

Below is the **Debut release**:

'Cows, Women & Land: The Indigenous Pivot of Power & Ecological Coexistence among the Borana Community'

'In the Borana Oromo Indigenous culture, three things stand above all else: Cows, Women and Land. Let me repeat that again: Cows. Women. Land. Nothing in the universe rivals their value. The cow, especially, transcends economics, it is identity, dignity, survival, spirituality and continuity of life itself. Land is revered as a Mother whose breast never runs dry. This is why, during severe prolonged droughts, when entire herds perish, deep grief consumes communities. Among these pastoralists, life without cattle is often perceived as life stripped of meaning, purpose and belonging. Yet beyond livestock, the Borana worldview carries profound lessons on gender, ecology and conservation ethics that modern systems are only beginning to rediscover.

While Borana society is historically patriarchal, the reverence accorded to women is immense. Centuries ago, strong women such as Akko Haamanoyye rose to lead the Borana nation with extraordinary wisdom & authority, commanding such influence that men trembled at her directives. Her reign amplified women's voices and rights over 500 years ago, and to this day, she remains deeply embedded in Borana feminist thought & cultural consciousness. Our Indigenous ecological governance systems were equally sophisticated. If a male and female gazelle stood side by side, killing the male was considered a grave offense. Why? Because the male symbolized generational continuity, and eliminating the last surviving male amounted to species genocide.

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Cutting down a large mature acacia tree was similarly punishable. Certain landscapes were designated as "holy lands," where even pruning a twig was forbidden. These sacred spaces were not merely spiritual sites, they were highly strategic ecological protection zones safeguarding biodiversity, water systems and critical habitats.

At traditional wells and dams, strict protocols governed water access. The final person leaving the well each evening was required to fill the water troughs so wildlife could drink safely at night without falling into the wells in search of water. Failure to do so was considered a serious communal offense.

Long before modern conservation frameworks, carbon markets, biodiversity credits, ESG metrics or Nature-based Solutions, Indigenous pastoral communities had already institutionalized ecological stewardship, coexistence and sustainability through culture, spirituality and customary law. As the world marks the International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists in 2026, perhaps the real question is this: What if the future of conservation, climate resilience and biodiversity restoration lies not only in modern science, but also in listening deeply to Indigenous knowledge systems that have safeguarded

ecosystems for centuries?



Borana livestock herded across the rangelands of Northern Kenya — a living testament to the inseparable bond between pastoralist communities, their cattle, and the land.

About ASREP

The ASAL Research and Resilience Programme (ASREP) is an indigenous-led organisation founded in 2023 and headquartered in Isiolo, Kenya. Operating across Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs), ASREP advances applied research, knowledge co-production, peacebuilding, climate justice, biodiversity restoration, and inclusive governance. The *ASAL Indigenous Knowledge Vault Series* is ASREP's flagship repository project, geared at showcasing the wealth of traditional knowledge and heritage of ASAL indigenous communities — knowledge that has been instrumental for climate resilience for thousands of years, and that holds critical lessons for the present, especially during the International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists 2026.

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