



# Impact of the COVID -19 lockdown on pastoralists of Andhra Pradesh

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CfP Report 2021



Centre for  
Pastoralism





## Centre for Pastoralism

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## List of Acronyms

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AP	Andhra Pradesh
WASSAN	Watershed Support Services and Activities Network
RRAN-WASSAN	Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network-Watershed Support Services and Activities Network
GOAP	Government of Andhra Pradesh
GOI	Government of India
APDAI	Andhra Pradesh Drought Adaptation Initiative
DFID	Department for International Development
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease or 2019-nCoV

# Andhra Pradesh

## Locked out in the lockdown: To Move or Not To Move – A Pastoralist Dilemma!

Kanna K. Siripurapu<sup>1</sup>

# Introduction

Andhra Pradesh (AP) has a vibrant pastoralist culture and populations, particularly visible in the state's rain-fed regions. The forms of pastoralism in the state range from agro-pastoralism, semi-nomadic, village pastoralism, urban pastoralism, and fully nomadic pastoralism marked by a permanent state of mobility (Sharma et al 2003). They are often closely associated with a particular livestock breed (ibid.). Pastoral communities and their livestock have traversed the landscapes of the sub-continent for centuries, yet they remain invisible institutionally. Across the world, pastoralists have been seen as backward, economically inefficient, and ecologically damaging. A few of the nomadic communities were even declared 'criminals' under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 (Kapadia 1952, Singh 2008, Piliavsky 2015). Though considerably battered, pastoralists continue to display remarkable resilience and have persisted to this day.

The major traditional pastoralist communities of AP include the Golla, Kuruma, and Lambadi (also known as Banjara/Sugali). The noun Lambadi is prominent in Telangana and Sugali is popular in AP for the Banjara community. The Lambadi/Sugali is categorised as a (De-notified) nomadic tribal community in the official categorisation of tribes and other indigenous communities of India. They are one of the largest tribal populations of the country and are believed to have migrated from the Mewar region of the north Indian state of Rajasthan and settled in AP and Telangana more than four centuries ago (Dhanavath 2020; Kurup and Burman 1961). The Sugali community shows a high affinity to cattle for cultural reasons and is known to rear the indigenous cattle breed Nallamala-Pasa (Siripurapu et al 2019a).

The Golla, also known as Yadava/Yaduvanshi, is one of the dominant mobile pastoralist communities of AP. The name Golla is derived from "Gopal", a Sanskrit word, meaning caretaker/protector of cows (Joshua, 2019; Yaadav, 2010). They rear cattle with the belief that they belong to the same lineage into which Lord Krishna was born.

The Kuruma, also known as Kuruba in Karnataka and Dhangar in Maharashtra, is primarily a sheep rearing mobile

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pastoralist community. They have a close affiliation with their animals and its wool forms an integral part of their social fabric and culture.

Andhra Pradesh ranks sixth amongst Indian states in terms of its livestock population, which stands at 34 million. The sheep population of AP is 17.6 million, which amounts to 24% of the country's total sheep population of 74.26 million. Sheep, like camels and yaks, are almost exclusively maintained under mobile, extensive grazing systems. In addition, AP has a significant number of cattle, goat, and pig populations maintained under different extensive pastoral systems (Gol, 2021).

In AP, sheep are often reared along with goats. Both animals are predominantly reared for meat production, and most of the goat populations found in the study area are of non-descript populations. The sheep breeds are predominantly hairy and do not produce wool, raised mainly for meat production. The Deccani sheep breed, an extremely hardy, dual-purpose, wool-meat breed, was once the dominant sheep breed in the Rayalaseema region of the state. But it has been replaced by the hairy meat purpose breeds in almost the entire Deccani tract (Mithun 2018, The World Bank et al. n. d., Sudhakar 2017, Amareswari et al 2017, Janyala 2017, and Ramdas 2015). There are several reasons for this replacement, including the fall in demand for indigenously produced wool as the industry increasingly favours the softer, longer-staple wool produced in various parts of the world and imported in India. There is also reducing demand for the traditional coarse wool blankets (known locally as Gongadi), labour shortage, and unavailability of shearers. In addition, the sheep development and livestock policy of the former undivided AP has actively encouraged the replacement of the Deccani sheep by the meaty Red Nellore sheep breed (Mishra et al 2007).

## Background to this study

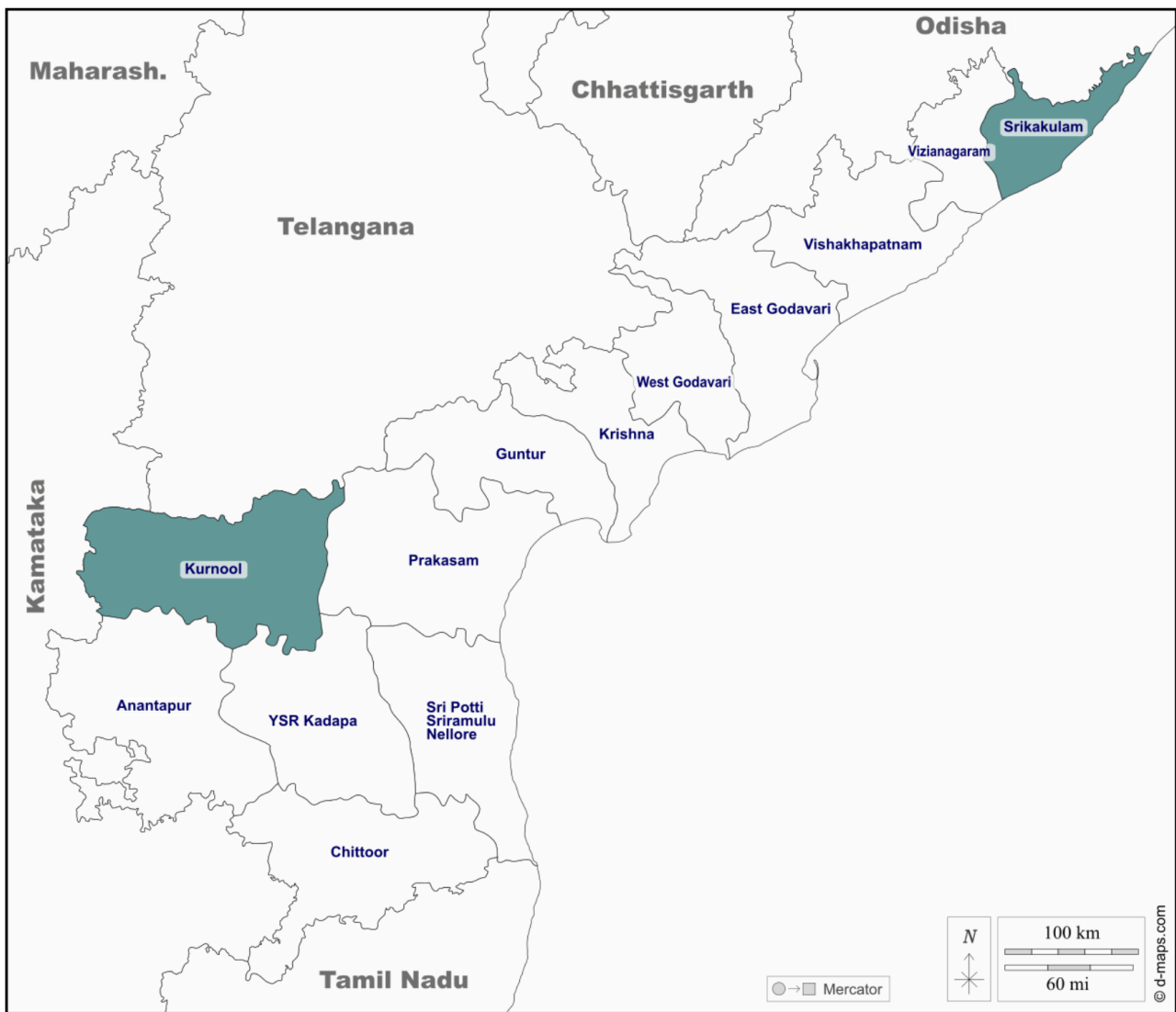
The COVID-19 pandemic brought the entire world to a screeching halt, affecting every aspect of society from the economy, social relationships, community bonding, traditional practices, occupations, physical and mental health, to mobility. The vulnerable and marginal sections of Indian society were hit hardest by the lockdown and movement restrictions. While the plight of migrant labour rightly captured much attention from the media, civil society organisations, and eventually the state, the situation of pastoralists received comparatively less attention despite being perpetual migrants. They would likely have been equally affected by lockdown restrictions, if not more.

This prompted the Centre for Pastoralism (CfP 2020) to commission a preliminary study in April 2020 to examine the impact of the lockdown on pastoralists in eight states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Uttarakhand. This pilot study acted as a precursor to the current extensive survey for examining the impact of the lockdown in several states across the country. This report focuses on the experiences of pastoralists in Andhra Pradesh.

## Study Area

We selected respondents from 29 villages of two districts of Kurnool and Srikakulam of Andhra Pradesh. Kurnool district is located in the western part of the state and flanked by the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers. On its northern and western side, it is bordered by neighbouring states of Telangana and Karnataka respectively. While the southern and eastern sides of the state are bordered by districts that lie within AP. These include Kadapa and Anantapur on the southern side and Prakasam on the eastern side. Kurnool is spread over 17,658 sq. Km and is home to 4.63% of the total population of the state.

Srikakulam district is located in the extreme north-eastern region of the state. This district is meshed with rivers of Nagavali, Vamsadhara, Suvarnamukhi, Vegavathi, Mahendratana, Gomukhi, Champavathi, Bahuda and Kumbikota Gedda. It is flanked by the Vizianagaram district of AP in the south and Odisha on the north and west, and the Bay of Bengal on the east. Spread over 5,837 sq. Km., 11.76 % of the district is under forest cover, 17 % is under agriculture, and 8.5 % is under permanent pastures (GoAP 2021).



Map I: District map of Andhra Pradesh. Highlighted districts indicate the study area. Map prepared using D-Maps.com, accessed via [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=8455&lang=en](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=8455&lang=en)

## Survey Method

The findings of CfP's pilot study mentioned earlier helped identify key issues with reference to which the impact of the lockdown has been examined in this survey. A simple questionnaire was designed keeping in mind those issues. The interview questions focused on the following issues: (i) movement, (ii) livestock markets, (iii) income and expenses, (iv) labour, (v) veterinary care, (vi) access to groceries and ration, (vii) social stigma, and (viii) perceptions about COVID-19's impact on life in general. (See Annexure II for questionnaire). Data was collected through interviews conducted by resource persons and trained field coordinators. Interviews were conducted at the campsites of herders as per their convenience, strictly adhering to social distancing and following other COVID-19 related safety protocols. Five pastoralist communities were selected based on the knowledge of their traditional involvement with mobile pastoralism in the study area. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted.

# Findings

## Profile of respondents

The communities that were a part of this study include Golla, Kuruma, Kuruva and Lambada. All four communities have been known to practice mobile pastoralism traditionally, and belong to two major social categories: the Other Backward Class (Golla, Kuruma and Kuruva), and the Scheduled Tribes (Lambada).

The major pastoralist livestock species of the area are cattle, sheep and goats. A majority of the Golla community (87.5 %) reported they rear sheep and goats, while 12 % rear cattle. The Kuruma respondents are predominantly cattle herders (70 %), though 30 % of the community also rears sheep and goats. All the Lambadas interviewed rear cattle. All participants reported that they practice mobile pastoralism, and have Aadhar cards and bank accounts.

Community/Group	Aadhar card holders	Bank account holders	Herd size	Presence of sheep and goat	Travel beyond 10 Km from their native village in summers
Golla	8/8	8/8	80-200	7/8	8/8
Kuruma	10/10	10/10	64-400	3/10	10/10
Kuruva	5/5	5/5	90-150	5/5	5/5
Lambada	5/5	5/5	130-180	0/5	5/5

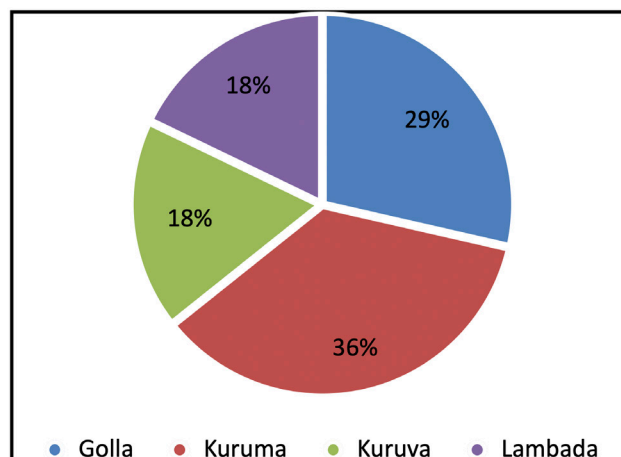


Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Figure 1: Community wise representation of respondents

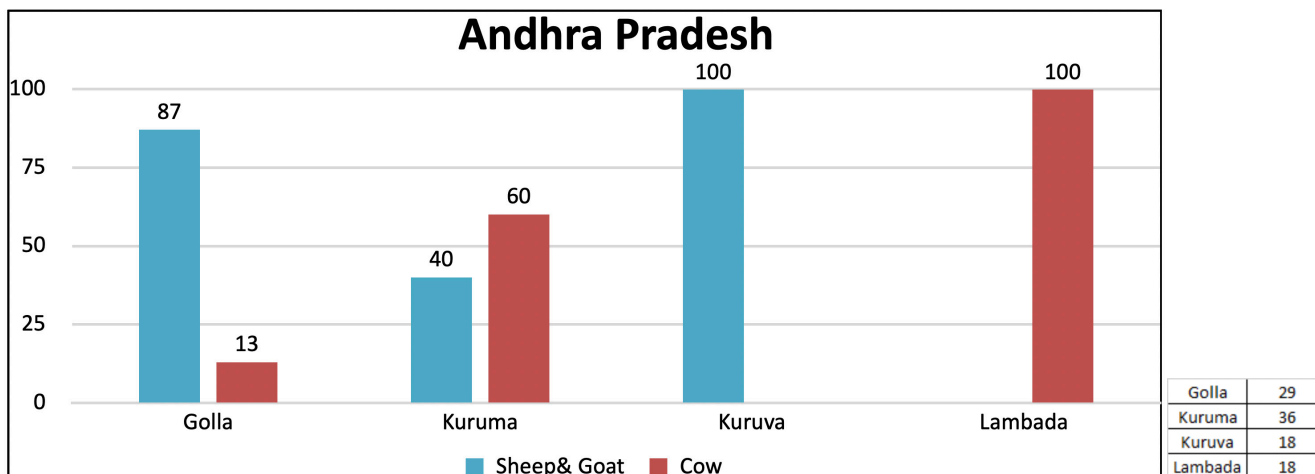


Figure 2: Livestock composition of pastoralists (percentage-wise)

## Impact on mobility

Herders did not experience a drastic impact on their mobility due to the lockdown. This is reflected in the fact that 62% of the respondents were on migration during the lockdown. The remaining 38% were grazing their livestock in and around their native places. All participants were present with their livestock during the lockdown. A majority of the pastoralists felt the lockdown had a positive impact on their movement due to the lack of traffic.

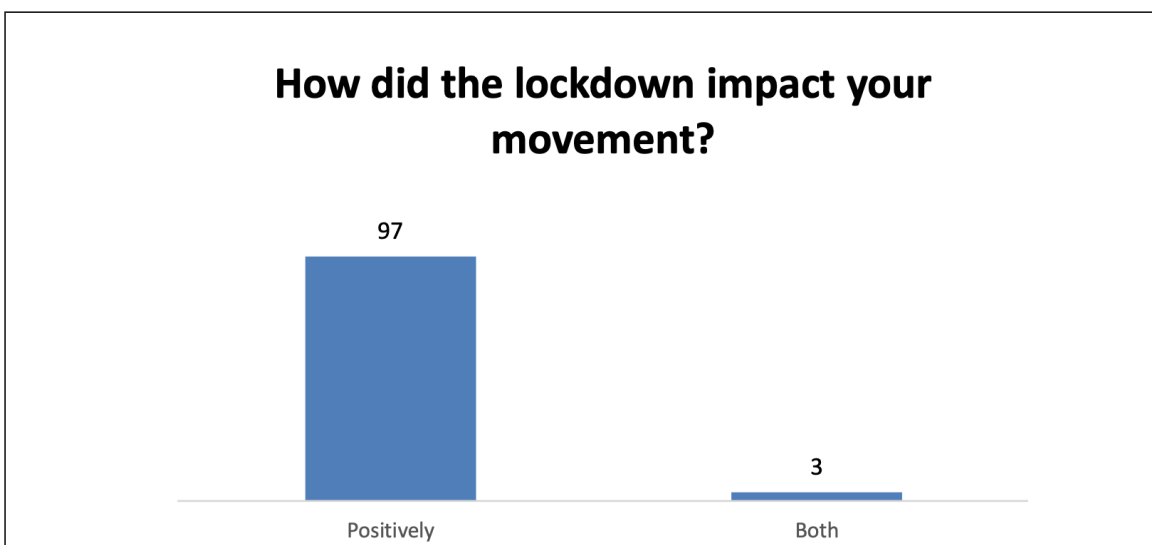


Figure 3: Herder responses w.r.t. impact of lockdown on movement (percentage-wise). 'Both' refers to experiencing positive and negative impacts.

## Access to forage, fodder and water

The mainstay of fodder and water are cultivable fallows, forests, protected areas and village commons during July - October / November. In addition, 53 % of the pastoralists depend on market sources for fodder. Cultivable fallows are the mainstay of fodder and water during December – June. It is during this time of the season when they depend on the market for fodder supply. A point to note is that it is only the cattle herders who purchase fodder from markets while sheep/goat herders do not. They depend exclusively on cultivable fallows, forests/protected areas, and village commons to meet the fodder and water needs of their flocks. Like any normal year, the cattle pastoralists (51 %) reported purchasing fodder from the market for their cattle even during the lockdown.

## Impact on revenues

The respondents' principal sources of income include the sale of cattle dung, penning on agricultural fields by the goat and sheep herders, sale of cattle as draught animals and sale of goat and sheep in the meat markets. There is no participation in either milk or wool markets. They often leave the milk of their animals for the calves to suckle. Milk is occasionally used for domestic purposes but never for sale.

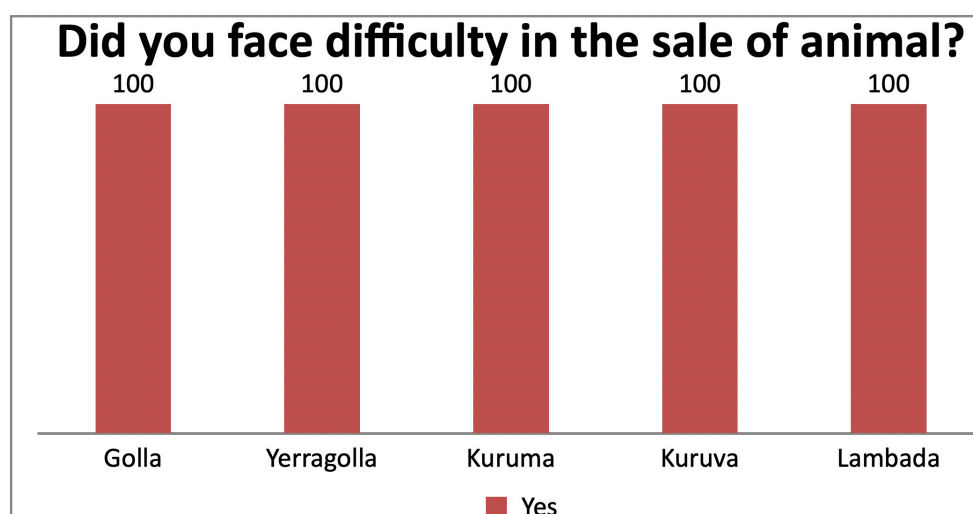


Figure 4: Herder responses w.r.t. difficulties faced in selling animals (percentage-wise)

The dung economy was hit by the lockdown in the study area. Cattle herders reported that they sell dung directly to farmers who visit them and use it as manure for their agricultural fields. The movement restrictions and the unavailability of public and private transportation meant that many farmers could not visit herders to buy dung this year. It was their income from penning that acted as a shock absorber.

Almost all cattle herders reported a mild impact on their income and all sheep and goat herders reported a medium impact on their income due to the lockdown. Sheep and goat herders' income was impacted due to the suspension of village markets, the low-key celebration of major

festivals and high freight charges for transportation of livestock. There was some regret over missing out on sales during the festival of Ramzan as that is a time when there is a large demand for sheep and goats. There was also a recognition that these losses could be compensated for by heightened demand during the remainder of the year. Cattle owners tend to sell their animals for draught purposes later in the year, closer to Dussehra, and so did not experience significant losses on this count.

## Impact on expenditure

The major expenses incurred by pastoralists were on purchase of medicines and transportation for livestock, food, and hiring labour for herd management. The majority of respondents (69 %) spent higher amounts while purchasing medicines for their animals during the lockdown than under normal circumstances. Higher expenditure on transportation was reported by 17% of respondents. However, it was only the sheep and goat herders who incurred this increased expense while the cattle herders did not. The other two higher than normal expenses related to food (7 %) and hiring labour (7 %). Respondents shared they had to pay a slightly higher amount to buy food and hire labour during the lockdown.

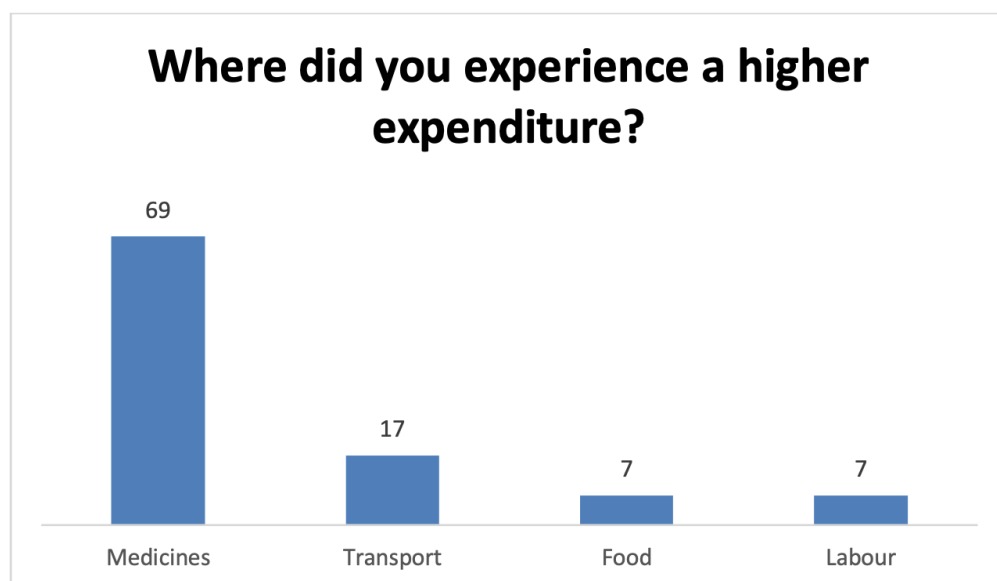


Figure 5: Herder responses w.r.t. expenditure during the lockdown (percentage-wise)

## Labour

Pastoralists who own large numbers of livestock needed to employ labour to help manage their herd. On average, sheep and goat herders hire two labourers, while cattle herders hire one labour. Seventy-eight per cent of owners reported their hired labour was able to accompany the herd and move without any restrictions. Fifteen per cent reported their labour and livestock were stranded at far off places and 7 % reported that labour could not join their duties due to movement restrictions.

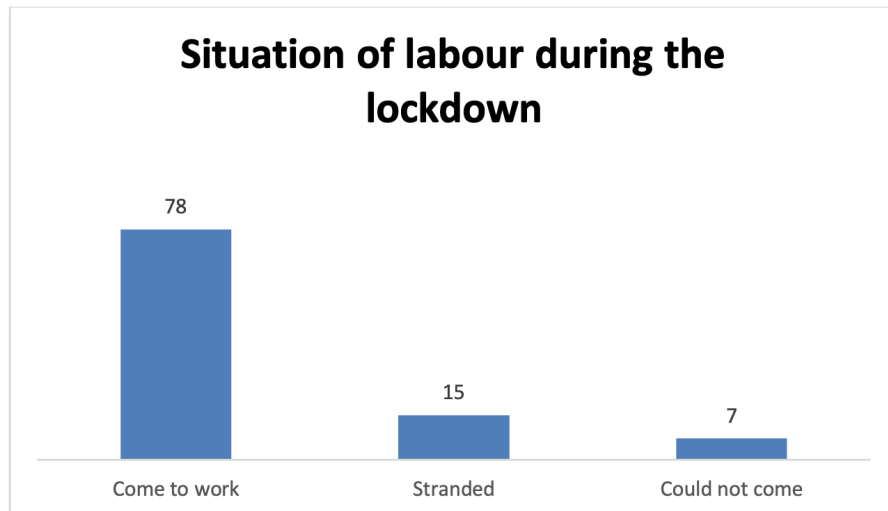


Figure 6: Herder responses w.r.t. availability of labour (percentage-wise)

## Access to Veterinary Services

Most respondents reported that they mainly depend on public veterinary clinics for animal health care. Under normal conditions, 64% of respondents usually visit clinics for consultation if they need any help for their livestock. Another 33 % reported they collect free medicines from the public veterinary centres during normal times. Only 2% access animal health camps.

During the lockdown, the availability of veterinary surgeons and supply of free medicine was limited at the public veterinary clinics. Only 38% of respondents could consult a veterinary surgeon and another 38% could avail free medicines from those clinics. While 24% of respondents reported they could access neither of the two services. The limited supply of free medicines at public veterinary centres forced them to procure medicines from private drug stores at higher prices. This appears to be the principal factor responsible for the steep incline in their expenditure on livestock health care.

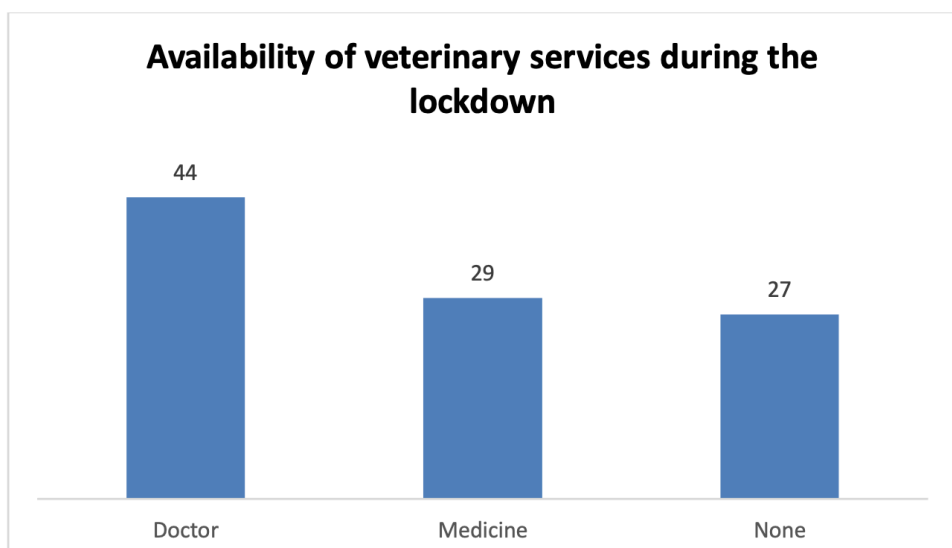


Figure 7: Herder responses w.r.t. availability of veterinary care services (percentage-wise)



## Rations

Under normal circumstances, respondents depend on two major sources for their grocery supply, which varies as per their migration pattern. From December to June, farmers who host herders for penning on their farms provide rations to them for the period. From July - October / November, herders fetch ration from home once in a fortnight. During this time herds move in and around the forested areas, and are kept away from villages and habitations. Since 62% of the respondents were already on their migration at the time of the lockdown, they relied on their usual sources, i.e. social networks with the farmers to access rations.

## State Support and Stigma

All respondents reported receiving nominal support from the state during the lockdown. This consisted of a sum of Rs. 1,000 and ration for a month from the state government. Concerning social stigma, a couple of stray incidents of host villagers raising concerns about outsiders arriving at their village were mentioned, although this was not a major problem. Most respondents shared there were hardly any restrictions on their movement through the villages. None of the herders were asked for any COVID-19 free certificate while migrating.

## Perception of pastoralists about life in relation to other similar communities

In response to the query about how they perceived their lives as compared to other similar communities during the lockdown, a majority (93 %) of them unequivocally said they felt that their life is better-off compared to other similar communities. One of the reasons for this feeling is that livestock offers a form of economic security to herders, an option that is not available to most other communities. The majority of respondents expressed that they have something to hold on to in their animals while other similar communities lost their jobs or did not have any work to generate an income. Many of them shared that income from penning acted as a shock absorber when it was difficult to sell livestock and its products. Only 3 % of respondents felt their life is worse-off compared to other similar communities. However, 37% of the respondents reported feeling a sense of fear for the future, particularly about the future consequences of this lockdown.

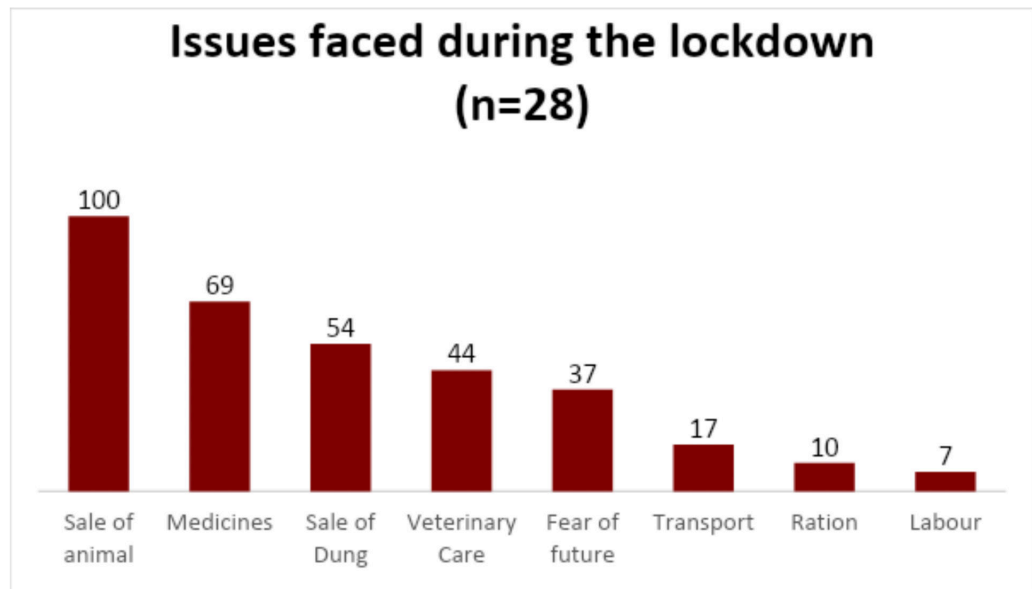


Figure 8: Issues faced by herders (percentage wise)

## Conclusion

Over 62% of respondents claim to have been on migration during the lockdown. In contrast, the Action Aid report points to only 38% of herders continuing with their normal migration.

Herders faced many challenges during the lockdown, including difficulties in selling animals due to closed markets and limited transport facilities, non-availability of medicines for livestock, and difficulty in the sale of manure due to a lack of transportation. The limited availability of public veterinary services led to an increase in expenditure on animal healthcare. Shutting of public transportation and movement restrictions impacted the sale of dung as farmers could not travel to buy dung for their farms. The cessation of private transportation and trucks (especially goods carriers) impacted the income of sheep/goat herders as neither they nor the traders could ship livestock to markets. These findings are broadly in line with those reported in the study by Action Aid (2020). On the whole, respondents seemed to suggest that their experience of the lockdown was less disruptive than appears to have been the case in many other states.

There are also significant differences in the findings in this study compared with those reported by Action Aid. Over 62% of respondents claim to have been on migration during the lockdown. In contrast, the Action Aid report points to only 38% of herders continuing with their normal migration. The Action Aid report suggests that 3% of pastoralists did not migrate this year and 30% experienced a delay in their normal migration. Other areas of difference include the fact that all our respondents reported receiving nominal support from the state, by way of Rs. 1,000 and ration for a month.

Action Aid's (2020) report is less laudatory of the state response displayed in northern and western India, suggesting that over 66 % of the mobile pastoralists did not receive any government support, 24% received partial support and only 10% received the needed support in terms of ration and food grains.

The differences in the two reports can be attributed to a couple of reasons. First, the Action Aid study focused on five states: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand. The pastoralist systems found in these states are considerably different from what is found in the Deccan region where states like Andhra Pradesh are located. This may be the reason for the differences in the ability to carry on with migration. Second, the sample size of the two studies varies considerably. The sample size of the Action Aid study was 100 individuals per state, which is much larger than the sample size of this study, which is 28 individuals.

One of the main sources of support for the herders in AP has been the pre-existing ties with farmers of the state as they could draw upon their long-standing relations with farmers to minimise conflict. It is perhaps for this reason that they did not experience social stigma to any great extent, although stray incidents were reported.

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# Annexure I

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## Summary of findings from a telephonic survey undertaken by CfP in April 2020

### 1. Restrictions on movement

Pastoralist migrations were halted by state governments either temporarily or for the entire year, on the assumption that all movements held the potential for transmission of the virus, and hence represented a threat to communities that pastoralists interacted with. In some instances, pastoral communities were able to convince governments to permit them to continue with their migrations. Others, such as the Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand were banned from moving to their summer pastures for the entire year, and were forced to either stall feed their buffaloes or find alternative grazing arrangements within the lower altitudes. Either option resulted in higher costs but also significantly reduced animal productivity. The Himachal government was particularly proactive in supporting pastoralist movement, because for the most part herders travel alone and tend to spend time in relative isolation, reducing the likelihood of viral transmission.

#### b). Accessing markets:

Pastoralist communities across states spoke of the difficulties of accessing milk, meat and feed markets, all closed due to the national lockdown. Some surplus milk was being converted into ghee and buttermilk, but as the weather warmed, even these products needed to be disposed of to avoid spoilage. The closure of meat markets had implications for immediate cash flows but did not represent the loss of a crop, such as may have been experienced by milk-selling pastoralists or by farmers with perishable, fresh produce.

#### c) Shortage of Labour:

In some instances, herders had returned home in February to attend to family functions or to help with cultivation. Post the imposition of restrictions, these herders were unable to move to where their herds were, resulting in a significant shortage of labour in managing the herds. Many herders also reported instances of hired labour choosing to return to home, owing to the limited information available on the pandemic and the associated desire to be close to home during this period of uncertainty.

#### d) Shearing sheep:

Sheep need to be sheared just before the onset of summer, and this is generally undertaken by shearers not necessarily part of the herding

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community. When sheep are not shorn, ahead of the summer heat, there are heightened levels of sickness within the herd. Owing to the lockdown, shearers were simply unable to travel to where the sheep were located. While the Himachal government was ultimately able to facilitate shearer travel to the herds, in most States shearing operations were badly impacted. Many herders spoke of the likely impact of the lockdown and its aftermath on the import of wool and on the export of woollen carpets and durries.

**e) Obtaining ration**

Pastoralists on the move normally obtain ration from village kirana shops or from shops in small towns. Pastoralists across the country spoke of the fact that villagers, normally welcoming, were wary of potential transmission of COVID and were often unwilling to have transient pastoralists enter the village. In instances where the state was providing ration, pastoralists tended to miss out since they were on the outskirts of villages or were grazing their animals at some distance from human habitation.

**f) Social Stigma:**

Pastoralists from various parts of the country reported that they experienced a great deal of social stigma on account of their religion or their nomadic lifestyle. Gujjars in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh and from the Rishikesh/Haridwar areas in Uttarakhand faced ostracism as minorities and had difficulty in selling milk and in embarking on their annual migrations. In both instances, there were rumours to the effect that their milk carried the coronavirus and so customers should not buy their milk. Pastoralist mobility in itself has been causing social stigma for many decades and reports from across the country indicate this was accentuated throughout the lockdown.

**g) Pastoralism, Resilience and COVID-19:**

Several pastoralists mentioned that they may have experienced fewer negatives resulting from the lockdown than many other with rural livelihoods. This is likely linked to the fact that pastoral communities have historically needed to adapt to climatic, political and other changes. Pastoralist adaptability may have played a role in mitigating to some degree the various issues listed above.

## Annexure II

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### Questionnaire to understand how pastoralists have fared under COVID-19

Code (State letters, followed by 1st three letters of Community name, followed by serial number of interview, in two digits – e.g. GUJRAB01)

Interviewers name

Date

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- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| a. Name                      | b. M/F                                     |
| c. Community                 | d. Phone #                                 |
| 1. Home Location             | 2. Current Location                        |
| 3. Aadhaar Card Y/N          | 4. Bank account Y/N                        |
| 5. Migratory Y/N             | 6. Owner/helper?                           |
| 7. Are you with the herd Y/N | 8. What animals do you manage?             |
| 9. Herd size                 | 10. Were you on migration during LckDn Y/N |

On each of the following please describe your normal practice and how this is affected because of the COVID epidemic:

#### A. Obtaining forage/water

1. What is your normal pattern of migration at this time? Do you cross district or state boundaries?
2. Has your movement been interrupted this year? Positively/Negatively?
3. Where have you obtained forage and water this year (village commons, Forest Department land, Protected Area, cultivated land, purchased, others?)
4. Do you normally purchase fodder? Were you able to do so this year?

#### B. Revenues/Expenditures

1. During lockdown have you had difficulty in the following:
  - a) Sale of milk and milk products
  - b) Sale of animals
  - c) Sale of wool
    - i) Difficulties with shearing?
    - ii) Getting wool to markets?
  - d) Penning
2. Has COVID/lockdown caused a fluctuation in the rates you receive for produce?



3. Where have these expenses changed (medicines, food, water, transport, alcohol, labour)?

4. Has COVID had an impact on your earnings?

A bit, Medium, A lot

#### **C. Labour**

1. What is the normal labour requirement? How much of this is hired labour?

2. What is the situation during lockdown? (could not come, had to leave, stranded?)

#### **D. Veterinary care**

1. What are the normal veterinary services that you access? Health camps, doctors, medicines, vaccinations?

2. Are these services available during lockdown?

#### **E. General Questions (Rations, health care, places to stay, social stigma)**

1. Where do you normally get your rations while on migration?

2. What difficulties have you encountered because of the lockdown?

3. What state or other support has been available to ensure you have adequate ration?

4. Were you required to carry a Coronavirus free certificate? Where were you required to show such a certificate? Did you need permission to move?

5. Have you experienced difficulties in finding places to camp during the lockdown?

6. Have you experienced social stigma? Please elaborate?

#### **F. Open-ended**

1. During COVID have you been better off or worse off than other rural communities (agriculture, settled livestock keepers)... Can you compare your situation with others from your community who have moved out of herding?

2. What are your hopes and fears with regard to the next 6-12 months?

3. Do you have anything to add?

#### **G. Additional Comments by interviewer**



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