



Concept Note

Title: Protecting the Commons: Grasslands and Waterbodies
— Pastoral Rights and Ecological Futures

A Workshop on the Legal Dimensions & Recent Court Orders

Venue: MABIF Conference Hall,
Agricultural College and Research Institute, Madurai
Date & Time: 15 November 2025, 10:00 a.m.

Organized by: Dr.P.Kabilan
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1. Background

Common lands — particularly **grasslands and waterbodies** — are living foundations of rural life and ecological stability in Tamil Nadu. For centuries, these landscapes have sustained traditional **pastoral livelihoods**, nurturing native cattle, sheep, and buffalo breeds, and supporting more than **two lakh pastoral families** who collectively manage over **fifty lakh livestock**.

Yet, over the last few decades, these commons have been steadily shrinking due to **encroachments, industrial expansion, and fragmented land-use policies**. The degradation of grazing and water resources has severely affected **rural biodiversity, soil fertility, and the traditional livelihoods of pastoralists and organic farmers** who depend on open, regenerative ecosystems.

In this context, the **Madras High Court** has repeatedly emphasized the **need to restore and protect common lands**.

- In its **landmark order dated 27 October 2025 (W.P. No.19286 of 2021)**, the Court directed the State Government to **identify equivalent pasture areas** in nearby villages to compensate for encroached lands, highlighting the ecological and social importance of grazing spaces.

- Earlier, in **Justice G. R. Swaminathan’s judgment (31 August 2020)**, it was underscored that **licensing and development policies must respect customary rights and traditional practices** of Tamil communities.

These judicial directions clearly reaffirm that **commons — grasslands, pastures, and waterbodies — are not merely environmental resources but cultural, legal, and economic entitlements** integral to community resilience.

2. Purpose of the Workshop

The workshop aims to promote **awareness and dialogue** on the legal and ecological dimensions of **protecting the commons** — with a specific focus on **grasslands and waterbodies** that sustain pastoral and agrarian ecosystems.

By connecting **pastoral representatives, farmers, ecologists, legal scholars, and policymakers**, the workshop seeks to:

- Strengthen understanding of recent court directives and existing laws related to commons;
- Encourage **community-based protection and restoration** of grazing and water ecosystems;
- Build momentum towards **policy coherence and participatory governance** for the commons in Tamil Nadu.

3. Objectives

- To examine the implications of recent **Madras High Court orders** on the restoration and governance of grasslands and waterbodies.
- To foster public awareness on **legal frameworks** that safeguard common resources and community rights.
- To facilitate dialogue between **pastoral communities, NGOs, ecologists, and legal experts** for collaborative action.
- To highlight the **ecological services** of grazing and wetland systems — soil regeneration, water recharge, and biodiversity conservation.
- To situate Tamil Nadu’s efforts within the global framework of the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026)**, advancing a vision for sustainable, low-carbon rural futures.

4. Participants

- Pastoral Representatives, Organic and Natural Farmers
- Environmentalists and Ecologists, NGOs, FPOs, and Community Leaders
- Legal Scholars, Researchers, and Policy Practitioners

5. Expected Outcomes

- **Policy Recommendations:** Integrating the protection of commons into Tamil Nadu's land-use and biodiversity strategies.
- **Awareness Resources:** Simplified legal and ecological briefs for local communities.
- **Collaborative Network:** Establishing a participatory forum for commons governance and restoration.
- **Follow-Up Action:** Launch of the “**Community Commons Restoration Campaign**” to map, reclaim, and ecologically revive traditional grazing and water areas.

6. Theme Context

This workshop is dedicated to the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026)**, under the theme: “**Commons and Pastoral Systems — Sustaining Livelihoods, Cultures, and Ecosystems.**”

It forms part of the **Fourth Edition of the Community Conference on Commons**, reaffirming Thozhuvam's commitment to **pastoral rights, ecological futures, and the protection of shared natural heritage.**



PROTECTING THE COMMONS: GRASSLANDS AND WATERBODIES PASTORAL RIGHTS AND ECOLOGICAL FUTURES

A WORKSHOP ON THE LEGAL DIMENSIONS & RECENT COURT ORDERS

**Venue : MABIF Conference Hall,
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Date: 15.11.2025, Time: 10 a.m.**

Participants : Pastoral Representatives, Organic Farmers,
Environmentalists, Ecologists, NGOs and FPOs



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