



Pastoralism: a livelihood system meeting the challenges of the 21st Century

Pastoral herding, in its many forms and across the globe, faces new challenges today: resource depletion, climate hazards, demographic pressure and land-use conflicts, as well as security crises. Yet, in the face of these issues, this way of life remains a suitable, resilient, and successful strategy.

1. Issues and challenges of pastoralism worldwide

In response to critics of pastoralism, scientists, sociologists, economists, and development actors have now reached a broad consensus on the benefits of this lifestyle and herding method, who directly sustains over 200 million herders worldwide. It contributes significantly to national economies and to food and nutritional security. It makes use of land that is otherwise unsuitable for crop cultivation; in these areas, it is more productive and cost-effective than sedentary farming. It enriches soils through the improvement of pastures and their biodiversity; it allows carbon sequestration and maintains a balanced carbon footprint. It is also a vector for crucial trade exchanges that are vital to many countries' economies, creating constructive links between farming and grazing zones. Beyond its economic

impact, pastoralism is characterised by strong knowledge systems, identities, and cultures that pastoral people across the globe defend and perpetuate.

The sector must nevertheless adapt to new challenges. Resource pressure continues to rise with demographic growth and climate change, overgrazing linked to larger herds, and restrictions to mobility in conflict zones. Limited social services (health, education, communication) in pastoral areas reduce the attractiveness of the occupation and cause a loss of human capital. Consumer demands (quality, quantity) require significant technical adaptation, prompting decision-makers to favour intensification and modernisation at the expense of pastoral zones. Finally, pastoral peoples continue to suffer from social marginalisation and are sometimes associated with terrorist groups.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Across the world, pastoralism plays a vital role in food security and in utilising land unsuitable for crops.** Furthermore, pastoral farming drives critical trade exchanges for the economies of many nations that rely upon it.
- **Livestock mobility**, including cross-border movement, and the recognition of herders' access rights to pastoral resources (mainly pasture and water) are fundamental for maintaining this way of life.
- **AVSF supports pastoral civil society to strengthen its social and political recognition and to promote modern and resilient pastoral farming** within an environment that is also attractive to new generations, thereby meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

2. AVSF supports modern and agroecological pastoralism

From its more than forty years of supporting herders across the world's great pastoral areas [Sahelian regions, Andean and Central Asian plateaux], AVSF has developed an approach, lessons learned, and a forward-looking vision to address the new challenges of the 21st century. Five major action areas are considered priorities.

Support pastoral organisations to manage resources collaboratively and peacefully amid conflict, climate change, and economic tension

User associations, such as the Pastoral Units (UP) in Senegal or the Pastoral Users Groups (PUG) in Mongolia¹, are effective mechanisms for regulating and organising the use of pastoral resources and infrastructure (water, grazing land, passage corridors, wells, etc.). In Senegal, UPs help to ease conflicts over resource and land access between transhumant herders, sedentary herders, and farmers; they facilitate dialogue between elected officials, technical services, and communities. In Mongolia, facing growing desertification, PUGs organise rational livestock load management to protect pastures. These associations also offer other important opportunities. In Senegal, they support a communication system on grass and water availability, helping herders react more quickly and adapt their movement strategies. In Mongolia, PUG restructuring has led to the recognition of herders as key actors in pasture protection and facilitated the creation of certified cooperatives for a pioneering "Sustainable Cashmere"² sector.

User groups are interlocutors for local authorities and deconcentrated state services and play an active role in territorial development and economic investment in the sector.

Support modern pastoral herding that is more efficient, diversified, market-oriented, and better valued economically.

Pastoral herding remains a key driver of the economies in AVSF's focus countries. Yet pastoral herders have a weak position in value chains. To better structure animal product

markets, such as meat and dairy in West Africa or fibre and wool in Mongolia, AVSF works to increase the share of added value retained by herders. Through their organisations, herders improve their incomes by integrating processing and marketing segments. In Mongolia's steppes, the strategy is twofold: developing a certified fibre chain and diversifying via a high-quality local meat market, which reduces resource pressure through regular herd destocking and offers a more profitable, diversified model.

In both the Sahel and Mongolia, a notable trend is that pastoral families seek to diversify their economic activities to access better living conditions and social services (food, transport, communications, health, livestock advisory support, etc.). In Mongolia, AVSF supports this diversification through meat and milk production and by promoting solidarity-based tourism, reducing reliance on cashmere alone. In the Sahel, AVSF encourages revenue diversification through market gardening, small livestock (sheep fattening, poultry), and dairy production, contributing to women's financial empowerment and dietary diversification; feed production and access to animal feed enable stall-feeding for dairy production; the creation of pastoral activity zones (PAZs) acts as local service hubs (milk, meat, and leather processing, feed production, information and alert centres), improving local livestock product value, generating non-livestock employment, and making pastoral zones more attractive to young herders. This last point is critical: without access to productive means and lucrative activities, youth risk turning to more appealing alternatives such as gold panning, migration, or, in extreme cases, illegal trafficking or joining armed groups.

Open up pastoral zones by strengthening herder services and access to communication tools and new technologies.

For over 45 years, AVSF has developed programmes for animal disease prevention and treatment by establishing high-quality, local veterinary services to improve productivity, ensure compliance with animal health standards, and prevent economic losses from epizootics.

Mobile health caravans, combining veterinary and human health agents, have been

deployed since 2005 in northern Mali, providing model health services adapted to pastoral mobility. Health posts and private veterinarians are almost absent in pastoral zones due to low population density and low profitability. Caravans thus provide access to both human and animal health care along the seasonal routes of pastoral communities in search of water and grazing, proving highly cost-effective.

By integrating human and animal health services, AVSF has implemented a One Health approach in a context where pastoral communities are already culturally receptive. AVSF also improves access to information so that herders have the data they need to guide movements and optimise livestock productivity. Senegal's pastoral early warning system is one example: it disseminates pastoral information via multiple channels (physical centres on transhumance routes, community radio, websites, WhatsApp groups, SMS messages in local languages). It covers multiple parameters based on herders' needs: rainfall, pond and pasture conditions, livestock market data, vaccination campaigns, regulations, livestock theft, and more.

In both Mongolia and the Sahel, new technologies help leverage available data [satellite images, weather forecasts, etc.] for herders, enabling better mobility strategies and improving access to services like communication and social life for herder families, particularly younger generations.

Support pastoral organisations and decision-makers to develop tools to anticipate and respond to crises.

Pastoralism's strength lies in its adaptability to changing conditions. Yet climate change, major health events, and socio-economic and security crises have major impacts on herders' livelihoods and mobility. Climate change affects herders and ecosystems through gradual shifts [such as reduced rainfall in Central Asia and rising global temperatures] and sudden changes, with increased frequency of extreme events such as *dzuds* in Mongolia or droughts in West Africa.

To face these risks, AVSF supports numerous actions that strengthen pastoral populations' and herds' resilience: creating forage and

[1] Or similar consultation spaces, co-managed by the operators with traditional organisations and public authorities.

[2] Since 2016, AVSF has supported Mongolian cooperatives producing "Sustainable Cashmere", an ad hoc label that guarantees the preservation of the steppe ecosystems; this certification resonates with today's consumers, who are attentive to environmental protection issues.



feed reserves for critical periods, assisting local authorities in adopting contingency plans, implementing vaccination and prophylaxis campaigns to prevent epizootics, developing breeding programmes for more resilient livestock, and establishing dialogue frameworks to ease social conflicts.

Strengthen pastoral organisations' political dialogue capacities for defending their interests and shaping favourable public policies.

Through pastoral organisations and their national and regional federations, AVSF promotes public policy development in support of pastoralism.

One example is advocacy for herders' access to land and pastoral resources: in the Sahel, AVSF and its pastoral civil society partners contributed to drafting and disseminating Pastoral Codes to secure grazing routes. AVSF has also supported and advised local authorities in Mali and Senegal in implementing pastoral livestock promotion programmes: creating pastoral land-use plans, financing productive investments (livestock markets, water points, etc.) for herders.

AVSF has also promoted to public authorities technical and economic solutions to enhance complementarity between farming and herding: local use of crop residues as

animal feed for fattening and milk production, development of fodder crops to generate supplementary income, and product labelling ("Sustainable Cashmere", "Fouladou – Kolda Milk").

For decades, AVSF has voiced herders' calls for regulating unfair competition and protecting markets, such as stopping the import of reconstituted milk powder in West Africa.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

→ To Southern governments and regional political institutions

National and regional legal frameworks, with land charters and local plans that:

- Recognise and protect customary land rights and traditional rules for pastoral resource access, while limiting privatisation and land-use change in pastoral areas.
- Guarantee livestock mobility and herders' rights to move their animals across national and sub-regional territories.
- Promote inclusive territorial development mechanisms:
 - In pastoral areas, including governance platforms for resource management, productive investments (water points, livestock markets, vaccination parks, etc.), facilities for processing livestock products (dairies, abattoirs), and services tailored to herders to better capture economic value.
 - Among national and regional consumers, through awareness campaigns, labelling, and public procurement.
- Encourage integration of pastoral systems with sedentary farming and livestock systems to maximise mutual synergies, notably using manure as fertiliser and crop residues as feed.
- Develop public mechanisms for tailored financial (e.g., long-term credit) and technical (e.g., adapted local breed improvement programmes) support for pastoral farms to anticipate and respond to climate, security, ecological, and economic crises.
- Open up pastoral zones through strengthened services (human and animal health, education, energy, transport) suited to this lifestyle, and by improving access to communication tools and new technologies.

→ To International Organisations

- Recognise pastoral systems and their mobility strategies as livelihoods and sustainable resource and ecosystem management tools.
- In line with the Paris Agreement, support these systems' adaptation to climate change by providing financial and technical assistance for anticipating and responding to climate crises.
- Support service improvement (human and animal health, education, etc.) tailored to herders' way of life.
- Accompany pastoral civil society by strengthening its technical and advocacy capacities.

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Sustainable Cashmere Project, Mongolia : Establishing a sustainable cashmere production chain in Ulaanbaatar and the provinces of Bayankhongor, Arkhangai, and Gobi-Altai, benefiting 5,000 Mongolian herder families.

Tekové Project, Bolivia : Contributing to the conservation of the Bolivian Chaco through risk and climate change management and promoting zero-deforestation sustainable livestock systems.

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