Protect Our Land, Restore Our Soil: Collective Territorialities for Land Justice, Pastoralist Futures, and Ecological Restoration

Joint Civil Society Statement |ICARRD+20 - 23 February 2026

As civil society organisations, social movements, faith-based actors, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralist and peasant organisations from Africa and across the Global South, we come to ICARRD+20 at a moment of deep crisis and urgent possibility.

Twenty years after the first International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, rural communities across the world continue to face dispossession, land concentration and ecological destruction. Despite global commitments to end hunger and poverty, land and food systems are increasingly controlled by corporate and financial interests, while communities that produce food remain marginalised and insecure.

Across Africa and other regions, customary and collective land systems are being undermined in the name of development, conservation, climate mitigation and large-scale investment. Carbon offset projects, extractive industries, agribusiness expansion and speculative land markets are accelerating dispossession, soil degradation and social inequality, often excluding communities from territories they have governed collectively for generations. At the same time, agribusiness corporations and financial investors are driving the rapid expansion of factory farming and industrial livestock production across Africa, concentrating land and resources, degrading ecosystems, and undermining pastoralist and small-scale livestock systems essential to food sovereignty.

Pastoralist communities are among those most severely affected. As 2026 is the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, this conference must recognise pastoralists as central to sustainable food systems and ecological resilience. Policies that restrict livestock mobility, privatise communal rangelands or convert grazing lands to agribusiness, conservation or carbon-offset projects undermine pastoralist livelihoods while intensifying conflict, poverty and environmental degradation. Yet pastoralism remains one of the most climate-resilient land-use systems in drylands. Through mobility and communal rangeland management, pastoralists sustain livelihoods, supply vital meat and milk production, and maintain ecological balance in areas where crop farming is often unsustainable.

Meanwhile, communities defending their territories face criminalisation and violence. Women pastoralists and small-scale producers, youth, and Indigenous Peoples remain excluded from decision-making processes, despite being central to food production and environmental stewardship.

ICARRD+20 must therefore not be a commemorative event. It must become a turning point.

Our Calls to Governments and International Institutions

Ahead of ICARRD+20, we call on governments, international institutions, and development partners to commit to the following:

1. **Recognise and protect collective and customary land tenure systems**, including individual and collective land rights as affirmed in CESCR, UNDRIP and UNDROP.
2. **Protect pastoralist rangelands and livestock mobility**, including cross-border corridors essential for climate adaptation and peace, and prevent conversion of rangelands to inappropriate uses such as monoculture tree plantations.
3. **Implement genuine agrarian reform and equitable land redistribution**, prioritising landless farmers, women, youth, pastoralists and Indigenous communities, while addressing the historical and political drivers of land degradation and induced land scarcity.
4. **End land speculation and financialisation**, including large-scale land acquisitions and carbon or biodiversity credit schemes that dispossess communities.
5. **Redirect agricultural and climate finance toward agroecology, rangeland restoration and community-led food systems**, and integrate pro-pastoralist strategies into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Promote conservation models that uphold pastoralists' rights and ensure restoration strengthens pastoralist livelihoods as part of a just green transition.
6. **Invest in decentralised infrastructure and services compatible with mobile pastoralist systems**, including water, veterinary care, markets, education and health.
7. **Guarantee meaningful participation of affected communities**, and free prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, in land, agriculture and climate decision-making.
8. **Protect land and environmental defenders**, and end violence, criminalisation and forced displacement.
9. **Establish binding corporate accountability mechanisms** for human rights violations and ecological harm across global value chains.

Toward Land Justice, Pastoralist Futures and Ecological Restoration

The future lies not in further commodifying land and food systems, but in restoring community control over territories, securing pastoralist mobility and commons, and supporting agroecological transitions rooted in justice and ecological integrity.

ICARRD+20 must renew global commitments to agrarian reform, land justice, and food sovereignty, led by communities that sustain the world's food systems and ecosystems.

Land justice is climate justice. Pastoralist mobility is ecological resilience.