









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.







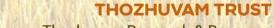


PROTECTING THE COMMONS: GRASSLANDS AND WATERBODIES PASTORAL RIGHTS AND ECOLOGICAL FUTURES

A WORKSHOP ON THE LEGAL DIMENSIONS & RECENT COURT ORDERS

Venue : MABIF Conference Hall, Agriculture College & Research Institute, Madurai Date: 15.11.2025, Time: 10 a.m.

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



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