

The Roots of Overgrazing in Morocco

a pastoralist's perspective



DiversEarth



Supporting the survival and revival of **nomadic practices** and **sustainable mobile pastoralism** in Morocco is key to combatting overgrazing and desertification.



Key Facts

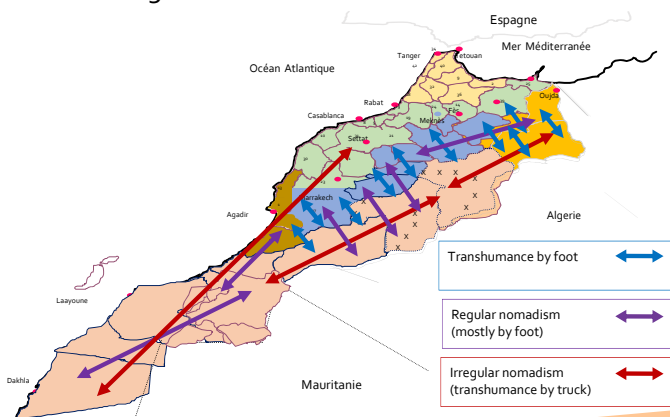
Mobile pastoralism is one of the most efficient livestock farming systems in terms of natural resource and land-use management.

Mobile pastoralism is a sustainable and economically viable system that maximises the least productive zones of our planet, not suitable for cultivation.

Animal husbandry plays an essential economic, social and cultural role in Morocco.

Pastoralism provides income to an important part of the rural population and contributes to food security and poverty reduction.

Livestock breeding represents between 25 and 30% of Moroccan agricultural GDP.



Where are the Moroccan Nomads?

In 10 years, between 2004 and 2014, the nomadic population of Morocco declined by 63% (from 65'500 to 25'000 nomads). If this rate continues, very soon there will be no Moroccan Nomads left.

There has been a major shift from nomadism to sedentarisation in recent years. Some of the main causes for this include:

- ⦿ A closer relationship between nomadic people and the towns, where nomads now build or buy houses, school their children and store-feed their families.
- ⦿ "One foot in the steppe, and one in the town".
- ⦿ A new type of lifestyle with an entrepreneurial spirit where nomads manage their activities from the urban centres.
- ⦿ Means of transportation – now water and concentrated feed are brought to the flocks by truck instead of the other way around.

What will the world lose?

- ⦿ Sustainable grazing systems that benefit biodiversity and prevent overgrazing which leads to desertification.
- ⦿ A practice that helps combat climate change.
- ⦿ Exceptional cultures, spiritualities and alternative lifestyles that may soon exist only for tourists.



Why is there overgrazing?

Overgrazing occurs as a result of too many animals using the pasture (overstocked rangeland) or by using the pasture in a permanent way that does not allow for plant regeneration.

Between 2000 and 2012, there was a 14% increase in livestock numbers.

The stocking density for sheep in Morocco is among the highest in Africa – around 20 sheep / km².

Unlike overgrazing, a moderate grazing (as is characterised in sustainable mobile or nomadic pastoralism) improves the productivity of grasslands which allows the soils to stock carbon. Properly managed pastures are a tool against climate change.

What are the impacts of overgrazing?

Overgrazing in periods of drought results in wind erosion.

Overgrazing leads to the trampling and damage of pastoral plants – biodiversity loss.

Overgrazing compacts the soils leading to a diminished capacity to let water infiltrate.

Overgrazing is ranked by the Moroccan Ministry of agriculture as one of the main causes of desertification.

What are the root causes?

The appropriation of pastoral areas and the disturbance of mobility routes making way for the expansion of crops.

Climate change makes things worse. Increasing climate hazards directly affect the feeding behaviour of the herd. Grazing periods are extended. This leads to overgrazing.

Sedentarisation of pastoralists on pastoral lands.

Subsidies on feed transport / imported feed has been disastrous for the pastures. These measures allow for a considerable increase in animal numbers.

The decline of community-based organisations with their customary practices enables competition on pastoral lands, which in turn leads to conflict.

Relationships are no longer based on customary law, which is unwritten and unrecognised by the authorities. This leads to the abandonment of the practice of Agdal in the High Atlas (customary management of grazing lands).

The transportation of water by trucks – or the distribution of plastic water tanks by government in principle extends the pastures spatially, which is beneficial. However, what it also does is promote the rise of big herds, which is detrimental.

Moving herds by truck puts greater pressure on pastoral resources.

The dramatic breakdown of **traditional nomadic pastoralism** and **customary governance** of pastoral lands is a principal cause of overgrazing, loss of biodiversity and heightened vulnerability to climate change in Morocco.

Solutions from a pastoralist perspective

- 1 Promote and support customary governance systems of pastoral lands**
Pastoral organisations or cooperatives, based on ethno-linguistic criteria should be organised with statutes including specific customary law relating to grazing. These customary rights are still present in the collective memory of the beneficiaries of the common grazing areas and forests. Such organisations need to be reinforced by law.
- 2 Reduce the number of animals on the pastures**
Ensure a balance between the number of grazing animals and the fodder availability of the pastures, which is directly linked to climatic conditions. The reduction can be effected by clear rules to be provided for in the statutes of user organizations.
- 3 Stop permanent grazing on pastoral lands**
In our opinion, it is necessary to ban the sedentarisation of shepherds on pastoral lands, install a seasonal grazing ban, coupled with incentives and revive the practice of Agdal. FAO suggests as an example, payments for environmental services to improve the management of rangelands.



Call to action

Pastoralists and scientists call on:

- ⦿ The government of Morocco to help put in place more sustainable solutions for pastoral lands.
- ⦿ Donors of development aid, conservation, climate change and others to support sustainable pastoralist initiatives.
- ⦿ The conservation and climate change community to help support and promote customary governance of Morocco's pastoral lands.

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