:Jonathan.Davies@iucn.org).

Wasaa Conservation Centre  
P. O. Box 68200 - 00200  
NAIROBI, Kenya  
Tel: ++ 254 20 890605-12  
Fax: ++ 254 20 890615  
E-mail: [earo@iucn.org](mailto:earo@iucn.org)

Eastern Africa Regional Office