

“ALSIPURA STATEMENT”
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“Indian Pastoralists and Herders Association”

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Members of pastoral communities from all over India, including Changpa, Raika/ Rebari, Gujjar, Toda, Dhangar, Malaimadu cattle breeders, Kurma sheep breeders, Vembur sheep breeders, Andhra Pradesh Sheep and Goat Rearers' Association as well as national and international NGOs seeking to protect the interests of pastoralists and other livestock rearers, met at the Training Centre of Lokhit Pashu Palak Sansthan in Alsipura (near Sadri, District Pali, Rajasthan, India) from 22-23 March, 2002 to discuss their mutual problems and exchange experiences about their situations.

They agreed on the following statement:

Pastoralists play an important role in the ecology of India. Their production of organic manure contributes to the maintenance of soil fertility. Their grazing controls invasive exotic species. Contrary to their reputation, pastoralists have many traditional practices for conserving vegetation, for instance by rotational grazing.

Pastoralists make a significant but largely unacknowledged contribution to India's economy in terms of food security (milk), provision of draft animal power, as well as foreign exchange earnings (meat, fibre e.g. Pashmina wool)

Since pastoralists usually do not own land, their produce is generated exclusively by dependence on communally and state owned grazing land. Due to neglect by officials and policy makers, pastoralists face deprivation from their traditional and customary rights to these grazing areas. Because their grazing areas are in decline everywhere, their populations are also declining throughout India.

Pastoralists play an important role on the conservation of indigenous livestock breeds (such as one humped camel, Toda buffalo, Nari and Malaimadu cattle, Deccani sheep), while Adivasis conserve valuable poultry genetic resources (Aseel chicken). These breeds harbour a wide variety of adaptive traits, being able to cope with harsh climates and landscapes and resisting diseases that affect crossbred animals. It is imperative to conserve them.

For many pastoralists, these farm animal genetic resources are the basis of their cultural identity and they have a moral and social attachment to them.

Pastoralists face severe pressures and many of them feel threatened by the continuous decrease in grazing resources, due to factors such as:

- They are usually excluded from participation in the Village Forest Protection Committees that are promoted by the Joint Forest Management Programme.
- In Rajasthan, the allotment of *gochar* land for private use at the discretion of District Collectors is undercutting their resource base of pastoralists.
- There are a large number of cases where pastoralists are banned from their traditional grazing areas because these have come under various “forest protection” or management scheme). Examples include: Malaimadu breeders in Tamil Nadu and the Grizzled Squirrel sanctuary, Toda buffalo breeders, camel breeders and the Kumbhalgarh Reserve in Rajasthan.

- In many places, for instance Ladakh, protection of wildlife has proceeded at the expense of the availability of grass biomass for the herds of pastoralists.
- Elimination of fallow areas, due to increase in irrigation agriculture.

In order to maintain their cultural identity and continue to fulfill their crucial role in India's ecology and economy, pastoralists recommend and demand the following policy changes as absolutely essential:

- Revival of traditional norms for use of grazing lands (such as rotation).
- Land use policies that protect grazing areas and ensure sufficient space for their livelihoods.
- Linkages between the government departments responsible for the two components of their livelihoods i.e. animal husbandry and forest /environment)
- Educational facilities that integrate and reinforce important elements of their culture and indigenous knowledge (experience is already available from Ladakh).
- Acknowledgement and support for their essential role in conserving India's farm animal genetic resources and valuable genetic traits.
- Animal health and livestock extension services that are suited to their particular situation and integrate/utilize the considerable indigenous (ethno-veterinary) knowledge of pastoralists.

Alsipura/Sadri. March 23, 2002

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