

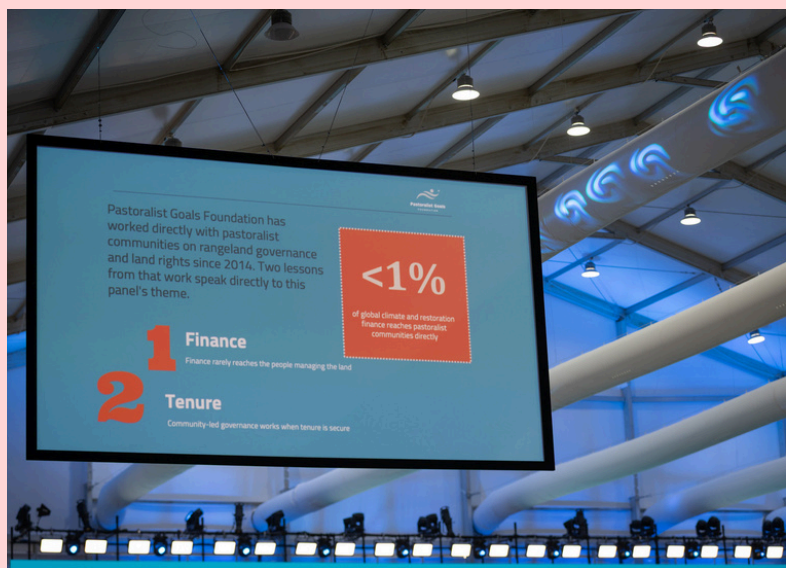
DISPATCH FROM MONGOLIA

Pastoralists, Rangelands, Youth, Rights & Finance at UNCCD COP17

For the first time, Pastoralist Goals Foundation came to a UN Convention to speak directly from the experience of pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya.

I came to Ulaanbaatar not only as the Founder and Executive Director of Pastoralist Goals Foundation, but as a pastoralist from the Rendille community in Marsabit. I carried with me the experiences of communities that are frequently discussed in global policy spaces, but are still too rarely present when decisions are being made.

At UNCCD COP17, PGF brought the realities, aspirations and demands of pastoralists into several spaces, the Open Dialogue Session, to conversations with UNESCO and UNDP on pastoralist youth, the World Food Forum and Youth Negotiators Academy, and the Ministerial Dialogue on innovative financial mechanisms for healthy land and drought resilience.



During the Ministerial Dialogue on Innovative Financial Mechanisms for Healthy Land and Drought Resilience, PGF called for a shift from incremental project financing towards structural and equitable investment in pastoralist systems.

Our priorities were clear:

- **Direct public finance**, guarantees and financial instruments to pastoralist-led organizations and community land institutions.
- **Invest in rangelands by** supporting pastoralists, community-driven restoration, secure land tenure and resilient livestock value chains.
- Protect pastoral livelihoods and Indigenous knowledge through fair and positive value chains that do not enable land grabbing or undermine customary systems.

The principle is straightforward:

If pastoralists are expected to safeguard rangelands, finance must reach the people actually managing those rangelands.



Our message was consistent

"Pastoralists are rights-holders, economic actors, knowledge holders and essential stewards of the world's rangelands."

At the Open Dialogue Session, I challenged the tendency to ask what more pastoralists should do for biodiversity and land restoration.

The question, instead, should be: Will finance and policy support the continuation of a way of life that is already conserving some of the world's most important dryland ecosystems?

PGF called for three fundamental shifts

01 – DIRECT FINANCE

Funding mechanisms that reach grassroots pastoralist institutions directly, rather than allowing layers of intermediaries to absorb resources intended for communities.

02 – RIGHTS & MOBILITY

Secure customary land rights and protected mobility corridors as foundations for sustainable rangeland management and restoration.

03 – KNOWLEDGE

Recognition of Indigenous and pastoralist knowledge as a living management system, to be integrated into national land, climate and adaptation planning alongside scientific knowledge.

The message was simple: finance, rights and knowledge must move together.

PASTORALIST YOUTH: FROM PARTICIPATION TO POWER

In conversations with UNESCO and UNDP, PGF presented what we described as the non-reducible minimums for pastoralist youth, grounded in the realities of pastoralist communities and the Madrid Youth Declaration.

OUR NON-REDUCIBLE MINIMUMS

- **Recognize pastoralist youth as essential drivers of present-day adaptation.**

Pastoralist youth are not simply leaders of tomorrow. They are already adapting livelihoods, navigating changing economies and responding to climate, land and social pressures today.

- **Guarantee meaningful youth representation.**

Pastoralist youth must be present where decisions affecting their lives and territories are made.

- **Establish permanent space for pastoralist youth within UNCCD processes.**

Youth participation cannot depend on invitations that change from one process to another.

- **Invest in culturally appropriate education and life skills.**

Education systems must respond to pastoralist realities, including mobility, livelihoods, culture and changing economic opportunities.

- **Provide targeted, direct and fit-for-purpose financing.**

Grassroots pastoralist organizations and youth-led initiatives need access to resources without systems designed for large institutions becoming barriers to participation.

- **Recognize youth as bridges between knowledge systems.**

Pastoralist youth can connect Indigenous and traditional knowledge with science, technology, innovation and new forms of learning.

- **Stop romanticizing pastoralism.**

Pastoralists should not be reduced to cultural symbols, resilient victims or beneficiaries. We must be recognized as rights-holders, economic actors and decision-makers. At the World Food Forum and Youth Negotiators Academy, PGF carried this conversation further

Young people should not only inherit responsibilities. They must also inherit the rights, resources and authority to shape the future.



Perhaps my biggest lesson from Mongolia was understanding how influence is built. At COP17, I saw how organized interests shape global conversations through sustained presence, research, reports, side events, relationships and strategic engagement. This is not accidental; influence is built over time.

Pastoralists must therefore prepare not only to participate, but to negotiate. We need pastoralist negotiators who understand the Convention, its processes, finance, science and the politics behind negotiating language. We need institutions that can produce evidence, influence research and remain engaged beyond the COP.

"Participation without preparation can become representation without influence."

Mongolia also reinforced for me the importance of solidarity, values and redlines. As Indigenous Peoples, we must know what we stand for, what we will defend and who genuinely stands with us. Policies and language can change, but trust and alliances must ultimately be tested through action.

The lesson I take home is simple: **pastoralists must move from being represented to representing ourselves; from being consulted to co-deciding; and from receiving projects to directing resources.**

