



Statement by the participants of the International Workshop on Camel Pastoralism, 5-10 January, 2024

Held in Sadri, Rajasthan, India, the International Workshop on Camelid Pastoralism was the first international event of the International Year of Camelids, 2024. The experience exchange was hosted by Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan (LPPS), the League for Pastoral Peoples (LPP) and the Godwar camel pastoralist milk producers. Participants represented the Raika camel herders and other camel pastoralists from Rajasthan and Gujarat in India, camel herders from Mongolia and Kenya, as well as researchers and practitioners from India, Iran, Kenya, UK, and Germany. They were joined on-line by scientists and practitioners from Peru, Pakistan, UAE, and USA.

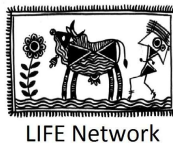
The participants appreciated that the UN General Assembly has designated 2024 as the International Year of Camelids, but cautioned that camelids should not be looked at as merely a means of production. Historically, camelids¹ are associated with highly mobile communities who capitalized on their capacity to convert the sparse vegetation of marginal areas into valuable products including food, fibre, fuel, and physical energy.

Camelids are vital for food security and biodiversity protection in the arid and semi-arid regions of the world, but only if they are kept in mobile management systems. Their mobility is an asset and explicit method of resilience especially in times of global climate change and environmental unpredictability. This is a fact that has long been realized by local people at the grassroots level who have been switching to camels from other livestock to improve their resilience to climate change, and to cope with droughts and water scarcity. Camelids are also regarded as especially beneficial for the environment because of their soft feet that do not disturb the soil, as well as their grazing/browsing habits.

Camel pastoralists, who have lived with their camels since centuries or even millennia, have tremendous bodies of traditional knowledge and wisdom. They regard their camelids as family members and often have a spiritual connection to them. Over the millennia, they have diversified camelids into hundreds of breeds and have developed an extensive range of products from them.

There is an increasing global demand for the special qualities of camel milk as a health food and (supplementary) treatment for various civilizational diseases such as autism and diabetes. Indigenous production systems and ancient knowledge are vital to save the rich nutritional qualities of camel products including the microbiological cultures that are associated with them and that disappear when camels are stall-fed.

¹ Camelids include seven species: Bactrian camels, dromedary camels and wild camels as well as South American camelids, namely domesticated llamas and alpacas, and wild vicuñas and guanacos.



Many inspirational approaches to camel development are women-led. It is noteworthy that women are leaders in developing and marketing camel-based products. For them camels are valuable assets, and they create a diverse range of products from wool, meat and milk. In doing so they contribute to the livelihoods and welfare of their own community and families, as well as that of camel pastoralists.

Camel pastoralists are facing land dispossession and policies and programmes which do not recognise their rights. Land and mobility rights are important factors for the future of camelid pastoralism. The lack of recognition of their customary land tenure and territories of life, enclosure of customary lands, and access rights to land are amongst the most important threats faced in recent decades. Threats include loss of mobility, extractive industries (mining, oil and gas), green energy, dam building, infrastructure construction, extension of commercial agrobusiness, and urbanization.

The participants rejected the extractive model of animal production that was first superimposed on many camelid countries in colonial times and is now leading to the capital-intensive industrialization of camel keeping which is dependent on fossil fuels, chemical inputs and imported feed. At a time when the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is a key means of preventing further global heating, fossil fuel free camelid development that is solar powered, makes optimal use of local resources, and is in tune with planetary boundaries is the need of the hour.

To support this model of food and fibre production and preserve it as an important part of our cultural heritage, governments and policy-makers of the countries where camelids live, must recognize their 'territories of life', respect, and protect the customary rights of camel pastoralists and provide them with legal, institutional, and financial support that ensures the continuation of camel herding into the future. Access to good veterinary services is especially important. Furthermore, mobile social services as well as state policies and programs that guarantee access to grazing and incentivize youths to take up mobile camel pastoralism are essential to ensure the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

People and groups who care about camelids (including policy and decision makers, CSOs, pastoralists, camel herders and their organizations, researchers, media, consumers and the private sector) should value and appreciate the quality, embedded cultural heritage, and variety of camel products, such as milk, meat, wool, leather, and handicrafts, and work to set up fair and ethical value chains that respect the dignity and interests of the camel herders and the well-being of their camels. Such products are precious and should therefore be remunerated accordingly. Community-based value chains that enable pastoralists to gain the majority of benefits from their own, often rare, products should be a development priority.

The International Year of Camelids is an opportunity to understand and value the work and knowledge of camel herding communities and must be in the centre of its activities. We expect global mobile camel pastoralists to unite their voices and work in alliance with each other to promote and adopt a development model that is good for camelids, people, and the planet and can also pave the way for a successful International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists in 2026.

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