

Pasture Management in Alsha Wuloswali, Samangan

June, 2025 | Alsha Manteqa, Samangan Province, Afghanistan

KEY MESSAGES

- **Households reported grazing most in spring when natural growth is highest**, but vegetation is also most stressed, potentially creating a critical pressure point for both rangelands and livestock.
- **While most households are familiar with rotational grazing, the practice is often delayed until pastures show signs of decline.** This gap between knowledge and practice may reduce opportunities for rangeland recovery in semi-arid conditions.
- **Some households reported decreases in accessible land due to barren pastures**, restrictions by private owners, and rising livestock numbers in the area. These dynamics suggest that even where access is maintained or expanded for others, conditions on the ground remain uneven.
- **Reported choices about when and where to graze are linked to plant health, water, and proximity.** This points to households making decisions based on what sustains livestock and household livelihoods in the short term, potentially to the detriment of long-term ecological recovery that is needed to sustain pastures.

CONTEXT & RATIONALE

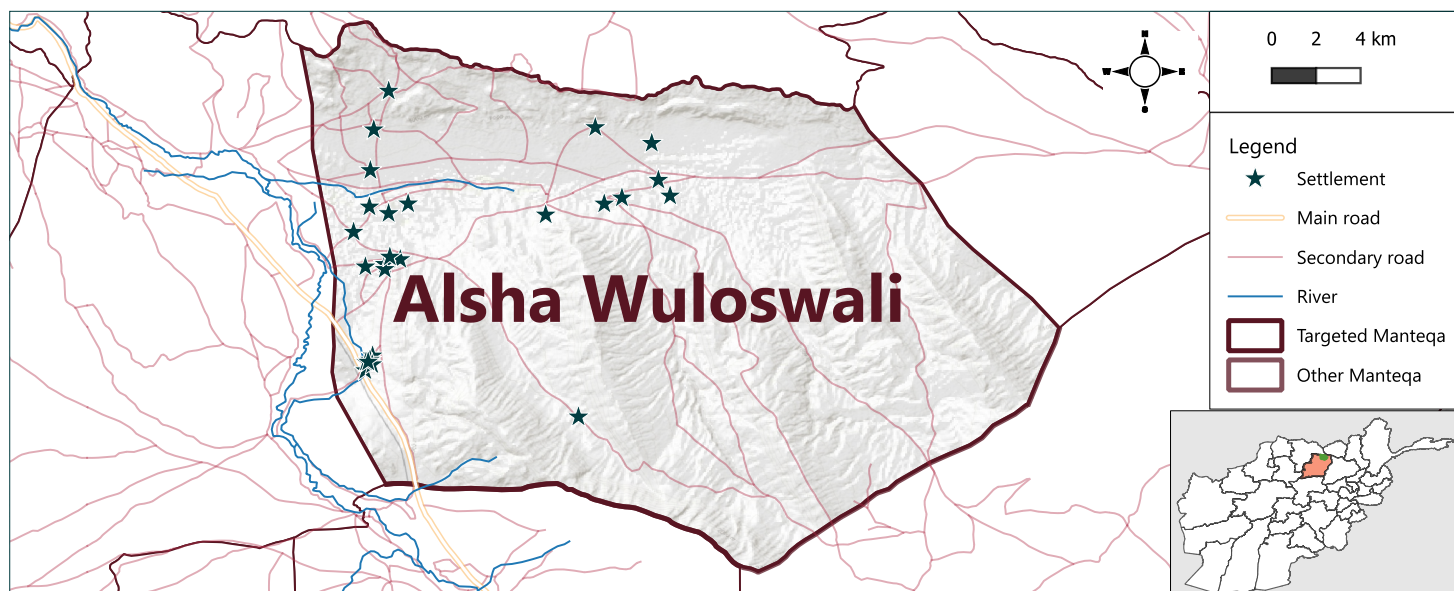
The convergence of prolonged environmental stress, socio-economic hardship, and limited institutional capacity has placed rural communities in Northwest Afghanistan under increasing pressure. In areas where livelihoods are heavily dependent on agriculture and livestock, recurring droughts, land degradation, and competing land use have intensified vulnerabilities.¹ To support sustainable recovery and resilience-building, the Pasture Management Assessment aims to generate localized, evidence-based insights into the use, degradation, and governance of pasture and rangeland resources. Conducted as part of the Sustainable Rural Development Programme-V (SRDP-V), this assessment aims to inform programming and prioritization for sustainable land management by tracking seasonal patterns, and community practices, across five manteqas. The inclusion of remote sensing further enhances the ability to monitor environmental change over time and triangulate findings with pasture management's Household (HH) survey and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

This assessment aims to analyze seasonal and year-round patterns of pasture and dryland use, evaluate degradation drivers, including climatic and socio-economic pressures, and examine local governance structures and community capacities to inform sustainable rangeland interventions across five manteqas² in Northwest Afghanistan. The selected manteqas have been targeted to implement a pilot of Acted's THRIVE initiative to support rangeland restoration in cooperation with local communities.

Methodology: This Pasture Management Research Assessment relies on a mixed-methods approach combining a HH survey, KIIs and Remote Sensing indicators to assess the use, management and state of pastures in five manteqas in North West Afghanistan. Data collection was carried out between the 26th of May and the 13th of June 2025. Findings in this factsheet should be considered indicative. For more details, follow this [link](#).

Map 1: Alsha Manteqa



PASTURE AND RANGELAND USE PATTERNS

Introduction

Alsha is located in Samangan Province, comprising 18 villages with an estimated 6,197 households (35,330 individuals).³ Less than 1% of the population are returnees and around 5% are internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁴ According to a previous assessment, most of Alsha's residents rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, and around 30% of its area are considered pastures.⁵

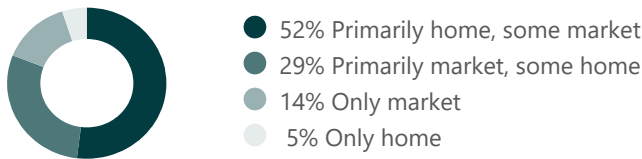
Alsha Manteqa's pasture use reflects the interplay between harsh climatic conditions, limited forage windows, and socio-economic pressures. Household surveys and key informant interviews provided insight into seasonal grazing patterns, decision-making processes, and management practices that shape rangeland use across its communities.

Household-level Pasture Use

Home Consumption and Commercial Farming

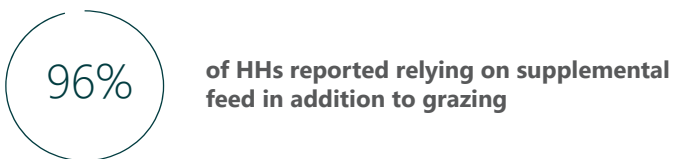
For most of the households, livestock farming seems to have considerable economic significance. Over 95% of household reported selling livestock products on the market to some extent. Despite this, livestock products were particularly important for home consumption for well over half of the households.

% of HHs that reported whether they farm for home consumption or market sale



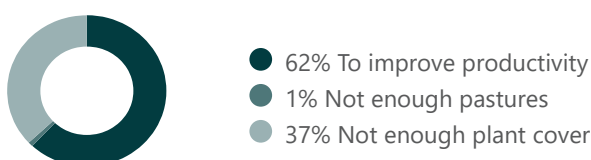
Grazing and Supplemental Feed

Aside from pastures, supplemental livestock feed seems to play a central role in the manteqa's livestock sector. Livestock farmers in the manteqa overwhelmingly reported relying on both grazing and feed, with only 4% pointing to grazing as the only feed source for their animals.



For most households (62%), feed is supplemented for its potential to improve productivity, but for over a third (37%), is a necessity because of a shortage of available natural vegetation to sustain livestock agriculture by itself. For a small minority (1%), the lack of accessible pastureland plays a role in relying on supplemental livestock feed.

% of HHs that reported reasons for using supplemental feed

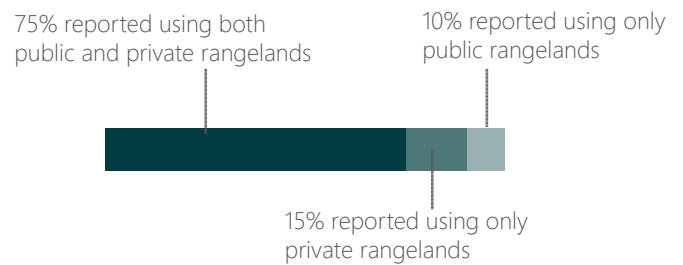


While supplemental livestock feed can offset temporary forage shortages, previous assessments in the region indicate that during drought periods herders are often compelled to sell assets, including portions of their herd or even household possessions, to purchase food and water for the remaining livestock.⁶ As such, pasture health likely plays a critical role in maintaining the balance between the cost of supplemental feed required to sustain livelihoods and the availability of natural forage resources.

Public or Private Land

Most herders in Alsha depend on public rangeland to some extent. While private rangeland may serve as a buffer for 75% who use both public and private land, this indicates that public pastures remain indispensable for sustaining herds.

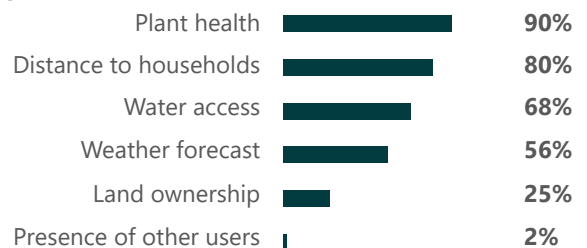
% of HHs that reported whether they make use of public or private rangelands for grazing



Pasture Selection

Households select pastures to graze mainly based on practical and ecological factors. The top reported considerations were plant health (90%), distance from the household (80%), water access (68%), and weather conditions (56%), while land ownership and presence of other users played only a minor role.

Factors reported in the selection of pastures for grazing, by % of HHs⁷



SUMMARY

- **Livestock production underpins both cash income and household consumption** for most surveyed households.
- **Households generally combine grazing with livestock feed**, often to increase productivity, but also to counterbalance insufficient natural vegetation.
- **Public rangeland is widely used**, with most households relying on them at least in part.
- **Pasture choice is led by ecological and logistical criteria** such as plant health, distance, water availability and weather, while land ownership and crowding are less important.



PASTURE AND RANGELAND USE PATTERNS

Seasonality and Rotation

Seasonality

Households in Alsha reported relying most heavily on pastures in spring, when natural grass availability peaks. In contrast, during autumn and winter, pasture productivity declines sharply. Most respondents reported that pastures provide insufficient forage during these months. While Alsha experiences an arid climate with most precipitation received in spring, the decline in pasture conditions over the seasons is likely exacerbated by the dry conditions witnessed over the past years.⁸

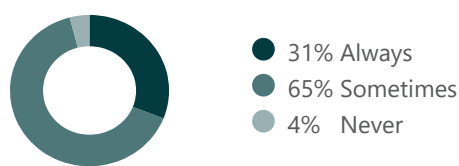
% of HHs that reported seasonality of grazing, pasture productivity and seasonality of forage

Seasons	In which season		
	Do you use pastures?	Is there most grass on pastures?	Does the pasture not have enough feed?
Spring	100%	100%	0%
Summer	63%	43%	27%
Autumn	14%	4%	58%
Winter	0%	0%	100%

Rotation Cycles

According to survey data, rotation is a widely adopted practice in the manteqa, although to varying degrees. Around 31% households reported always practicing it, while 65% do so only sometimes. Only a small proportion reported never relying on rangeland rotation. Key Informants noted that rotation is not applied uniformly and has led to increased pressure on the land.

% of HHs that reported regularly rotating rangeland they use

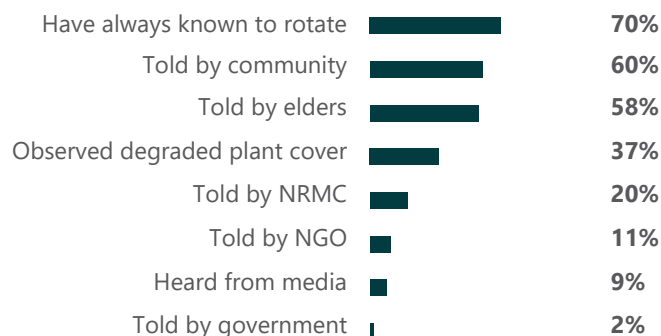


Reasons for Rotation

For most, rotational grazing seems to be motivated above all by a local consensus about its importance. Most HHs indicated they have always known to practice rotation, while 60% listened to advice from other community members and 58% to advice from community elders. This contrasts with a minority who seem to rely on the advice of NGOs (11%), the media (9%), or the government (2%).

Just over a third (37%) reported they also rely on visual cues such as degraded plant cover. While this can be a successful strategy to fine-tune the timing of rotation, practitioners in other contexts suggest that adequate residual stubble height of the plant cover is a core requirement for successful regeneration.⁹ With key informants highlighting concerns about overgrazing, it is likely that the cues used to decide when to shift pastures are not well aligned with the regrowth needs of the manteqa’s plant cover.

Reported reasons for rotation, in % of HHs¹¹



While it seems that external inputs from NGOs or the media do reach some individual households, local governance plays a much more important role in pasture management, a dynamic that could be leveraged by external actors. KI perspectives echo this, highlighting the potential for NGOs to provide technical training, financial support, and collaborative management approaches that could strengthen both community practices and institutional capacity.

Length of Pasture Stay

Survey data indicates that households have their livestock remain on a single pasture for an average of 81 days. It is unclear whether this period represents continuous use or is divided into shorter grazing bouts within paddocks, but if concentrated, such extended use could risk overgrazing and limit pasture recovery.¹⁰

81 Average number of days HHs keep their livestock on a single pasture

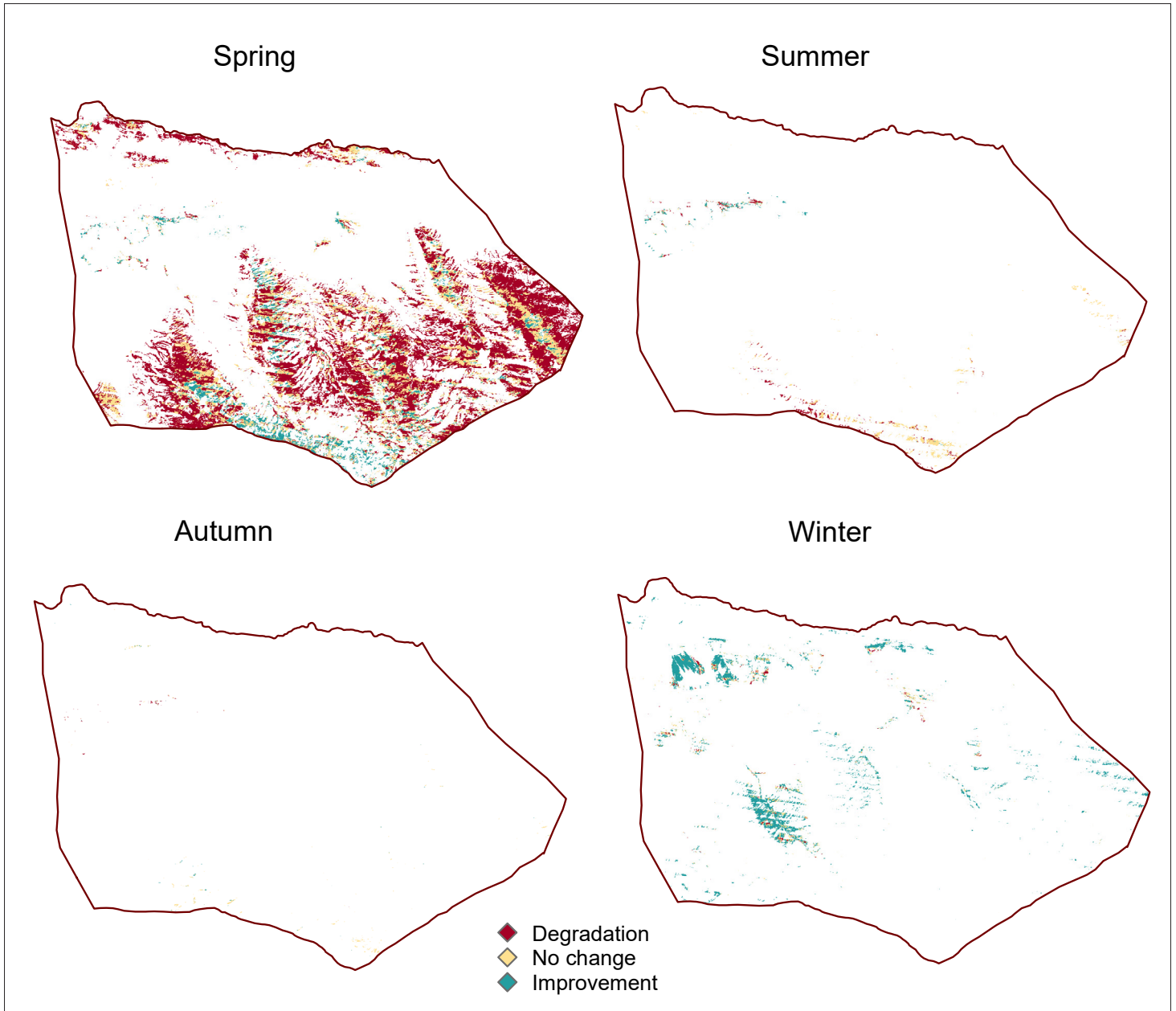
KIs reinforced this concern, stressing that overuse is the main challenge in Alsha Manteqa. They pointed to neglect of rotational grazing and rising livestock numbers exceeding carrying capacity, both of which have contributed to pasture degradation.

SUMMARY

- **Pasture use peaks in spring, but shortages in autumn and winter** could force reliance on depleted land, adding stress to fragile rangelands.
- **Most households know about rotational grazing**, yet only a third always practice it, while the rest do so irregularly.
- **Community consensus, elders, and peer advice shape grazing decisions** far more than NGOs or government, making local structures key for management.
- **Many seem to graze until plant cover is degraded** before moving animals, which may limit recovery if misaligned with key indicators such as stubble height.
- **Livestock remain on a pasture for an average of 81 days**, which, if continuous, may exceed sustainable use in semi-arid conditions and heightens the risk of overgrazing.

CONDITION, PRESSURES, AND DRIVERS OF LAND USE

Map 2: Pasture Condition Changes Between 2001-2005 and 2020-2024, Alsha Manteqa



Pasture Conditions

Satellite imagery and vegetation indices, primarily Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) and related spectral measure help track seasonal and interannual changes in vegetation cover. An analysis comparing 2001–2005 with 2020–2024 shows clear seasonal shifts in pasture condition across Alsha Wuloswali Manteqa (see Map 2). Spring degradation is concentrated in central and southeastern rangelands, linked to reduced spring rainfall, earlier winter greening under warmer conditions, and livestock grazing at the start of the growth cycle. Summer and autumn remain largely unchanged, reflecting low rainfall and the natural seasonal decline of vegetation. Winter shows the clearest improvement, as precipitation and warmer temperatures enable earlier greening while grazing pressure is minimal. Elevation strongly moderates these dynamics, with higher zones sustained by snow and cooler temperatures, and valleys and lowlands supporting denser growth.

DEFINITIONS

- Degradation** here refers to a decline in plant growth and cover, shown by lower satellite greenness index values in the recent period (2020–2024) compared to the baseline (2001–2005).
- Improvement** here refers to an increase in plant growth and cover, shown by higher satellite greenness index values in the recent period (2020–2024) compared to the baseline (2001–2005).

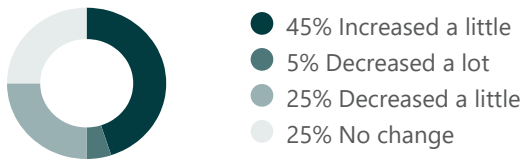
CONDITION, PRESSURES, AND DRIVERS OF LAND USE

Pastoral Shifts (2019-2024)

Changes in pastureland

Nearly half of the households surveyed suggested that the size of the pasture area accessible to them had increased over the past five years, while just under a third reported small or larger decreases. At the same time, 25% reported no change over this period. These differences in the perception of surveyed HHs may be owed to local changes at a level below the manteqa, perhaps in line with the small seasonal improvements and deterioration capture by remote sensing data.

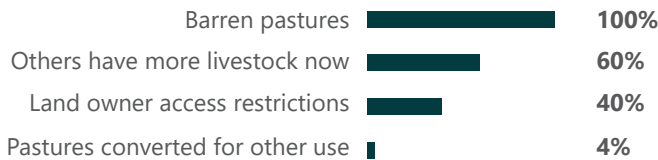
% of HHs that reported changes in accessible pasture area for their HHs over the past 5 years



Pasture Availability

Of those reporting a change, all cited barren pastures as the reason. In addition, more than half pointed out that the livestock numbers of other pasture users had increased, likely raising competition over shared pastures, while 40% suggested that private rangeland owners had restricted access. Only a small proportion reported conversion of previous rangelands into rainfed agricultural land, rendering land unusable for grazing.

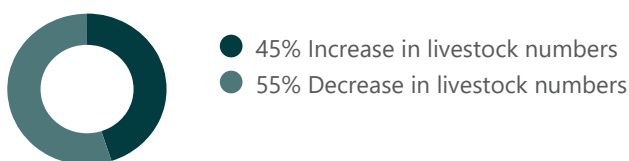
Reported reasons for a change in accessible pasture area in % of HHs¹²



Changes in Livestock Numbers

Reported changes in livestock numbers indicate that 55% of all households surveyed witnessed decreases over the past 5 years, while 45% saw increases.

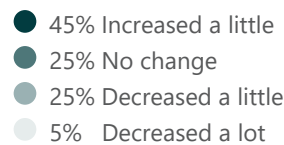
% of HHs that reported changes in livestock numbers over the past 5 years



In contrast to this, KIs noted a rise in livestock numbers that exceeded the carrying capacity of existing pastures in the manteqa, indicating that the manteqa's pastures are already at their limits and at risk of overgrazing in the absence of common strategies for the management of shared natural resources.

SUMMARY

- Remote sensing analysis indicates a seasonal redistribution of pasture health, with improvement during winter, degradation during spring, and relative stability during summer and autumn.
- Survey responses suggest that about half of households felt their accessible pasture area had increased in recent years, a quarter reported no change, and just under a third reported decreases.
- Those reporting decreases most often referred to barren pastures, competition from higher livestock numbers, and restricted access from private rangeland owners, while only a few mentioned conversion of rangeland to agricultural use.
- Reported livestock trends were mixed, with a small majority of households indicating decreases in their own numbers and a minority reporting increases, pointing to uneven grazing pressures across the community.

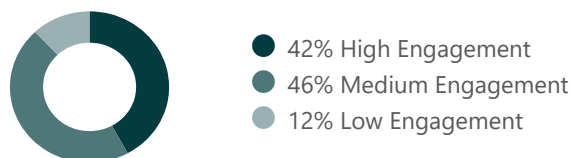


BARRIERS AND ENABLERS FOR PASTURE MANAGEMENT

Household-level Coordination

Household survey results show that community engagement around pasture use is mixed. About 42% of households demonstrate a high level of engagement, regularly consulting multiple actors before deciding which pastures to use. Nearly half fall into a medium category, consulting others only occasionally, while around 12% show little engagement.

% of HHs regularly engaging with pasture management actors

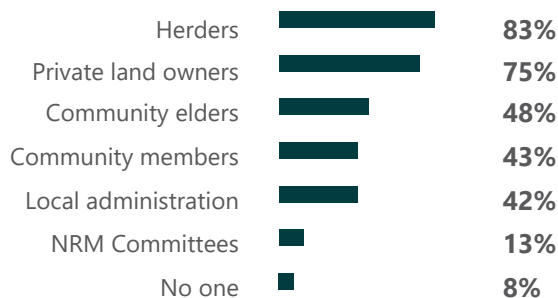


KI findings underline a gap between consultation and compliance, as even where households report regular engagement with others, actual adherence to agreed rules may be inconsistent, leaving governance fragile. Importantly, KIs also pointed to a breakdown of local governance mechanisms around pastures due to droughts.

Coordination mechanisms

Pasture management actors that most respondents engage with appear to be herders (83%) and private land owners (75%). Community elders are the third most consulted group (48%), followed closely by other community members (43%) and local administration (42%).

Pasture management actors HHs reported engaging with, in % of HHs¹⁴

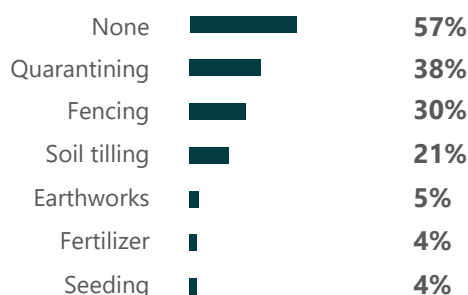


Although HHs reported frequent consultation with peers and elders, KIs noted that these interactions do not always prevent conflict. Consultation exists, but may not always translate to compliance with regulation, so disputes still occur.

Restoration Efforts

Most households (57%) reported not taking any measures to improve pasture health themselves. The most common activities revolve around deferment through quarantining (38%) or fencing (30%).

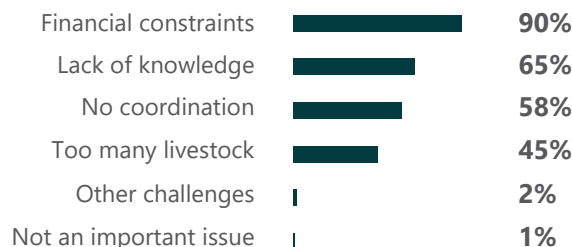
Have you taken any steps to improve pasture health yourself¹⁶



Challenges to Improving Pasture Health

Challenges related to pasture restoration identified by households revolved above all around financial constraints (90%), a lack of knowledge (65%) and a lack of coordination (58%).

Reported challenges to improving pasture health in % of HHs¹⁵



Information About Improved Farming

Households reported that they acquire information about improved agricultural practices mainly through peers. Nearly three quarters observe and listen to other farmers (73%). Advice from village leaders (68%) seems to also play an important role and just under a third pointed out the role of NGOs (31%). Demo plots (18%) or government (13%) sources seem to reach fewer households. These trends may highlight the centrality of informal networks in knowledge sharing and suggest that interventions are most effective when they build on existing peer-to-peer systems rather than relying solely on external extension.

Reported sources of information on improved agricultural practices, in % of HHs¹³



SUMMARY

- Household engagement around pasture use varies, with some families consulting multiple actors regularly, while others consult only occasionally or rarely.
- Key Informants highlighted that consultation does not always lead to compliance, as agreed rules are often not followed and governance remains fragile, particularly under the stress of droughts.
- Despite some reporting quarantining paddocks or fencing, most households do not take active measures to improve pasture health.
- Reported barriers to improving pasture health center on financial constraints, limited knowledge, and weak coordination, while some also believe livestock numbers prevent effective measures.
- Information about improved farming practices is primarily shared through observation and peer networks, with village leaders also playing a role, while NGOs, demonstration plots, and government sources reach far fewer households.



METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The Pasture Management Assessment utilized manteqas as the primary unit of analysis. Manteqas are locally recognized geographic areas smaller than districts but larger than individual settlements, defined by shared natural resources, socio-economic ties, and customary governance structures. In the five assessed manteqas, data was collected through a combination of household (HH) surveys and key informant interviews (KIIs), including local herders and natural resource management stakeholders.

The sampling approach for the HH survey employed a two-stage stratified cluster methodology. Settlements were first randomly selected within each manteqa, followed by random selection of households within those settlements. A minimum of six households were surveyed per settlement, with quotas split evenly between households engaged in irrigated agriculture and those relying on pasture-based livestock. To ensure inclusivity, female enumerators conducted interviews with women where access was permitted, including remote interviews in restricted areas. In Alsha, a total of 84 HH interviews were conducted, 23 of which with female-headed

HHs. KIIs were conducted with 1 herder and 2 district-level officials from the relevant line department.

In parallel, remote sensing analysis was conducted using Landsat-based spectral indices to assess historical changes in pasture health and land cover. This geospatial component enabled triangulation of field data with satellite imagery to identify trends in degradation and land use conversion over time.

Limitations:

- Exact proportions of manteqa residents engaged in livestock agriculture in this manteqa are unknown. Findings presented in this output should therefore be considered indicative
- Access constraints limited in-person interviews with women in some areas, potentially affecting gender-disaggregated insights.

For more information on the methodology, please refer to the Term of Reference ([TOR](#)).

ENDNOTES

1 REACH Afghanistan. Drought Impact and Resilience in Agro-Pastoral Communities in Northwest Afghanistan, Alsha Manteqa, 2025. [Link](#).

2 A manteqa is a geographic unit in Afghanistan, typically larger than a village but smaller than a district. It often comprises multiple villages that share social, economic, or geographic ties.

3 REACH Afghanistan Manteqa Profiles, 2023. Available on request.

4 REACH Afghanistan Pasture and Irrigation Assessment, 2025. HH surveys for both assessments were carried out at the same time with a combined sampling. Findings for demographic indicators across both assessments are statistically representative at 95/10 for the manteqa.

5 REACH Afghanistan. Drought Impact and Resilience in Agro-Pastoral Communities in Northwest Afghanistan, Pump Khana Manteqa, 2025.

6 Respondents could select more than one option.

7 Respondents could select more than one option.

8 REACH Afghanistan. Drought Impact, Alsha Manteqa.

9 UWM Crops and Soils Division of Extension. "Meeting the Needs of the Animal and Forage Plant through Grazing Management." [Link](#)

10 WSU Extension. "Optimizing Pasture and Animal Production through Planned Grazing." [Link](#).

11 Respondents could select more than one option.

12 Respondents could select more than one option.

13 Respondents could select more than one option.

14 Respondents could select more than one option.

15 Respondents could select more than one option.

16 Respondents could select more than one option.

About AGORA

AGORA is a joint venture between Acted and IMPACT Initiatives created in 2016 to operationalise our motto « Think local, Act global ». It is an innovative area-based approach that aims to better address the relief, environmental and development needs of people in fragile contexts through a NEXUS approach.

The key value added of AGORA is:

- Working at the **right geographical scale**, enabling both meaningful engagement with local actors and the ability to scale-up the action
- Contextualising action through a strong evidence-base and reliance on **local knowledge** to inform programme approaches
- Putting local actors at the centre** by strengthening their capacity, enabling them to identify their own needs and response priorities through participative research and planning approaches, and to participate and monitor implementation
- Linking local and external actors** so that the latter can contribute resources and capacity to implement local solutions and response priorities.

AGORA strengthens territorial resilience by enabling a wide range of programmes, including strengthening local governance, improving basic services and livelihoods, climate change adaptation and mitigation, improving natural resources management, disaster risk reduction and management, anticipatory action, or supporting durable solutions to displacement.

AGORA has already been piloted in **17 countries through 20 projects**, reaching approximately **1,8 million direct beneficiaries** and supporting **nearly 1,294 organisations**.

