



MANIFESTO

OF THE UNIVERSITIES OF WOMEN IN PASTORAL AND AGRO-PASTORAL AREAS
IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Session from 11 to 14 January 2026 in Tsévié, Togo for the
International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

“The future of my daughter”

“At the moment, our animals are no longer able to meet our needs. In order to feed our children, we are forced to herd other people’s animals and work in their fields. The pay is very low and the workload is heavy. I believe we need to change our way of doing things to live better. I have always thought that this poverty is also due to our lack of access to education; it is our greatest obstacle. Here, there is not a single person who has been to school. Even when we receive a letter, we must go to the neighboring village to find someone who can read it. This situation worries me deeply, especially for my children. I spoke to my husband about schooling for my eldest daughter. He agreed but did not help in any way. I sold a goat and sent my daughter to study with my aunt in town. I want her to become someone in this village one day.” Extract from the 350 stories of [the Mosaic of Pastoralist Women](#)



Figure 1 : Extrait de la fresque des Universités Femmes Pasteures, Tsévié, 2026

This testimony expresses an aspiration to broaden children's choices and opportunities, in complementarity with inherited pastoral knowledge. The analysis of the stories contained in the Mosaic of Pastoralist Women also shows that women who are directly affected by the social, environmental and economic dynamics of pastoral systems possess knowledge, skills and proven practices that are essential to the management of herds, resources and territories. Here, education is understood as a lever for empowerment and continuity of pastoral futures, not as a break with pastoralism, but as a force that should strengthen it.

WE ARE ACTORS, WOMEN AND MEN RESEARCHERS¹, ROOTED IN AND COMMITTED TO REALITY

In a regional context marked by intersecting climate, land, security and food crises, increasing pressure on pastoral mobility, and the fragilization of livestock systems, the realities faced by women in pastoral and agropastoral areas constitute a constant challenge:

- Vulnerable, like men, to climate-related shocks;
- More exposed to security risks;
- Caught between insecurity and discrimination;
- Facing loss of milk production and the development of alternative pastoral activities;
- Confronted with male migration and increased responsibility;
- Affected by changes in traditional herd-building systems that weaken income from livestock activities.

These difficulties do not reflect an intrinsic failure of pastoralism as a way of life, a production system, or a sustainable form of territorial management. Rather, they are the result of external structural constraints that must be addressed: restrictions on pastoral mobility, growing land pressure and privatization of commons, unequal value distribution, persistent insecurity, weak implementation of existing policies, and the marginalization of pastoral systems in public decision-making.

In this context, women demonstrate extraordinary strength. They emerge as pillars of pastoral resilience, social cohesion, territorial economies, pastoral knowledge, and the construction of their children's futures.

This manifesto seeks to refound the pastoral political agenda in West and Central Africa on the basis of women's leadership—by listening to women, accompanying ongoing transformations, and building together, women and men alike.

WE REVIEWED THE MERA 2010 OUTCOMES

What Mera proclaimed:

The recognition of the rights of pastoralists, the legitimacy of pastoralism as a way of life, mobility as the foundation of pastoral systems, secure land tenure, women's participation in decision-making, protection against violence and discrimination, and equitable access to essential services.

What MERA helped to change:

¹ "Universities are a space for knowledge construction where each participant is a co-researcher. This is not about academic titles."

- The emergence of women's pastoral leadership with dedicated advocacy;
- Recognition and defense of the pastoral cause;
- Field-based initiatives, particularly those led at the local level.

What MERA did not change:

More than half of the expectations formulated in 2010 have regressed due to:

- Weak implementation of policies and legal frameworks, combined with insecurity and instability;
- Insufficient involvement of women throughout the entire chain of decision-making and action.

Not enough results. Too many words. Not enough action.

PASTORALIST WOMEN SPEAK OUT: HERE IS THEIR VOICE

The perspective on women within pastoral systems as defended by MERA differs from the realities expressed by women in pastoral and agropastoral settings in 2026:

- A transformation in the status of pastoralist women;
- Multiple roles played by women in a rapidly changing society;
- Evolving aspirations and motivations to act;
- Women as strategists, contributing to decision-making in their own ways.

Yet significant challenges remain:

- Structural invisibility of women's multiple roles;
- Decisions and actions still largely taken without women, or with women confined to consultative roles;
- Persistent violence and discrimination against girls and women.

WE SHARE A VISION BASED ON WOMEN'S COMMITMENT

1. Nothing for the pastoral world without women

Everything that concerns women, men and pastoralism must be thought out, designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated **with women**, starting from their words, their lived experiences, their priorities, their ideas and their creativity.

2. Women are not a homogeneous group

The diversity of situations (countries, territories, statuses, ages, pastoral and agro-pastoral contexts) must be recognized, and responses must be adapted to the specific realities of each group of women.

3. Making the voices of the women concerned heard is a political act

Advocacy carried directly by the women themselves, through their own stories, is more powerful, more legitimate and more transformative than any indirect representation.

4. “Listening at night”: Women must be actors in decision-making, not mere figurants

Women must fully participate in decision-making processes, including the most sensitive ones (land, natural resources, conflict resolution), and not merely be consulted symbolically. Processes must adapt to women’s realities, not the other way around.

5. Combating all forms of violence against women and ensuring their rights

It is essential to identify and address visible and invisible violence, old and new, structural and daily, and to co-construct solutions with the women concerned.

6. Ensuring the respect of the fundamental rights of pastoralist women

Women should not have to fight for their rights; it is time for their rights to be guaranteed, and for the institutions responsible for citizen protection, pastoral governance, gender equality, security, rural development and social protection to fully assume their responsibilities.

These institutions—sectoral ministries, local authorities, intergovernmental organizations, regional institutions, technical and financial partners—are obliged to implement the commitments they themselves have made, and to do so with accountability, transparency and continuity, from the local level to the continental level.

Access for women in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas to new roles must not expose them to increased violence and insecurity.

7. Strengthening the political and legal capacities of women within institutions

Women must understand the political, legal and institutional, economic and social, climatic and environmental issues in order to be able to participate and contribute appropriately, and to be capable of leading effective advocacy on questions relating to resources, the environment, inheritance and land rights—at every link in the chain.

8. “The women of tomorrow”: Specifically targeting young girls and their specific needs

Young women and young men already play a central role in the functioning, adaptation and transmission of pastoral systems. Their current marginalization results from structural land, economic, security and political pressures, not from disengagement or lack of interest in pastoralism. Investing in young girls is strategic: their needs are specific, and their trajectories must be supported in differentiated ways, without imposing a single model.

9. “Towards a just and sustainable society”: Combining practical needs with strategic interests

Meeting immediate needs is necessary but insufficient: power relations must also be transformed, and autonomy, education, confidence and the ability to confront structural inequalities must be strengthened. Access to education, training and services must adapt to pastoral realities—mobility, timing, social organization—rather than requiring people to leave pastoral systems. The goal is to strengthen the capacities of women and girls within pastoral territories and systems.

10. Recognizing and strengthening women’s economic power

The economic role of women—particularly in livestock and family production—must be recognized, valued and supported, including by men, because it has a direct impact on families, children’s education, communities and national economies.

This economic power is already deeply rooted in pastoral systems, notably through livestock, milk, family production and territorial economies. It is currently weakened not by a lack of initiative, but by political, land and market transformations that marginalize these activities and their sustainable model. The economic empowerment of women must therefore be anchored in the strengthening of pastoral systems, not in their disappearance.

11. Creating mechanisms of trust and equitable financing

It is essential to establish mechanisms adapted to reach women, build trust with institutions, and provide financing designed for their initiatives and empowerment. These mechanisms will be more effective if they are co-designed with women, instead of persisting in imposing models that remain poorly adapted.

OUR COMMITMENTS

We, women and men gathered within the Universities of Pastoralist Women and signatories of this manifesto, commit ourselves to collaborating with the women and men concerned by the social, environmental and economic challenges and transformations of pastoral systems in order to:

- Be united among us women, to overcome barriers and innovate in social, economic, environmental, climatic, political and institutional fields,
- Collaborate with men, both young and adult, and with society as a whole, from the grassroots to the highest levels, on the decisions taken and to be taken in favour of pastoralism,
- Become authors of our own lives and contributors to the future our children will choose,
- Hold accountable the institutional actors who commit themselves alongside us,
- Be guardians: carrying forward the monitoring mechanism that has been put in place.

WE CALL ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ACTORS TO: ACT

Signatories: Leaders of ROPPA, APESS, WILDAF-AO, AFAO, RBM, RBM members, and invited researchers of the Universities of Women in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.