

# Traditional Knowledge: Valuable Wisdom in the WANA Region



## شعر بدوي Bedouin Poem

يا لله يا سواق مزناً معتم....تكشف بروقه من سهلها للاوعار  
يشعق بروقه والسحاب يتهم....هلت من المنشأ بغزير الأمطار  
يضفي مطرها للوطن عم....إن سيلت وديانها وكل الأقطار  
بأمر الاله الي له الكون محكم....الغيم يطر والسما دووم مدرار  
امطار بالرحمة لها وزن وقيم....والجو هادي مابدى بعج وغبار  
وعدا شهر كانون وشباط تم....لازم تشوف الخير مع هلت ايدار  
زايد مقبل زايد الغبين

الحلابات - البادية الشرقية

Zayed Magbel Al Gbeen

Al Hallabat – East Badia - The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

The verses above speak of the importance of rain for the land. The poet starts by talking about the Mazan – the heavy clouds that cover the sky, turning the weather eveninglike. Later, lightning and thunder strike while rain falls heavily on the vast lands and covers all valleys, mountains and lowlands. The poet describes rain as God's order of blessings and mercy to all humans, animals and plants. Rainfall is perceived to be foretelling of a good agricultural season.

Ultimately, the poem describes the importance of water to all forms of life.

# Arab Network for Pastoral Societies

The primary goal of the Arab Network for Pastoral Societies is to revive, document and develop traditional knowledge in the Arab Region in order to support the development of Bedouin pastoral groups and build their capacities for effective participation in the rehabilitation and improvement of the sustainable participatory management of rangelands. This will be achieved through mainstreaming and networking with civil society organisations, researchers, experts, decision makers and other stakeholders and networks.

## Vision

To raise awareness about local knowledge in pastoral societies.

## Mission

The revival and development of traditional knowledge in the “Arab region” for the development of pastoral societies and to build their capacities to effectively participate in the rehabilitation and improvement of sustainable management of pastures.

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Narrated by members of the Arab Network for Pastoral Societies

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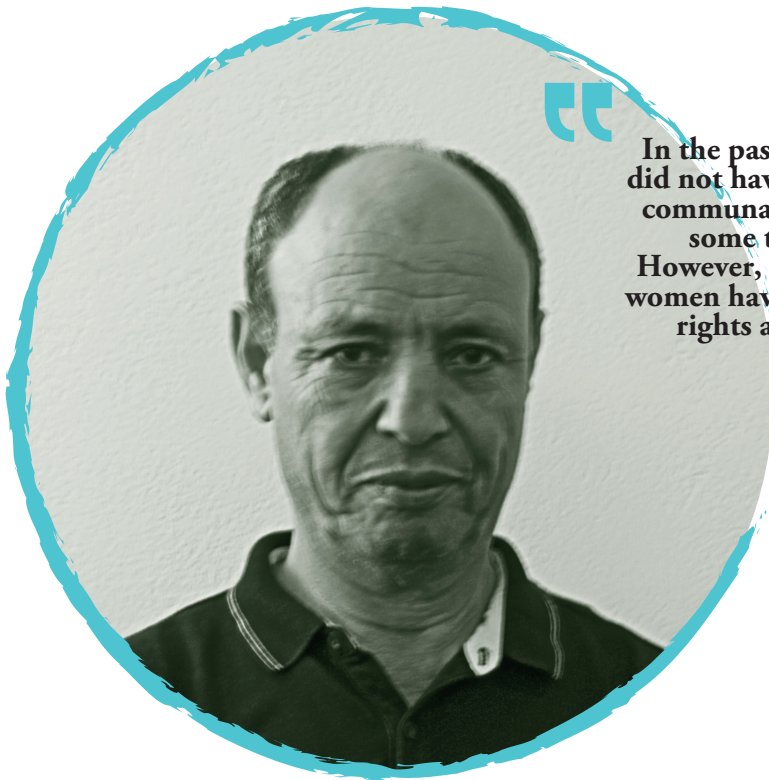
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**In the past, women  
did not have rights in  
communal lands in  
some tribes.  
However, nowadays  
women have the same  
rights as men.**

”

## **Dr Said Fagouri**

The Kingdom of Morocco

President of Arab Network for Pastoral Societies



# Agdal, Pastoral Right

My work as the elected president of the Arab Network for Pastoral Societies, and as a member of several regional organisations and associations specialising in pastoralism, has contributed greatly to my understanding of the immense potential offered by local pastoral sustainable practices in the Arab World.

In the Arab World, two similar traditional community practices exist, known as "Agdal" in the Western part and "Hima" in the East. Agdal is a customary practice amongst Berber communities in North Africa, where pastures are closed during certain times of the year in order to conserve the vegetation and soil, which increases productivity. Agdal depends on the seasonal division, which means cultivating pastures non-continuously throughout the year, instead of doing so continuously, for the purpose of conserving the pastoral areas in the country and contributing to the enrichment of the local biodiversity.

The process of Agdal is usually overseen by a group of representatives from a tribe or tribes, who assign a person as the "Sheikh Al-Agdal" to implement the customary laws, which are applicable on agdal users, including the dates on which pastures open and close, cattle counting, solving disputes with neighbours, and so on. In the past, women did not have rights in communal lands in some tribes. However, nowadays women have the same rights as men, but their involvement in the groups that administrate the pastures is very limited. Overall, women's daily life is huge, and includes providing food and water, milking cows, goats and ewes, weaving tents and taking care of baby animals. We rarely see women grazing flocks, however.

Sustainable pastoral practices in Agdal are similar to other local systems such as the Hima, and have many environmental benefits including increasing the ratio of carbon sequestration in soil. Therefore, enhancing those practices can be an important tool in fighting climate change. Unfortunately, growing settlement and resource demands have led to the gradual disappearance of these practices with potentially far-reaching, negative, long-term consequences. Members of the agricultural and pastoral societies that implement Agdal, depend on a number of local traditional practices that they inherited from their parents and grandparents. Most important is the process of sharing assets, whereby the main pastoralists distribute their herds to other pastoralists during holidays for two purposes – to allow themselves to rest and to help provide work opportunities for pastoralists who do not have their own herds.

In the past, Agdal was practiced across Morocco. Today, however, it faces many challenges, including rural-urban migration, urbanisation and modernisation, which have contributed to the loss of many local traditions, customs and practices, which preserved and sustained lands for decades.

Agricultural lands, like the pastoralists who work them, need rest. It is therefore urgent to intervene and provide immediate support to preserve important traditional practices, through mechanisms that will allow local pastoral societies to conserve relevant elements of their social systems notwithstanding current environmental and social developments.



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**When modern science  
interfered, traditional  
knowledge started to  
vanish.**

”

**Eatemad Rafalla Abdallah**

Mersa Matroh - Arab Republic of Egypt

## Stars and Pastoralism

In Egypt, pastoralists used to lead their herds of sheep and camels from the Libyan borders to Siwa at night, and rest during morning. They did this as the stars were critical for providing directions and understanding their location. At daytime, the pastoralist would rest after tying and securing the oldest female camel, putting it on its knees and thereby ensuring it would stay still. The pastoralist knew that the herd would not move without the mother-camel while he slept. He would also tie the largest sheep to his hand in order to wake him up when it moved if rest of the herd began to move.

Pastoralists usually travel long distances, and they take enough food with them to last a month. Their food includes flour, salted dried meat and Keshk (dried milk and flour mix), items selected due to their high nutritional value and ease of preparation. They also used to eat fat, which in the past was not available all year long. They used to cut it to small pieces, put it under the sun and cover it with spices such as turmeric for almost ten days. Then they would mash it and make it into balls and place it in goat skin for storage. It could then be used in easily prepared meals. My governorate is Mersa Matrouh, located on the Libyan Egyptian border. The residents are divided into six tribes and the residential area does not exceed five square kilometres. Our income is drawn equally from planting and irrigation, and our lives depends on rain from God for agriculture and pastoralism. We extract drinking water from artesian wells.

The biggest concern of farmers and pastoralists is to provide sufficient water for their lands and their families. In the past, they used to build dams that poured directly into wells. Building dams was not an easy process – it would take more than a year, with farmers moving rocks every afternoon to the location where they intended to build.

Our grandparents depended on nature, even in the design of dams. They used to stack stones on top of each other, often randomly, knowing that winds would carry the soil and set it beside the outer walls of the dam, reinforcing and strengthening it; then soil would gather on a slant at the edges of the dam like a small hill. This soil, located on the edges of running water, was considered fertile and suitable for farming, as it was saturated with minerals. Farmers, back then, planted figs and olives at the edges of the dam. The concept was very simple – it was obvious and self-evident without the need for any engineer's help.

When modern science intervened, traditional knowledge started to vanish. My grandfather used to have flowery gardens all year long, in which he only used natural fertilizers from cattle droppings, which were placed at the edge of the garden until rain distributed them across it.



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The traditional stories I like the most, are those that talk about the importance of cooperation, and how members of the local community would always stand together and support each other.

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Mansour Al-Fawaz

Sabha – The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan



# The Badia and the Extinction of our Knowledge

I am Mansour Al-Fawaz, head of the Cooperation Association in the northern Jordanian badia. I cannot forget what my grandparents used to tell me about the most distinctive features of Sabha and Sobhiyeh villages, and the Jordanian badia in general, between the 1930s and 1970s. Participatory cooperative systems were enhanced by customary law that distributed duties and tasks among the members of one tribe. In winter, tribe members used to meet and nominate a number of men to work in reforming and maintaining the irrigation channels that fed the ponds, as well as the old Roman wells spread in Sabha and Sobhiyya. If one of the tribe members needed shelter or maintenance for his shelter, the sheikh of the tribe held a meeting to assign tasks to men, where some collected stones and soil, others built, and so on. They all used to work together as one soul, believing in the importance of relief and support for each other.

Spring is a beautiful season. I remember when all pastoralists used to walk to the wide pastures that extended to Najd, Iraq, Syria, and others, whilst women prepared winter supplies for the next coming winter. In winter, the work of the Hawash started, as he would collect the herds from the whole tribe and lead them to grazing areas designated by the tribal leaders, who always reminded the Hawash of two things. First, the importance of avoiding grazing in pastures that belong to other tribes and second, the importance of choosing the right area for grazing in each season in order to allow the grass to grow and renew.

Today, the Jordanian badia constitutes more than 80% of the total area of the kingdom. Agriculture is the backbone of our society, as 60% of the residents depend fully on farming as a source of income, whether planting or animal production.

Artemisia and thyme are medical plants that grow naturally. Nowadays, however, their planting is limited due to the expansion of agricultural land, but they remain the aboriginal plants of the area. As for cattle breeding, everyone knows that it is economically unfeasible. It is still, however, a common and traditional practice that must be adopted, whether profitable or not. In villages, owning goats and sheep helps to maintain traditions. The process of searching for new sources of income began in the late eighties when we extracted water from water basins in our area, which encouraged us to farm and thus provide a new income source.

In the fifties, lands were distributed equally among tribes. At that time, most of the Bedouins were nomads. Bedouins were moving to areas where pastures were available and their movement was usually affected and impacted by conditions of drought and infertility. During severe droughts, the distances travelled would increase. I remember our grandfathers almost reached Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and of course Syria, in addition to Palestine and the Sinai. In the forties and fifties, borders were opened and pastoralists would sometimes travel for months – they only settled after the foundation of political borders.

We have a new technique for the protection of land from drought, which is protected planting (i.e. greenhouses), as an adaptive measure to deal with climate change impacts, as temperatures hit sub-zero levels in the winter and reach over 40 degrees Celsius in summer.

In the past, we used to make everything we needed with our own hands. One of the most important traditional crafts, which gradually decreased and may now be extinct, was the use of traditional tents, which were used by Bedouins when they travelled and during festivals. Nowadays, we import such tents instead of making them locally as we used to.



“ Challenges have not diminished the pastoralists' love for the land; rather, it has made them more resilient and determined to hold onto it. They are known as the 'guards of the land'. ”



**Attef Bani Oudeh**

Tubas governorate – Palestine

**Wissam Abu Zahra**

Yatta - Palestine

## Our Caves are Our Glory

Palestinian pastoralists used to travel from one area to another according to the season. For example, in spring they travelled north to fertile pastures before heading south towards the end of summer. Tribes travelled in caravans from one place to another. Recently, sizes of caravans became smaller and pastoralists now travel only with families to hidden caves inside mountains, which were inherited from their grandparents and fathers. The caves are relatively big in order to accommodate the family and their herd.

Most of those who inhabit northern Palestine and those in the valleys depended on pasture as a source of income, which was a part of their customs and traditions. Pasture areas expand from Tubas in the north to southern Yata, As-Samu', Ad-Dhahiriya, Bethlehem and other places. Pastoralists travel from one area to another looking for pastures, while carrying their tents. They travel light and when they leave the hidden caves, they leave them completely empty, to return a year later.

A long time ago, grandparents built water canals from the highest slopes of the mountains to the existing wells in the vicinity of the caves. These wells were full in the winter for the benefit of Palestinian pastoralists in subsequent seasons. Those canals have other benefits as well, including keeping the soil from drifting.

Palestinian pastoralists are famous for their ability to face multiple challenges and changes. It is worth mentioning that these challenges have not diminished the pastoralists' love for the land; rather, it has made them more resilient and determined to hold onto it. They are known as the "guards of the land". It is possible that the secrecy of these caves protected them from the claws of occupation and maintain their Palestinian-ness, despite vulnerability to violence, demolition and the confiscation of fodder and sheep.



**Haissam Taaimi**

Kfar Zabad-Lebanon

## Hima: A Lifestyle

Traditions and customs affect many aspects of daily life, including treatment of diseases and injuries. Pastoralists used to cauterise the cattle's wounds by heating a sharp tool, which was normally used to prepare coffee. Unfortunately, most of those who taught cauterisation and many other traditional treatments have died, which is leading to the loss of this knowledge. Today, many traditional methods are considered outdated and useless. However, some of those lost traditions are now gradually returning. This includes cupping and the use of natural herbs to heal infections. However, their use is still somewhat limited.

There is not enough documentation of tribal history in Lebanon, because Lebanon as a country was established in the 1920s. In my town, for example, an area called "Al-faour" located in Al-Beqaa', 80% of the residents depended on pastoralism as their main source of income sixty years ago. This compares to less than 20% nowadays. The foundation of political borders in the region and the increased costs of livestock production have contributed to this shift. In the past, lands were available and pastoralists were able to move freely until governments started to determine land ownership. Grazing became prohibited in lands owned by the government or municipalities, and in order to feed the cattle, pastoralists have to get permission from the owners of the private lands, who normally agree on grazing for one or two days as they benefit from the droppings as fertilizers. Problems and obstacles arise, and the state replaced grazing with tourism as a primary sector, and also constructed large factories in a number of other sectors.

Hima is an important local system that aims to regulate natural resources in Lebanon. It falls under the ownership and management of municipalities. The existence of Hima in itself is proof that pastoral societies work hard to preserve environmental diversity, despite the challenges the country faces, and that pastoral societies are aware of environmental diversity and the importance of preservation.







