

How pastoralists can engage with the UNCCD Civil Society Organizations Panel

Why and How

Pastoralists are not on the margins of the desertification agenda. They are at its center.

By: Ellen Otaru-Okeodion, UNCCD CSOs Panel ,
Desertif'Action 2026, Djerba, Tunisia



Why engage?

To make sure policies are built on reality, not assumptions.

Because decisions already affect pastoralists

UNCCD-linked strategies, action programmes, and reporting processes influence how governments respond to land degradation, drought, and restoration in dryland territories.

Because lived knowledge improves policy

Mobility, customary systems, seasonal movement, and rangeland realities are often poorly captured in top-down planning, yet they are essential for workable solutions.

Because engagement changes who shapes the narrative

Without pastoralist voices, others speak on their behalf. Engagement helps move pastoralists from being discussed in policy spaces to actively shaping the messages that enter them.



Why this matters now

Pastoralists are directly affected by drought, land degradation, and policy choices.

National reports often privilege quantitative indicators while missing community realities.

- Better engagement increases the chance that plans fit pastoral systems instead of overlooking them.

What policies need from pastoralists

Pastoralist knowledge strengthens both diagnosis and solutions.

Pastoralist input helps decision-makers understand:

How drought affects women, youth, elders, and the wider community differently.

How mobility and customary governance work in practice across rangelands.

Why seasonal movement is a resilience strategy, not a planning failure.

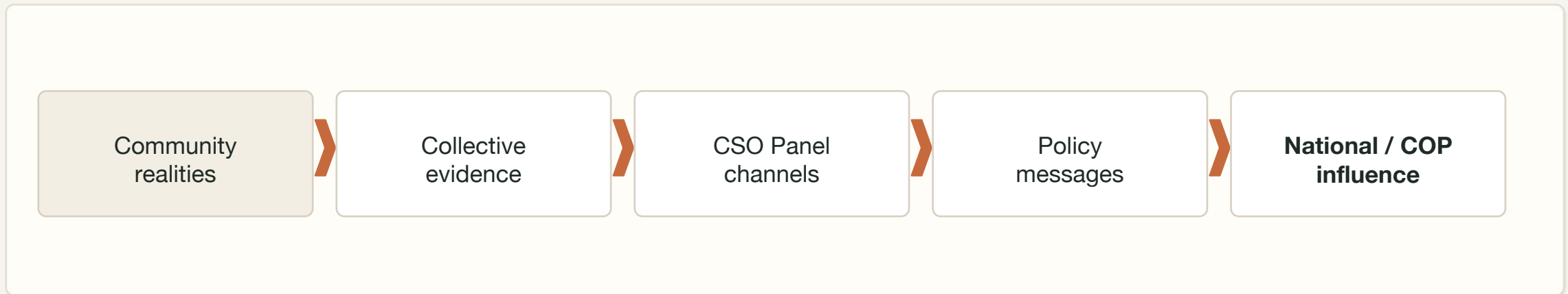
Which local indicators and narratives should complement formal reporting systems.

- Which solutions already work on the ground and deserve scaling.



From the why to the how

Participation influences when it is organized, evidence-based, and connected to the right entry points.



The bridge

The UNCCD CSO Panel is useful because it provides an organized civic space through which pastoralist concerns, priorities, and evidence can travel from local realities to national, regional, and global policy discussions.

In practice, this means pastoralists do not need to stay outside while others speak on their behalf.

How: four practical pathways to engage

Main channels through which pastoralists can enter and influence UNCCD-related processes.

1. Partner with accredited CSOs

Work with accredited civil society organizations that already participate in UNCCD processes and can help carry pastoralist positions into formal spaces.

2. Contribute to national and regional consultations

Join discussions linked to national action programmes, drought planning, land restoration, and reporting processes before messages are finalized.

3. Connect with caucuses and constituencies

Link pastoralist voices to caucuses, regional groups, Indigenous Peoples representatives, youth, women, and other allied constituencies where relevant.

4. Build alliances beyond the UNCCD room

Collaborate with researchers, media, legal advocates, and environmental organizations to strengthen visibility, credibility, and follow-up.

What makes engagement effective?

Clear priorities, not too many messages.

Evidence from communities, especially women and youth.

Named focal points or spokespeople.

- Consistent follow-up before and after meetings.

What pastoralists can do next

Organize local evidence: examples, impacts, community priorities, and workable solutions.

Agree on two or three key asks that can be repeated consistently.

Nominate focal points who can speak in meetings and stay engaged after them.

Prepare short written inputs, testimonies, and community stories that show what policy must change.

Track national reporting and consultation moments so pastoralist voices enter early, not late.



The objective is not only to be present. It is to help shape decisions from the beginning.

A more resilient future for drylands requires pastoralists to be not at the margins, but at the center.

Engage the UNCCD CSO Panel. Bring organized evidence. Build alliances. Shape policy before policy shapes you.

Thank you