

# PASTORES



Pastoral ACTORs, Ecosystem services and Society  
as key elements of agro-pastoral systems in the Mediterranean

## Mainstreaming Pastoralism in Sectoral Policies in the Mediterranean Region



**Policy Brief**

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## Introduction

The [Pactores project](#) stands amongst the many endeavours that aim at pushing pastoralism high up the agenda for a sustainable Mediterranean, as this would provide relevant strategic options to tackle ongoing societal challenges in the region. By showing the strategic links between sustainable livestock systems, healthy rangeland territories, and rural community welfare, Pactores helps to demonstrate that pastoralism is highly effective and resilient in agro-ecological settings where other forms of food production and resource management would not be feasible.

The project is coordinated by the Center for Agro-food Economics and Development (Spain), and implemented with CIHEAM-Bari (Italy), University of Vic - UVIC (Spain), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - AUTH (Greece), Polytechnic University Marche - UNIVPM (Italy), National Research Council - ISPAAM (Italy), Institut des Regions Arides - IRA (Tunisia), Algerian National Agronomic Research Institute - INRAA (Algeria), Sétif University - UFA (Algeria), and Suleyman University - SDU (Turkey). The Pactores project is structured into four work packages: WP1. Assessment of social and policy dimensions of Mediterranean rangeland systems; WP2. Agro-pastoral socio-ecosystem services in the Mediterranean; WP3. Economic sustainability assessment: addressing the financial performance of agro-pastoralists and their productive rationality; WP4. Communication, knowledge deployment and mobility. Task 4.4, led by CIHEAM-Bari, builds on the project results and provides recommendations to make agro-pastoral systems and sustainable grassland management central in sectoral policies in the Mediterranean region.

### **Analysis of pastoral policies in the Mediterranean region**

Throughout the Mediterranean, and most likely as in the rest of the world, agro-pastoral systems are being increasingly integrated into wider societal dynamics; accordingly, environmental uncertainties are progressively complemented by those generated in the market and policy domains. While ecological challenges pastoralists face are quite well known and analysed, those affecting their socio-political, institutional, and economic dimensions have received less attention and understanding.

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy is paramount in defining pastoralists' evolving and shrinking room for manoeuvre, not only in Europe but also in neighbouring countries through the Pre-accession for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPARD) programme addressing eastern Europe, the Balkans and Turkey, as well as the European Neighbourhood Partnership for Agricultural Development (ENPARD) informing EU relationships with most Maghreb and Mashreq countries. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, despite un-harmonised and diversified ideological and institutional settings, the policies issued in the different countries seem to converge to a very similar framework. Throughout the MENA region, the increasing compliance with institutional rules and legislative regulations has exposed agro-pastoral farms to a greater degree of dependence on public subsidies, loans and input supply schemes and market mechanisms, so to increase their vulnerability to socio-economic and environmental dynamics.

Particularly in the Mediterranean, where pastoralism is embedded in local cultures and landscapes, the process of institutionalisation does not seem to have been beneficial for pastoralists, who are currently seeing their consistency decline, their socio-economic conditions worsen and their ecosystems degraded. Despite considerable political and financial investments, agro-pastoral systems across the region suffer from similar patterns and trends, indicating above all a serious erosion of their natural, human and socio-economic resource base.

## **Mainstreaming pastoralism is sectoral policies: Recommendations**

The main critique to the policy frameworks informing resource management and governance issues in pastoral areas is that these have mostly evolved to serve the interests and needs of non-pastoral stakeholders. This is visible in the fragmentation of the different policies concerning the resources that pastoralists manage, which is instrumental to State approaches and urban culture, but proves inadequate to support the well-being of pastoral communities. Similarly, development approaches aimed at peripheral communities and marginal territories are often adaptations of mainstream visions designed for intensive production in high-potential areas, rather than being tailored to mountainous or dryland settings and negotiated with the involvement of local communities. This explains to a good degree the logic behind most public funding, which increasingly supports capital- rather than labour-intensive farming systems.

While navigating these different policy dimensions, pastoralists also have to take into account the broader institutional framework that impinges on their livelihoods, and that typically shows more concern for other societal interests and actors, rather than focusing on the needs and the rights of pastoralists. Trade agreements, environmental concerns, food security and safety issues, consumers' attitudes, value chain governance are often steered by interests and in ways that do not favour pastoralists in the marketing of their products, the protection of their lands, the development of their culture. This is quite surprising, as it might seem that the interests of pastoralists conflict with other societal objectives, whereas they are often the best allies in pursuing such political intentions.

The main shortcoming of current policymaking is probably its limited ability to effectively link these different interests within an overall development framework that sees society as a sustainably functioning organism. The abandonment of marginal territories, the erosion of local knowledge and skills, the intensification of livestock production, the loss of landscape biodiversity are processes that affect society as a whole, with important consequences for everyone's lives. This short-sighted perspective reflects and reiterates the prejudice that pervades our society, from educational to administrative systems, in that pastoralism is perceived as obsolete and ineffective, rather than the most appropriate agricultural practice for certain rich but fragile ecological contexts. This misperception translates into low social and economic prestige, and helps explain to a good extent the phenomena of labour shortages, low generational turnover, and rural depopulation that characterise pastoral settings throughout the Mediterranean today.

In order to redress these dynamics, the policy framework across the Mediterranean should **appreciate pastoralism as a specialised and most effective system to produce food and maintain the natural resource base in the mountainous and arid areas of the region**. Accordingly, public investment and support systems should take better account of the specificities and potentials of extensive livestock farming and operate with the aim of adequately compensating and rewarding the people who decide to invest their lives, professions and livelihoods in providing society with precious products and important public goods that are poorly recognised and valued by market mechanisms. Far from complicating and constraining the capacities of pastoralists, public institutions and officers should engage in more effectively translating positive principles into appropriate support measures and adapt legislative, financial and administrative mechanisms accordingly.

At the different national and local levels, **policy endeavours should redress public support in more effective ways so to enhance the viability and the attractiveness of pastoral farming systems**. This requires, on the one hand, a better tuning of existing financial mechanisms that support environmental-friendly practices while also ensuring the entrepreneurial autonomy of pastoral farms. On the other hand, adequate investments are needed in developing practices, technologies and arrangements that are tuned and tailored to the specificities of pastoral resource management and

the embedding agro-ecological conditions, rather than adapting those conceived for conventional, intensive production systems.

Existing experiences across the region show that the **societal appreciation of the pastoral profession could receive an important boost from locally-nested pastoral schools** that invest in reproducing and innovating local farming systems and the related human capital. With the aim of supporting generational renewal, these experiences allow, on the one hand, for a better recognition of the public goods that pastoralists provide to the wider society, while, on the other, contribute to enhancing entrepreneurial skills through managerial and organizational innovations, including for the integration of newcomers issued from other settings or countries.

**The low involvement of pastoralists in fair social dialogue and policy debates is also a major gap in most Mediterranean countries.** While the political arena should open up to the participation and contribution of pastoralists, investing in their social and political capital provides is relevant in consolidating civil society around sustained collective action. Better organised pastoralists provide a strategic asset to effectively deliver public services and technical assistance to support innovation and networking. These initiatives are also critical in enabling monitoring and ensuring that appropriate policy principles are adequately translated into legislative and administrative measures in the field.

**In a more technical perspective,** climate dynamics and range ecosystems functioning suggest the reinvigoration of indigenous breeds, animal mobility and seasonal rotation patterns, which in turn require more effective mechanisms to regulate access to and control of pastures. Crop-livestock interactions have substantial potential for development, provided that these evolve without altering feeding and livestock management patterns in ways that degrade the local natural resource base. Better synergies could also be forged with the forestry sector, moving away from the rigid dualism that currently informs its relationship with herding communities. As has been shown, particularly in the Mediterranean, the grazing of animals, including goats, plays an important role in the management of forest resources and the prevention of major environmental hazards, including fires.

**In a regional perspective,** climate dynamics and environmental changes, together with socio-economic transformations and evolving political domains, generate significant uncertainties that challenge the sustainability of Mediterranean pastoral systems. On the one hand, the arid lands of North Africa and the Middle East host growing numbers of animals under climatic conditions that increasingly affect pasture conditions and freshwater availability. While on the other hand, livestock numbers are dramatically decreasing on Europe's greener pastures, where EU policies seem ineffective in countering rural depopulation. The current patterns of farmland abandonment in Europe and the intense rangeland degradation in MENA countries provide dramatic scenarios and call for an integrated policy framework that better takes into account evolving trade patterns, environmental changes, labour markets and migration regimes in a regional perspective.

Such a policy shift should capitalise on evolving societal demands for the products, services and public goods provided through pastoral resources management and that nurture other relevant economic dimensions - from leisure to tourism, to landscape management and environmental protection. It must also take into account existing experiences and programmes that have demonstrated consistency in supporting sustainable pastoral farming. The trade and market dimensions are as well part of the challenge, through better governance of existing value chains, that adequately recognise and prize the positive features associated with local extensive livestock breeding when compared to products issued from other production systems or areas, which hold different implications for the environment and society.

## **Original contribution of PACTORES project**

The [Pactores project](#) stems from the observation that, despite potential good intentions, the policy framework has failed to support sustainable food production, natural resource management and rural livelihoods in agro-pastoral environments across the Mediterranean. Despite scientific developments and civil society efforts, most policymaking finds it difficult to recognise the specificities of pastoral resource management and to appreciate its socio-economic and agro-ecological potentials. In most countries, existing institutional and legislative frameworks remain persistently and obstinately unfavourable to extensive livestock farming. The consequences and implications of such longstanding inconsistencies pose a serious threat to the sustainable future of the region.

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