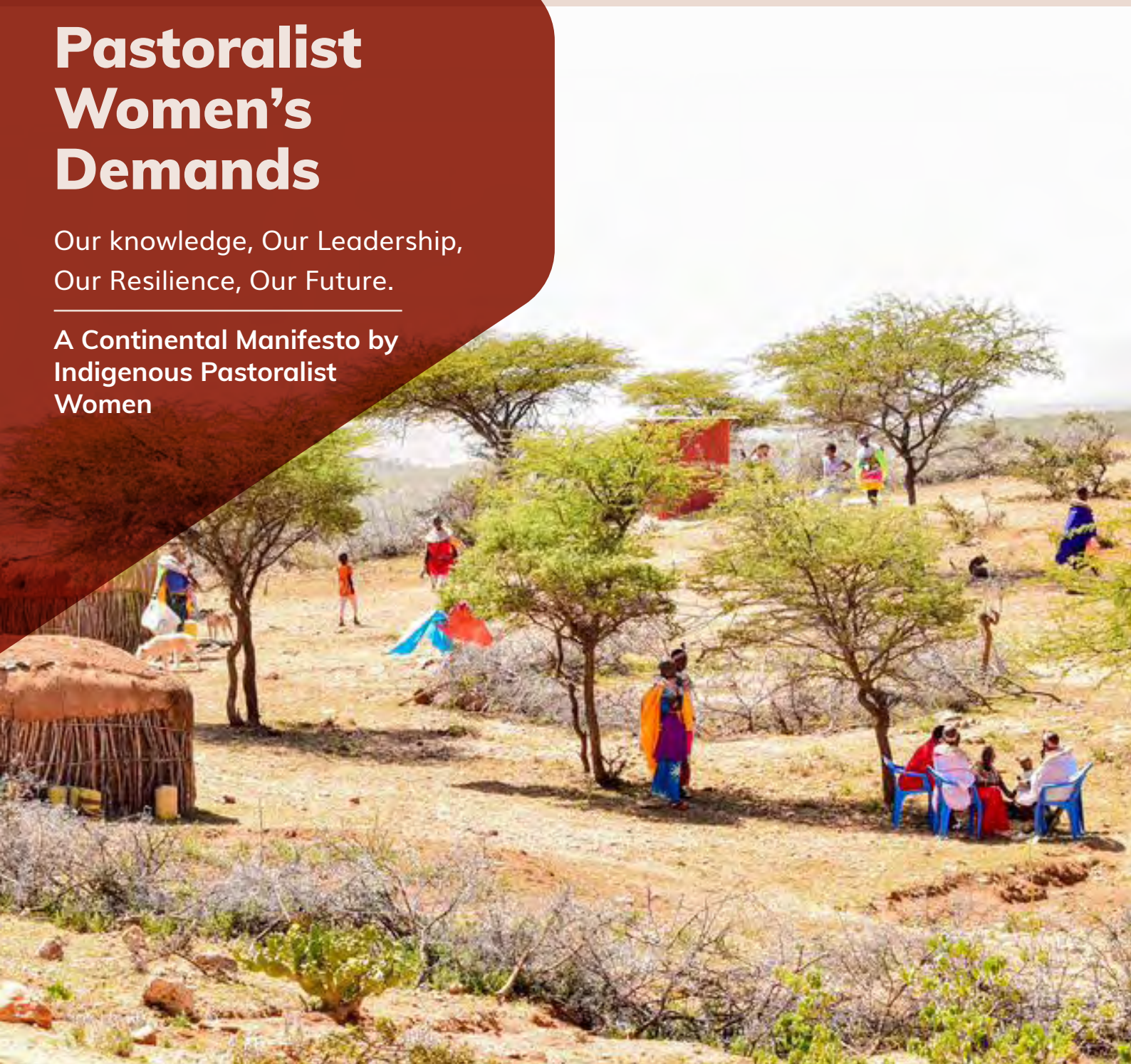


Pastoralist Women's Demands

Our knowledge, Our Leadership,
Our Resilience, Our Future.

A Continental Manifesto by
Indigenous Pastoralist
Women



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
**RANGELANDS AND
PASTORALISTS**
2026

Foreward

Voices from, by the most affected indigenous women, paradigm shift though leading the change, tapping into indigenous women knowledge. As a pastoralist woman, a mother, human rights defender, a lifelong practitioner of pastoralism, and the Executive Director of Samburu Women Trust (SWT), it is my honor to present the manifesto, **“Pastoralist Women’s Demands for IYPR 2026 – Africa.”** This publication is far more than a collection of reports, recommendations, or statistics - it is a living testimony of pastoralist women’s resilience, leadership, and unwavering innovation.



Across Africa, pastoralist women are the pillars of our communities from time in memorial. We sustain households, nurture families, protect rangelands, preserve Indigenous knowledge, biodiversity, and lead with courage during crises. From Samburu to Borana, Maasai, Fulani, and Turkana lands, women have long been the invisible architects of survival, adaptation, and progress. Yet, despite our indispensable contributions, we have historically been excluded from decision-making, denied recognition, and most women led initiatives remain underfunded, our voices too often silenced in spaces where our insights and expertise are most needed.

The International Year of Pastoralists and Rangelands (IYPR) 2026 offers a historic opportunity:

to recognize pastoralist women as rights holders, knowledge keepers, and leaders at the center of policy, programming, and global advocacy.

This manifesto is our call to action - to governments, donors, global platforms, and communities. It documents our lived experiences, our strategies for resilience, and our demands for equity, recognition, and meaningful inclusion.

We hope that readers of this publication will not only come to understand the realities, knowledge, and the role of pastoralists women within their communities and society but will also take action: to support our leadership, invest in our economies, amplify our voices, and partner with us in shaping sustainable pastoralist futures.

Pastoralist women are ready.

We have always led.

IYPR 2026 must finally see us, hear us, and act with us - not for us, but with us.

Jane Meriwas, HSC
Executive Director,
Samburu Women Trust (SWT)

Opening declaration

We, Indigenous and specifically pastoralist women of Africa, come together at a critical historical moment. As the world prepares to mark the **International Year of Pastoralists and Rangelands (IYPR) 2026**, we refuse invisibility. We refuse token inclusion. We refuse policies written about us without us. We have to be positively included, and contributions considered.

For generations, pastoralist women have sustained Africa's rangelands, protected livestock-based economies, transmitted Indigenous knowledge, nourished families, mediated peace, and ensured survival under some of the harshest climatic conditions on earth. Yet we remain systematically excluded from decision-making, land ownership, climate finance, and political power.

This manifesto is not a request. It is a declaration of rights, leadership, and political demands.

We speak as Samburu women, Maasai women, Borana women, Turkana women, Afar women, Fulani women, Tuareg women, Somali women, as Indigenous pastoralist women across Africa. Our contexts differ, but our struggles and aspirations are shared.

We assert clearly that:

- Pastoralism is not backward way of living - it is sophisticated, adaptive, and future-facing way of life.
- Pastoralist women are not beneficiaries - we are leaders, rights holders, and agents of resilience.
- Indigenous knowledge is not informal - it is science, having survived hard times as well as overcoming institutional marginalization.

IYPR 2026 must mark a turning point, not another symbolic year.

SECTION I

Why pastoralist women's demands matter now

1.1 Pastoralism at the center of Africa's future

Pastoralism sustains millions of Africans and occupies more than half of the continent's landmass. It contributes to food security, climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, medicine, and cross-border economies. Yet pastoralist territories remain affected negatively targeted by politically identity-based characteristics underinvested and misrepresented.

Development narratives have wrongfully portrayed pastoralism anti civilization, fragile, inefficient, or destined to disappear. These narratives have justified land dispossession, sedentarization policies, extractive investments, and militarization of rangelands.

For pastoralist women, the consequences have been devastating: loss of land tenure, lack of basic services, increased workloads, heightened violence, and exclusion from economic opportunities.

1.2 Gendered impacts of policy failure

When pastoralism is undermined, women absorb the shock first.

- When grazing land is taken, women walk farther for food, and water.
- When livestock die, women manage hunger and malnutrition.
- When conflict erupts, women protect children and elders.
- When services collapse, women provide unpaid care.

Yet policies addressing pastoralism rarely recognize these gendered realities. Women are mentioned as vulnerable groups, not as political actors whose leadership is essential to sustainable solutions.

1.3 IYPR 2026 as a political opportunity

IYPR 2026 must not become another international observance that celebrates pastoralism symbolically while continuing harmful policies in practice.

For pastoralist women, IYPR 2026 is a **political opening** to:

- Reclaim pastoralist identity and dignity
- Demand structural policy reforms
- Secure recognition of Indigenous knowledge
- Access climate finance and development resources
- Build intergenerational pastoralist women's leadership

This manifesto sets out our demands clearly and unapologetically.

SECTION II

Who we are - Pastoralist women as leaders and knowledge holders

2.1 Leadership rooted in daily survival

Across Africa's rangelands, pastoralist women lead every day - not through formal literacy engagement, titles, but through responsibility.

In Samburu, women decide how milk is shared during drought. In Borana communities, women manage household resilience strategies. In Fulani territories, women sustain dairy economies. In Turkana and Afar regions, women organize survival during displacement.

Leadership in pastoralist contexts is practical, relational, and collective. It is rooted in care, foresight, and accountability to community survival.

2.2 Indigenous knowledge as living systems

Pastoralist women carry knowledge systems that have sustained life in arid lands for centuries. This knowledge build over centuries includes:

- Seasonal grazing and mobility planning
- Livestock health and breeding practices
- Water source identification and protection
- Indigenous medicines for people and animals
- Food preservation and nutrition

This knowledge is transmitted orally, through practice, observation, and mentorship. It evolves with changing conditions. It is adaptive science.

Yet colonial and post-colonial extractive governance systems have dismissed this knowledge as informal or outdated.

We demand its full recognition and protection.

SECTION III

Recognition of pastoralist women as political actors and decision-makers

3.1 Our position

We demand full recognition of pastoralist women as political actors and decision-makers at all levels of governance - local, national, regional, and global. Indigenous women must be meaningfully included in localization of human rights, and humanitarian responses.

Pastoralist women are not passive members of communities. We negotiate survival daily in conditions shaped by climate change, land dispossession, conflict, and systemic neglect. We make decisions that determine food security, mobility, conflict resolution, care, and continuity of life. These are political decisions.

Yet across Africa, pastoralist women remain excluded from formal power. Decisions about land, rangelands, climate finance, peace and security, development planning, and resource allocation are made without us - despite the fact that these decisions affect us first and most.

Recognition is not symbolic. Recognition is power - the power to influence agendas, shape policies, control resources, and hold institutions accountable. The world would indeed be a better beneficiary of learning from indigenous women.

3.2 The reality of exclusion

Across pastoralist regions, women's leadership is systematically undermined through harmful, disrespectful forms of disempowerment, including, but not limited to some underlying aspects like;

- Male-dominated governance structures that exclude women from councils of elders, rangeland tenure committees, peace forums, and land boards
- Cultural misinterpretations that silence women's voices while benefiting from their labor and knowledge
- Policy frameworks that treat pastoralist women as beneficiaries of welfare rather than agents of governance
- Development and humanitarian programs that consult women informally but deny them decision-making authority
- National and regional platforms where pastoralist representation is male, urban-based, or disconnected from lived realities
- Studies, and research that are extractive, with no credit to the information women provide

In Samburu communities, women may organize food sharing during drought, negotiate access to water points, and mediate tensions between families - yet be absent from formal meetings where land use or security decisions are finalized.

This contradiction must end.

3.3 Pastoralist women's political leadership in practice

Pastoralist women already exercise political leadership in ways that are often unrecognized by formal systems.

In Samburu and other Indigenous pastoralist communities, women:

- Decide how scarce resources are distributed during drought
- Negotiate with elders and local authorities to protect girls from early and forced marriage
- Mobilize communities during climate shocks and displacement
- Organize women's groups, savings collectives, and producer associations
- Act as first responders in times of hunger, conflict, and crisis
- Periodic evaluation of implementation to move from theory to practice

These forms of leadership are collective, relational, and accountable. They prioritize survival, care, and long-term resilience over short-term power.

Formal governance systems must adapt to recognize these leadership models - not erase them. Pastoralists indigenous women must be included in political power, representation, and all levels of governance.

3.4 Recognition beyond tokenism

We reject token inclusion. People speaking in the name of indigenous women, without indigenous women knowledge or participation. Too often, pastoralist women are invited to meetings without decision-making power, placed on panels without influence, or showcased in reports without control over outcomes.

True recognition requires:

- Decision-making authority, not advisory roles
- Control over resources, not symbolic participation
- Representation that is accountable to pastoralist women's constituencies
- Safe and accessible spaces that respect Indigenous languages, mobility patterns, and care responsibilities
- Political, electoral and public participation roles.

Participation without power is not inclusion - it is exploitation.

3.5 Our demands for IYPR 2026

We call on governments, donors, and global institutions to commit to the following:

01: At community and local levels

- Mandatory inclusion of pastoralist women in rangeland governance committees, peace councils, land boards, and climate adaptation structures
- Recognition of women's customary leadership roles within Indigenous governance systems
- Support for women-led community institutions and movements
- Implement times, and venues that are appropriate for women inclusive participation

02: At national levels

- Legal and policy reforms guaranteeing pastoralist women's participation in decision-making
- Quotas or affirmative measures for women's leadership in pastoral and ASAL governance
- Resourcing women-led organizations to engage in policy processes
- Representation at legislative and executive levels
- Full funding for affected indigenous women experiencing the grave violations, and abuses, culminating from failure of state protection of harm

03: At regional & continental levels (AU, IGAD, RECs)

- Direct representation of pastoralist women in pastoralism, climate, food systems, and peace platforms
- Institutional partnerships with Indigenous women-led organizations
- Accountability mechanisms to track women's participation and influence
- Representation at human rights tools and mechanisms

04: At global levels (UN, FAO, IFAD, Climate Funds)

- Recognition of pastoralist women as rights holders and political actors in IYPR 2026 programming
- Direct access to funding for women-led pastoral initiatives
- Inclusion of pastoralist women in global decision-making forums - not only as speakers, but as agenda-setters

3.6 What recognition makes possible

When pastoralist women are recognized as political actors:

- Policies become more practical grounded and effective
- Climate adaptation strategies reflect lived realities
- Conflict prevention improves through inclusive peacebuilding
- Resources reach households and communities more equitably
- Girls see leadership as possible and legitimate

Recognition is not a favor. It is a prerequisite for justice, sustainability, and resilience.

3.7 Our declaration

- We will no longer accept policies about pastoralism without pastoralist women.
- We will no longer accept participation without power.
- We will no longer accept invisibility in spaces where our lives are decided.






As Africa prepares for IYPR 2026, pastoralist women claim our rightful place as political actors and decision-makers - locally, nationally, continentally, and globally.

Developed by Samburu Women Trust (SWT) in solidarity with Indigenous pastoralist women across Africa.





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