

PHOTOVOICE *with* PASTORALISTS

A Practical Guidebook



Shibaji Bose

PHOTOVOICE *WITH* PASTORALISTS

This guidebook is part of the PASTRES (Pastoralism, Uncertainty, Resilience: Global Lessons from the Margins) project, pastres.org, cohosted by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and the European University Institute in Florence. The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 740342). This publication is in support of the 2026 International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

The PASTRES programme and researchers hold the copyright to all content in this volume. Permission must be sought to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for teaching or not-for-profit use.

Copying in any other circumstances, including but not limited to any commercial use, re-use in commercial publications, or for translation or adaptation, is not permitted without prior written permission from PASTRES for which a fee may be payable.

ISBN: 978-1-80470-143-0



A Practical Guidebook
Shibaji Bose

CONTENTS

7	Preface and Acknowledgements	38	Key Takeaways
11	Introducing the Photovoice Method	42	Embracing Other Visual Methods
14	Planning a Photovoice Project	45	The Afterlives of Photovoice
19	Embedding the Process		
22	Reflections		

Preface & Acknowledgements



The PASTRES researchers photographed in Addis Ababa, from top left, clockwise: Masresha Taye (Ethiopia), Palden Tsering (Amdo Tibet, China), Natasha Maru (India), Giulia Simula (Italy), Tahira Mohamed (Kenya), and Linda Pappagallo (Tunisia). Credit: Roopa Gogineni

PASTRES (Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Resilience: Global Lessons from the Margins, pastres.org) is a European Research Council-funded research project that aims to learn how pastoralists respond to uncertainty, applying such ‘lessons from the margins’ to global challenges. The project fosters conversations with other policy domains where uncertainty is pervasive, including financial and commodity systems, critical infrastructure management, disease outbreak response, migration policy, climate change, and conflict and security governance.

One of the highlights of this project was to use photovoice to centre the voices of pastoralists, inviting them to share their beliefs and perceptions within their frameworks of understanding, and exploring their experiences of contending with unfolding uncertainties. This embracing of the ‘indigenous lens’ and ‘letting go of researcher control’ through photovoice was facilitated in all six PASTRES sites: Amdo Tibet in China, Sardinia in Italy, Isiolo in northern Kenya, Borana in southern Ethiopia, Kachchh in Gujarat, India and Douiret, Tataouine in southern Tunisia. The photovoice experiences helped unearth the pastoralists’ voices and implicit narratives and their understandings of variability and uncertainty.

This guide is a co-produced collective output of the PASTRES team and the photovoice community groups in our research sites. The contents of the guide are primarily derived from discussions with PASTRES researchers – Palden Tsering (Amdo Tibet, China), Natasha Maru (India), Linda Pappagallo (Tunisia), Giulia Simula (Italy), Tahira Mohamed (Kenya), and Masresha Taye (Ethiopia). All of the researchers were PhD researchers at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex at the time of the photovoice work. The excellent design and layout and the photo curation are by Roopa Gogineni. Nathan Oxley provided invaluable support to reach audiences far and wide. Ian Scoones, the motivating force behind this guide, meticulously checked it to the last detail while ensuring we had all the resources and time for its publication.

Why is this guide different?

Since Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris wrote about the visual research methodology 'photovoice' in 1997, this participatory action research technique, involving providing cameras to people to voice their lived realities, has become a topic of interest amongst researchers and practitioners globally.

This guide does not seek to add to the numerous other 'How to' photovoice manuals but offers a reflexive journey and the diverse perspectives that the PASTRES researchers encountered while aiming to learn from pastoralists responding to uncertainty from a wide geographical spread of pastoral areas in Amdo Tibet (China), Sardinia (Italy), Isiolo (Kenya), Borana (Ethiopia), Gujarat (India), and Tataouine (Tunisia). It explores what happened in practice, sharing how researchers faced challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and improvised accordingly. It demonstrates how to adapt and extend the standard photovoice approach with other visual methods, which proved effective in collecting, producing, analysing, and presenting diverse voices.



The overall research is discussed in the book *Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development* (2023), with cases from each site. The photovoice work was an important component whose main objective was to understand, through the photos and narratives of the pastoralists, how they view the complex, contested and highly differentiated realities that arise from

conditions of uncertainty. By exploring the diverse meanings of uncertainty from pastoralists' perspectives, we aimed to uncover understandings that were difficult to articulate simply in words, generating a debate amongst participants on what uncertainty is and why it is important in their lives.

Within the PASTRES project, photovoice was embedded in the research process. It facilitated giving pastoralists a voice, offering them opportunities to share how uncertainties are faced daily. In other contexts, photovoice can take a more utilitarian approach with specific objectives such as evaluating a project through the eyes of beneficiaries.



"It is the practice of making photos talk," stated a participant from a photovoice group discussion in Amdo Tibet. Credit: Palden Tsering

In the PASTRES work, researchers used the photovoice method to surface new meanings and perspectives that are missed by traditional methods such as interviews or focus group discussions. During their reflexive sessions, PASTRES researchers concluded that the evidence revealed by the visual techniques complemented their research and, in some cases, became central to their research findings.

One of the primary reasons for developing this guide is due to the numerous requests from the community, local organisations, NGOs, aid agencies, research students and others, including audiences of our visual methods website (seeingpastoralism.org) for sharing the PASTRES experience of embedding photovoice experiences in research processes.

This guide presents the photovoice process in seven sections, each drawing heavily from field experiences. The guide gives field-based accounts of how researchers situated the method, their challenges and revelations, and how they complemented and improved on a standard approach using other visual and digital ethnography tools. Each of the sections provides a frank reflexive assessment offered by the participants. The guide has tried to cover all aspects of the photovoice journey, from the first orientation with the researchers to the exhibitions and feedback dialogues in different fora. The guide has also tried to view the photovoice experience as a site of enquiry, putting forth a loose road map on how other visual research methods and ever-evolving visual study techniques can complement the photovoice approach, flexibly adjusted according to the situation, study population, and social and political environment.

1. Introducing the Photovoice Method

In its simplest sense, photovoice is about giving people cameras to take photographs around a theme. The participants then explain why they took these photos and why they are important to them and their community. The method works well when the facilitators – a researcher, NGO worker, or visual methods practitioner – have previously worked with the community or have a trusted interlocutor with rapport with the local community.



Photovoice participant in Amdo Tibet, China. Credit: Tsering Bum

The technique usually centres on group-based activity, allowing a collective voice to emerge from the images. Hence, the VOICE in ‘photovoice’ is also an acronym – Voice Of Individual and Collective Empowerment. After everyone has taken their photographs, the group sit together, discuss the photos, and develop the accompanying narratives. They select the pictures that best summarise the story they want to tell and refine the narrative descriptions. They then present the images and narratives to an audience, possibly other community members, researchers, or policymakers. These people can then act as messengers, sharing the photovoice stories with a broader audience at different levels.



PASTRES PhD researchers at the Institute of Development Studies. Credit: Ian Scoones

Orienting the researchers

The photovoice method is about letting go of outsiders' control and looking at issues from the community's perspective. This may be challenging for researchers, NGO workers, and others who like to be in charge of how stories are told!

Photovoice rests on three pillars. First, it is aimed at helping those who are often silenced to gain a voice. Second, it relies on photographs and narratives developed by the community. And third, it assists in developing a critical consciousness around an issue, both on the part of the facilitator and the participants, as they generate co-produced knowledge. As we found, embedding the methodology within the research process is crucial.

At the start of the PASTRES project, we held a workshop with all researchers to help orient the visual methods work. This involved exploring how to find out different meanings of pictures, particularly around a complex theme such as 'uncertainty'; understanding the basics of visual ethnography for meaning-making; discussing how different images and narratives can be looked at through an 'intersectional' lens, exploring how social

difference influences image creation and interpretation; examining how a common theme can emerge out of the images and narratives, facilitating this without constraining the discussion around preset ideas (such as academic definitions of 'uncertainty'), and finally, how the collective nature of the co-production process can be a powerful tool for broader advocacy and policy engagement.

As researchers, the PASTRES team had quite a few questions. What are the ethical issues of using photography within a community where one has spent considerable time? Is it extractive and inappropriate? The discussion focused on how photovoice is about looking through the lens of the community, exploring the world they live in, their perceptions, anxieties and uncertainties, and allowing their reflections about the evolving daily realities around them to come to life.

Photovoice complements other research or development activities and equally must rely on trust and confidence in the researcher (or another facilitator) to work effectively. It may not be appropriate for some people and in some settings; in others, it can be liberating and informative for all involved. In all cases, ethical protocols must be followed, requiring prior informed consent for all activities and a restriction on photography involving minors and anyone who cannot consent. In the PASTRES case, the ethics approval of the university and following the guidelines agreed by the funder were essential.

2. Planning a Photovoice Project

Every photovoice project has an aim. In this research project, photovoice allowed researchers to look at their themes through the lens of the community.

For PASTRES, the theme was ‘pastoralism and uncertainty’ – a broad area of enquiry. Researchers, therefore, first discussed with the photovoice participants the theme – what pastoralism is, what uncertainty is, and how this theme is understood in the local context and in their language, which provides an understanding of their culture and their world view. Participants were then invited to take pictures on the theme during their daily, weekly and seasonal activities in their homes and localities, or while on the move with their animals. In all cases, it was a very open-ended invitation, allowing individuals and groups unconstrained exploration of the issue.

In some cases, more precise questions were posed. For example, in Isiolo in Northern Kenya, the researcher asked a group of youth participants to explore the role of young people in the pastoral economy and the role of inequality, linking to her study of moral economy practices in addressing uncertainties.

Site selection

As with any participatory research approach, facilitators must be familiar with the sites and have good connections with the local community. For the PASTRES work, the photovoice exercises took place after the researchers were already conducting their research. It is always important to be careful about the positionality of any interlocutor in the process because vested interests can easily derail things, as participants either may be too biased towards their views or may not reveal their own opinions for fear of upsetting their relationship.



Pastoralism is central to the Sardinian economy and culture. The types of production range from highly extensive, including those who practise transhumance and take livestock to mountain pastures (above) to those who have intensified in a fixed farm site with high levels of mechanisation (below). Credit: Giulia Simula and Roopa Gogineni

Selecting photovoice groups

A photovoice group ideally should have representation from all the possible groups in the locality, either together or as separate groups – such as men, women or youth, as happened in some of the PASTRES sites.

A community is not a homogenous entity; there will be tensions about who gets selected, who wants to get chosen, their motivation levels, and what they will get in return for being engaged in the photovoice exercise. In patriarchal settings, forming women's groups may provide a safe space. Nevertheless, the photovoice exercise may still be seen as challenging and could make women uncomfortable in some cases and settings.



Researcher Palden Tsering holds an introductory photovoice workshop with pastoralists in Golok, Amdo Tibet. The group included monastic and secular participants. Credit: Tsering Bum



A photovoice group of young pastoralists from Kinna in northern Kenya. Credit: Tahira Shariff

The PASTRES researchers in different sites had to contend with specific issues, particularly those related to working with pastoralists. For example, how can you facilitate a process when people are on the move? How can you reach remote populations in far-distant pastures? How can you create a group when people are so dispersed?

Researcher Natasha Maru keeps in touch with pastoralists in Kachchh over video calls. Credit: Natasha Maru



Different case studies were pursued across the many PASTRES research sites – some near towns, some further away, deep in the rangelands, or in distant mountains. This allowed for comparisons between different geographies with contrasting socioeconomic contexts, but it also created logistical challenges for regularly keeping in touch with photovoice groups.

A critical lesson from the PASTRES experience is that the facilitator must continuously engage with the groups using mobile phones and ideally through regular physical visits after the initial group selection. Maintaining motivation and engagement is crucial, but some of the original participants may have little time to engage with photovoice as they have busy schedules looking after their animals or being involved in other activities. In this case, new members interested in participating may join the group as long as the group remains heterogeneous and represents a cross-section of the community.

People have different obligations and therefore engaging with photovoice exercises may be challenging. This may especially be the case for women. However, PASTRES researchers often found that women were keen to be involved, as the process gave women the opportunity to document their daily lives and the importance of their behind-the-scenes role in pastoral contexts.



Researcher Palden Tsering with a pastoralist photographing the mountains in Golok, Amdo Tibet with a phone (above). A pastoralist in Ethiopia practises with a point-and-shoot camera (below). Credit: Tsering Bum and Masresha Taye

3. Embedding the Process – Understanding the Instrument of Capturing Photos

When you start a photovoice project – after you have selected the research frame, site(s), and groups – then you need to orient the groups on the objective, what your plans are, what is in it for the community, what will be the final output, and how you want to take forward the outputs, including the photos and the narratives produced by participants to reach stakeholders at different levels.

Before anything else, you must assist participants in using a point-and-shoot digital camera or a mobile phone camera. These days, most people choose the mobile phone over the camera, given its ubiquity and ease of use. In addition, when conducting a long-running photovoice project to capture the seasonality, as was done in the case of PASTRES, it is impossible for the researcher to be physically present during the entire project duration. In these cases, smartphones are handier for sharing pictures and narratives through WhatsApp/Snapchat. The narratives or the story behind the photos are usually communicated through audio chat. This also allows the researcher to communicate with the photovoice group.

However, smartphones with good cameras tend only to be owned by more affluent people, often men. Younger women may only have a basic phone, by contrast, and so may not be able to contribute the same quality of photos and may not be able to use a smartphone if one is supplied. These dynamics need to be considered in planning the photovoice work.

In two of the PASTRES sites (Sardinia and Amdo Tibet), most men and women had access to smartphones. However, there were also communities where smartphones were rare (Kenya and Ethiopia). In Tunisia, the PASTRES researcher bought each participant a disposable camera to take pictures. The Kenyan researcher bought the local youth group a set of smartphones, while in contrast, in Ethiopia, the researcher took a photo walk with each participant and took pictures of issues and objects that the participant told him to document – a guided photovoice. In Gujarat, India, a professional photographer was hired to help the researcher design a pictorial booklet and other learning aids to orient

the herders on camera use. The process is never straightforward. Often the herders in Gujarat would forget to take pictures or be attracted to other uses of their smartphones. Images taken by a young woman in Gujarat who said she had taken many photos of her journey could not be found on the camera. In Isiolo in Kenya, the youths inadvertently damaged their smartphones, and it took some time to get replacements. Despite all these challenges, photographs, alongside their explanatory narratives, from participants in all sites were incredibly revealing, speaking to themes of uncertainty, hope, despair, stoicism and diverse emotions.



The broken smartphone of a photo-voice participant in Kinna, Kenya.
Credit: Tahira Shariff



Researcher Natasha Maru and photographer Nipun Prabhakar held a photovoice workshop with Rabari pastoralists. Photographs from other PASTRES sites were used as examples. Credit: Nipun Prabhakar

4. Reflections

Amdo Tibet, China

Two photovoice groups were formed with pastoralists from Golok and Kokonor in Amdo Tibet. The group in Golok comprised males and included monks, to understand male perceptions, while the group in Kokonor was a female group. This selection enabled us to examine the issues through the lens of both genders. Two rounds of photovoice were conducted with both groups exploring uncertainty and pastoralism. These field sites were selected because, besides the varying altitude, both sites have different issues such as inter-generational gaps, lake expansion, urbanisation, and vanishing pastures. Photographs and narratives were collected and shared through WeChat (a social media platform in China). With the advent of newer mobile technologies and access to the internet, messaging has enabled a far more dynamic process of collecting photographs and allowing for discussions remotely.

The photovoice process was undertaken over time to cover seasonal variability and its effects on the lives of pastoralists in different settings. The dominant realisation among the photovoice participants in the community validation workshop was that ‘the only certain thing is pastoralism’ (with young people returning to pastoralism) and the perception that ‘things in the city are very uncertain.’ A prominent theme discussed in Kokonor was the issue of losing land and livestock to the expanding lake and trying to create opportunities for change and transformation, despite such impacts. With monks being a part of the male photovoice group, there were discussions on uncertainty reflecting Buddhist religious beliefs and culture. The group provided many examples that describe different dimensions of uncertainty in the Tibetan setting. As a result of these community deliberations, the two main themes that evolved were: ‘The lake expansion and the landless pastoralists’ in Kokonor and ‘The black tent and the summer pasture’ in Golok. Both groups were motivated and kept sending pictures and narratives via WeChat. At the end of the process, both groups convened and had a community validation followed by an exhibition for the local people.

For more on the Amdo Tibet work, see Chapter 4, ‘Hybrid Rangeland Governance: Ways of Living With and From Uncertainty in Pastoral Amdo Tibet, China by Palden Tsering in the book Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development. See also the newspaper on the Seeing Pastoralism website.



‘This was my winter pasture, and I spent my first 20 years there. Then I got married and had a share of pasture from my family. I fenced up the pasture and leased this piece of land to others, and sometimes I herd my flock too... Uncertainty to me is the land I have lost to the lake. Our pastoral life depends on the land, a significant part of my life I have lost. I lost a place where I had my childhood memories and cultural footprints. It is not only the livelihood I lost but also an important part of my life that completes me from all perspectives.’ (Gong Bae).

Credit: Gong Bae



Sardinia, Italy

Pastoralism is the backbone of the Sardinian economy and culture. In recent decades, however, the dairy industry has undergone profound change with significant implications for pastoralists. The declining price of milk and increasing cost of inputs affect every pastoralist in Sardinia, generating many uncertainties for pastoral livelihoods. But everyone is affected differently, and responses to uncertainties vary widely: 'Why don't you sell cheese if the milk price is low?' is a frequent question.

Diverse responses reflect the different realities of pastoralism in Sardinia. Two groups were formed to capture the pastoralists' perspectives, one in and around a market town and another in a remote mountain area. Due to the pandemic, the researcher had to adapt the photovoice method, using Facebook and WhatsApp to interact with the pastoralists and collect and share photographs. It was not easy due to the on-and-off lockdowns. Following lengthy discussions, pastoralists often trusted the researcher to choose the pictures and help frame their narratives. The result was a collaborative reflection. Unfortunately, because of the unique situation presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the photographs reflected a constrained life without the usual festivals and celebrations that typify pastoral life. Some participants also did not have the time to engage as the pandemic created many production and market challenges. Those who were involved in more specialised production were busy most of the time. Unable to leave their houses, pastoralists also shared old photographs: pictures of them sharing a meal after a sheep-shearing session or pictures that showed solidarity and camaraderie, for example. These images told stories of the past and reflected what an excellent pastoral life should be. The pastoralists always wanted to share positive pictures – pictures of pride and not necessarily of uncertainty. Uncertainty was implicit in the context, but they wanted to show how they overcame it by being resilient, stoic, and with challenges taken in their stride. Later in the process, when conversations emerged around the photos taken, the pastoralists went into depth, revealing more nuanced reflections prompted by the pictures.

One strongly emerging theme was the dynamic around the market – volatile prices, shifting demand, challenging access – and the political relations with the state that governed these. This was a core feature of uncertainty that emerged through the discussions, which allowed pastoralists to have a voice around these political and economic issues and express concerns in new ways. The many in-depth freewheeling conversations with

***'There are around 300 households in our community. Unfortunately, only one or two families still live in our traditional black tents; all other families stay in white tents or concrete and iron houses. Every 20th February, we hold the annual Dri Mo (female yak) Beauty Contest within the community. We present the pastoral culture to the whole community, and it is not only a special festival day for Dri Mos but also a good opportunity to show young pastoralists the traditional pastoral way of life. I know it is unreasonable for them to live in black tents these days, but it is still our common memory, and you need to know the past so you can proceed to the future.'* (T Sam).**

Credit: T Sam

the photovoice groups brought to light two themes: 'Food production as resistance and necessity: regaining control over price' and a focus on relying on natural produce during uncertain times, told through the photovoice story: 'Not everyone can make cheese and sell jam.' The photovoice experience in Sardinia showed the strength of not being overly rigid when embedding a particular method and approach. The pandemic required innovation and improvisation, and responding to uncertainty in the research process. The conversations that flowed brought out both personal and general political-economic problems and highlighted how these were intertwined around themes of uncertainty. As the Sardinia case demonstrated, group discussions among the participants after the completion of the method are as crucial as the photo-taking process.

For more information on Giulia Simula's work on Sardinia, see Chapter 5: Uncertainty, Markets, and Pastoralism in Sardinia, Italy, in the book Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development. See also the newspaper on the Seeing Pastoralism website.



A pastoralist in Sardinia shares old photos from a lunch shared after sheep-shearing. Shearing is a slowly disappearing collective event. Friends, family, and pastoralist colleagues are invited to help. Young people keep the sheep so they are ready to be sheared and are also in charge of collecting the wool. Adult pastoralists shear for four to five hours a day for two or three days in a row. After shearing, everyone enjoys a nice lunch and spends time together. Credit: Giulia Simula

MAGGIO 2020	
1	VENERDI
2	SABATO
3	DOMENICA
4	LUNEDI
5	MARTEDI
6	MERCOLEDI
7	GIOVEDI
8	VENERDI
9	SABATO
10	DOMENICA
11	LUNEDI
12	MARTEDI
13	MERCOLEDI
14	GIOVEDI
15	VENERDI
16	SABATO
17	DOMENICA
18	LUNEDI
19	MARTEDI
20	MERCOLEDI
21	GIOVEDI
22	VENERDI
23	SABATO
24	DOMENICA
25	LUNEDI
26	MARTEDI
27	MERCOLEDI
28	GIOVEDI
29	VENERDI
30	SABATO
31	DOMENICA

'Look, these are the deadlines for invoices and things to pay. And when payments are due, etc. But the payments don't arrive on time and the bills to be paid remain... how can you stay calm? How do you plan things? I write everything down because it's the only way to plan a little bit... but you don't get a payment and you still have to pay 800€ of feed and 500€ of diesel and vaccines and this and this and that and then things accumulate and it's not easy. Especially because we are at the beginning of the year and they are all investments and no income since the aid does not arrive. I have yet to get the drought aid of 2017 just so you understand the situation.' (Filippo Dore).

Credit: Filippo Dore



Credit: Said

Douiret, Tataouine, southern Tunisia

Beyond seeing pastoralism as a livelihood, and as a way of life that responds to various uncertainties, livestock provides a stable job and a viable alternative to living in the city. High unemployment rates in the south of Tunisia is a primary concern for the younger generation, causing significant emotional distress. The original plan was to share disposable cameras with the participants in the mountains and plains to capture a wide range of perspectives. However, the researcher was unable to travel to her field site in Tunisia for over a year during the pandemic, constraining the photovoice process. Towards the end of the project, cameras were provided to two youths. These photovoice stories portray the lives of two young entrepreneurial livestock owners, Mohammed and Said, aged between 30–35, from Douiret in the region of Tataouine. Using disposable cameras, their stories illustrate the everyday life of emerging livestock owners who have returned to their place of origin to escape emotional and physical precarity in the city. Their flocks provide employment and income, as well as being a healthy food source. The increasingly stringent migration policies, coupled with the challenges faced by the national economy, such as the increasing living and housing expenses and limited access to credit and land, are all factors that limit opportunities for younger generations in rural areas. One of the stories reflects on a journey back to the rural areas. It is relayed from inside the car, travelling to and from Douiret.

Images capture them waiting in front of petrol stations and shops while fodder is unloaded, and they contrast the experiences of migrants constantly on the move with the stillness of café culture. The images capture the tension between returning to a simpler life and leaving for the city (Tunis) or going abroad to follow their aspirations. The other photovoice story is more like a digital diary. It depicts the familiarity of community life, surrounded by livestock and the simplicity of a tent and the open expanse of rangelands.

This contrasts with the cacophony of unsatisfactory possibilities in the capital city of Tunis. A group activity, where the participants gather to discuss the pictures taken and try to identify themes, proved a considerable challenge during the pandemic lockdowns in Tunisia. Instead, undertaking individual, more rapid explorations using photovoice and digital photo diaries proved an excellent alternative. The process is less controlled by the researchers, and when face-to-face interaction was not possible, this allowed more remote engagement with the process.

For more information on Linda Pappagallo's work on southern Tunisia, see Chapter 8: Confronting Uncertainties in Southern Tunisia: The Role of Migration and Collective Resource Management in the book Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development. See also the newspaper on the Seeing Pastoralism website.



'I love this place, in peace, in work; if you want to be a self-made man, you can do it... I started in 2006 with a small number of livestock, six head, and we reached 35 head; then, in two to four years, you find yourself owning 150–250 head... you cannot do that in Tunis; you cannot invest in a place you don't like; you wouldn't succeed.' (Mohammed).

Credit: Mohammed

Kachchh, Gujarat, western India

The original idea for the photovoice was to document the Rabari herders' perceptions during the movements of their camps and animals across the seasons.



Rabari pastoralists prepare to move camp. Credit: Natasha Maru.

Movement is synchronised with the rhythms of nature – weather cycles, crop cycles, and animal life cycles. Animals serve as the mobile infrastructure that makes pastoral livelihood possible. While the health and productivity of their sheep are the primary motivation for their mobility, the camel serves as their main beast of burden, making life on the move possible. Centred around these two animals, the two photovoice stories represent the two circuits of movement of the pastoralists amidst the changing and increasingly uncertain landscape. Due to the Covid-19 lockdowns, the original plan of accompanying the herders on journeys had to be shelved. Two family groups were identified, as the researcher had a prior working relationship with the extended family. A field-based orientation was conducted using mobile phones, cameras, and pictorial aids. Due to their interest in the process, young male pastoralists predominantly created the photovoice stories.

The first story focuses on pastoral mobility and talks of the relationship between the pastoralists and their animals, with their experiences of land and the environment mediated through movement. This movement involves an entanglement of complex feelings, such as trust, fear, friendship and diplomacy, as they encounter others, both familiar and unfamiliar.

The second photovoice story is about the intimate connection between a pastoralist and his camel, a species whose numbers are dwindling in the area. One of the most exciting elements of exploring photovoice stories with the moving pastoralist groups was the communication between the researcher and the participants during the photovoice process, even during the lockdown periods. Besides using WhatsApp video and voice calls, communication included social media such as Facebook and TikTok, which the pastoralists often used to convey their feelings. Photovoice was complemented by documentary photography and photo elicitation to gather the entire spectrum of perceptions from the local community.

For more information on Natasha Maru's work in Kachchh, Gujarat, western India, see Chapter 3: Engaging with Uncertainties in the Now: Pastoralists' Experiences of Mobility in Western India in the book Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development. See also the newspaper on the Seeing Pastoralism website.



'We decide 2–3 days in advance of moving. We think of where there is good grazing, where it is worth staying. We may stay in one place one night or even 15–20 days. We contact pastoralists ahead and farmers ahead – they tell us, come to our farms in a week or come in 10 days. Our mukhi or leader goes to find grazing. This scouting is called niharu karvu. If we stroll through the outskirts of a village, we know that there are crops that will be harvested in this many days and will be available for the livestock to graze. It is not decided where we go, but we have built relationships in certain villages over the years where we are comfortable, so we try to go there year after year, providing grazing is available.'

Credit: Vibho Rabari

Isiolo, northern Kenya

A key objective of the photovoice activity in Isiolo in Northern Kenya was to understand the role of youth in moral economy practices that help pastoralists confront uncertainty and look keenly at the role of both genders. The female participants examined women's role in caring for animals and managing the milking of them. Money made from milk marketing (notably from camels) was highlighted as being necessary to support other family members as part of a broader 'moral economy' of solidarity and support – a fundamental way of confronting uncertainty. Through the photovoice stories, participants were able to embed the female lens and challenge the dominant view of pastoralism as being a predominantly male profession. The photovoice stories gave voice to previously silent players – women as mothers, daughters, and caregivers – central to providing support in challenging, uncertain times.

The male group explored the role of their peers in providing herding services, transportation services through motorcycles, and the importance of educated youths sending remittances from their jobs. The researcher provided smartphones to both the male and female groups. After the first round, the groups met and discussed to select the most dominant themes from the photographs and associated narratives. Regular iterations followed in the form of more group discussions throughout the photovoice project. Two sites were chosen to gather differential perceptions – one very remote and one place near Kinna Town. One photovoice story highlighted the deterioration of the vital drought-grazing reserve due to the proliferation of the invasive tree *Prosopis juliflora*, which added to the uncertainties faced by the pastoralists. The photovoice in Northern Kenya helped in the research process, which looked at changes over time in forms of uncertainty and moral economy practices among the Waso Boran pastoralists of northern Kenya. The photovoice stories provided a slice of the life of the pastoralists through their own eyes. Photovoice was complemented by a visual technique called re-photography to explore historical changes (see Section 6).

For more information on Tabira Mohamed's work on Isiolo, Kenya, see Chapter 6: Responding to Uncertainties in Pastoral Northern Kenya: The Role of Moral Economies in the book Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development. See also the newspaper on the Seeing Pastoralism website.



***'We cannot cross over there because of the bush; this shrub [juliflora] proliferates, every faecal material livestock produces enhances regrowth. We cannot control it; it has taken over the entire riverbed. People used to have small shamba near the river bed, but they have all been lost to this shrub. Wild animals have infested the place, and the government is doing nothing about it. It is destroying our livelihood, and now we even have conflict with the wild animals we have lived with in peace for ages.'* (Isaqo Huqa, Merti).**

***'I am Ralia and I am in high school. Covid-19 led to school closure and I have been home for many months. Many children have been a burden on their parents because they require meals and remain idle. I wanted to be productive for myself and for my mother. I requested to use our neighbour's vacant plot and planted onions. I invited a few women to help in planting and weeding. Now my onions are ready, and the earnings can help in my school fees. It's about how you manage the problem; you can twist and benefit from the other side of the coin rather than focusing on the bitter side.'* (Ralia, Kinna).**



'No more petty trade. This entire shop costs close to four cattle. But I know I will not lose all the goods in one month, like my cattle due to drought. The pain is high when you do petty trading or put everything in livestock. This shop backs the livestock and the other way around.' (Boru, 28, Dire). Credit: Boru



A young woman made this photograph and titled it 'ATM of the youth.'
Credit: Galmo

Borana, southern Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, 18 pastoralists, disaggregated by wealth, status, gender, age and location, participated in the photovoice exercise. They were asked to take photographs to give their perception of a simple question: 'How do you visualise risk and uncertainty through pictures?' Pastoralists could communicate their experiences and understanding of risk, uncertainty, and imagination through images.

The photovoice exercise aimed to capture temporality by exploring seasonal variations while observing stress times during droughts for two consecutive years and flooding in the same year. Risks and uncertainties are experienced differently by pastoralists depending on their family status and relationships with their wider clan, groups and networks. Together, these shape their particular worldview and their experience of droughts. This was evident through several pictures, each conveying the different perspectives of the participants, male and female, young and old. The results of the photovoice exercise (complemented by the photo-elicitation technique in some instances) were shared with the community to elicit further dialogue and feedback. According to the researcher, sharing the newspaper (see Section 7) with the community and local officials was also a step towards challenging how technocrats and insurance modellers conceptualise drought.

For more information on Masresha Taye's work in southern Ethiopia, see Chapter 7: Livestock Insurance in Southern Ethiopia: Calculating Risks, Responding to Uncertainties in the book Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development. See also the newspaper on the Seeing Pastoralism website.

5. Key Takeaways

The PASTRES photovoice allowed pastoralists to record their perspectives and reflect on their settings. The method revealed real-life experiences and a space for critical dialogue around their realities, thoughts, and responses to uncertainty. With photovoice, different stories are told, photographs are captured, and reflections emerge.

In all six sites, the method was found to be easy to implement, and photovoice was able to set off interactions between the researcher and the participants. Even in areas such as Sardinia and Gujarat, where participants did not take many pictures but shared their feelings through TikTok and Facebook, the discussions prompted by the photovoice interactions were free-flowing and encompassed history, place, and complex, uncertain realities.

The advent of newer mobile photo technologies and the internet and social media have made it easier for researchers to conduct visual research methods, even if they cannot be there full-time or can only go at irregular intervals. Such technologies helped the process during the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 had, for a while, prevented the researchers and the photovoice participants from physically meeting each other. But exchanges of photos through social media helped deepen research-participant relationships, which were rekindled when they got together physically after the pandemic.

The method also supported qualitative discussion by surfacing meanings through photographs that may have yet to be noticed by traditional tools of enquiry. For example, in Borana, Ethiopia, a lady milking a cow was interpreted differently by different sections of the community; some saw this as an opportunity for nutritious milk from livestock while others saw this as women being burdened by their daily chores without a helping hand. The accompanying narratives helped expose diverse interpretations of an issue.



A wealthy adult male pastoralist took this photograph to show a ‘natural dinner’ for children. The photo prompted a variety of responses:

‘A woman without help’ (carrying a child on her back and milking alone) – a poor, young, female pastoralist.

‘She might be a very busy woman to milk a cow after sunset’ – a middle-aged female pastoralist, medium wealth group.

‘A dinner for pastoralists’ – an adult male pastoralist, medium wealth group.

‘Not sufficient milk, as the cow looks starved’ – a poor, elderly, female pastoralist.

Credit: Malicha



A collection of Facebook groups dedicated to Douiret in southern Tunisia. Members post archival photos, maps, poetry, obituaries, and live videos of sheep-shearing and olive-picking. Credit: Linda Pappagallo

The visual data in all the sites were rich, meaningful, and thought-provoking for the community and the researcher. The photovoice exchanges also helped draw out metaphors, oral traditions, and other imagery.

The method promoted reflective thinking and helped participants to bring to life the critical things they wished to say in their own words, allowing a quite conceptual idea such as ‘uncertainty’ to be brought to life.

In some sites, for example, Gujarat, some pastoralists had to be continuously motivated to take pictures, as they were busy or wished to use their phones for accessing social media and making videos for TikTok. In Sardinia, the pastoralists would only take photos of the things they took pride in and wanted to keep the stories of the challenges they faced with the community private.

Within a group, some individuals ‘got’ the photovoice concept more quickly than others, who took much more time to understand the method. Working in groups helped facilitate the process.

Visual methods research such as photovoice took much longer than in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and took the researcher more time, but the material's richness was worth it.

Safety and ethical issues were critical as self-disclosure may occur, and facilitators need to be able to manage situations where safety and emotional wellbeing are at stake. Some people distrust cameras or do not like taking or being in photos, which must be respected.



Locust swarm. When asked about the locust plague that arrived in Borana in 2020, one pastoralist responded ‘Bofa dheedhiitti, buttii afaan buune’ (‘When we attempted to flee from a bofa snake (less deadly), we were met with butti (the most poisonous snake)’). Photos of locust swarms provided a focus for discussion around the meaning of uncertainty. Credit: Masresha Taye

A Sardinian pastoralist shares a photo of his cheese with the researcher. Credit: Francesco

6. Embracing Other Visual Methods

Across the PASTRES sites, researchers used various complementary methods, which are discussed next.

Re-photography: gaining a longitudinal view

Visual materials from archival sources (whether available in official archives or people's photograph collections) can provide perspectives across time. Comparing current and past images can provoke discussions, for example, about how uncertainties have changed and how pastoralists' responses have evolved. In Isiolo, Kenya, the research traced changes from 1975 to the present, using photographs taken by Gudrun Dahl, an anthropologist who had worked in the area before, and updating photographs of the same sites.



Pastoralists fill jerry cans at the water pan in 1975 and 2020. Credit: Gudrun Dahl (left), Goracha (right)

Documentary photography and video - capturing diverse images

In Tunisia, India, and China, photography and videography carried out by researchers, sometimes together with professional photographers (Nipun Prabhakar in Gujarat) and with the youth from the community (Golok and Kokonor), allowed particular social events and moments to be documented – whether that was sheep-shearing in Tunisia, the pastoralist camp and grazing routines in Gujarat, or the yak festival in Amdo Tibet. Local people pointed towards particular customs and cultural events they wanted to do-

cument. The photographs and videos became useful later in the research documentation and sharing of findings, for example, through the newspapers and websites.



Gujarat. 'Jyaan maal ne maja aave tyaan amane maja aave' [Where the sheep are happy, we are happy], say Rabari pastoralists, who trace their mythical origins, their avatar, to shepherding. Dedicated to the welfare of their animals, the shepherds travel far and wide in search of the choicest fodder and emerging opportunities. Credit: Nipun Prabhakar



Tibet. A winning yak at the yak beauty contest in Golok, Amdo Tibet. In the words of the organiser: 'Pastoralists, especially young pastoralists, are abandoning yaks too. They sell their yak cheaply; some even give up on pastoralism and move to urban areas. There are so many uncertainties, especially with the decreased price of the caterpillar fungus these years. As pastoralists, life has to depend on animals – that is the essence of being a pastoralist – and that is why we need to re-establish the significance and the value of the yaks, and this is why we organise such a contest.' Credit: Palden Tsering

Photo elicitation

Photo elicitation is a method of interview in visual sociology that uses visual images to elicit comments. In PASTRES, the researchers captured context-embedded photos of what they thought was essential to visualise uncertainty during their long stints in the field sites. They showed these photos to the community to elicit responses. For example, in Kachchh, India, Borana, Ethiopia, and in Sardinia, Italy, the photos drew out reflections on different themes such as uncertain markets and pricing, perceptions of risks, and changing weather patterns, which highlighted tacit knowledge, emotional responses, and subconscious feelings around issues of uncertainty and how resources are changing.



A wealthy, old, male pastoralist took this photograph to show a new form of wealth accumulation, while a poor, young female saw poverty driving youth to be daily labourers. Credit: Malicha

For more detailed information on these methods, explored through cases from the sites, see Chapter 2: Decoding Uncertainty in Pastoral Contexts through Visual Methods by Shibaji Bose and Roopa Gogineni in the book *Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development*.

7. The Afterlives of Photovoice

A photovoice process continues after the field-level exchanges and workshops. Continued discussion and debate can emerge from the process. Within the PASTRES project, various forms of feedback and discussion using the photovoice material followed. This allowed the conversations initially generated in the six field sites to continue.

Returning to the community

Sharing the results of the photovoice work with the broader community provided an opportunity for both researchers and photovoice participants to generate a wider debate on the themes of responding to uncertainty in pastoral settings. For the researchers, such community feedback meetings were important occasions to discuss their more comprehensive research findings, with the photovoice experience opening up the conversation.



Researcher Tahira Shariff held a pop-up exhibition with stakeholders in Isiolo, Kenya. Credit: Ian Scoones



Researcher Palden Tsering exhibited photographs and narratives emerging from the photovoice workshops in Golok, Amdo Tibet. Credit: Palden Tsering



Field-level interactions with the newspaper

In each site, a ‘newspaper’, including photos from the photovoice work, and wider photographic documentation, was produced. You can download digital versions on the Seeing Pastoralism website (seeingpastoralism.org). Printed out in A3 format, they proved hugely popular as a route to discussing the research with pastoralists. They were also helpful in engaging local officials and policymakers.

Tibetan language newspapers were distributed at a Horse Festival in Kokonor, Amdo Tibet. Credit: Palden Tsering

Researcher Masresha Taye distributed Oromo language newspapers to participants in his field site in Southern Ethiopia. Credit: Masresha Taye

Pastoralists look through photo newspapers at the exhibition launch in Sardinia. Credit: Roopa Gogineni

The exhibitions: at the local level, the country level, and the global level
During the project, dozens of exhibitions were held in a variety of spaces, from the ONCA Gallery in Brighton to an agriturismo in Sardinia to the International Livestock Research Institute in Addis Ababa. Here, the photos produced during the research were shared with very different audiences. Some exhibitions were held within or near the field sites; others were in capital cities where policymakers and others were invited to view them. Still others were at the global level. Sometimes, only pictures from the locality were shared, but images from the different sites were displayed in other exhibitions. These provoked important conversations about how similar or different the contexts were and how uncertainties were faced.

Interacting through international fora

We held an exhibition in Glasgow around the international climate conference (COP26), focusing on how pastoralist perspectives offer insights into climate change policy. Those attending the conference from different parts of the world came to the exhibition, along with members of the general public.

The inaugural cross-country exhibition titled Seeing Pastoralism took place outside Alghero in Sardinia, Italy in September 2021. Newspapers and prints were hung on yarn spun from Sardinian wool in the gardens of an agriturismo hotel. Credit: Roopa Gogineni

Ethiopian Minister of Finance Ahmed Shide opened the Seeing Pastoralism exhibition in Addis Ababa at the ILRI campus (International Livestock Research Institute). Credit: Roopa Gogineni

Seeing Pastoralism exhibition at COP26 in Glasgow. Credit: Roopa Gogineni





The Seeing Pastoralism online exhibition, designed by Mariano Sanz.

Audience reactions and feedback from the websites

The Seeing Pastoralism website (seeingpastoralism.org) is where the outputs of the photovoice experiences are posted, along with photo documentation and other commentaries from each of the six PASTRES sites. The website has been a popular and accessible way to share results with a wider international audience.

'the PRACTICE
of MAKING
PHOTOS TALK..'