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The XXIV International Grassland Congress / XI International Rangeland Congress (Sustainable Use of Grassland and Rangeland Resources for Improved Livelihoods) takes place virtually from October 25 through October 29, 2021.

Proceedings edited by the National Organizing Committee of 2021 IGC/IRC Congress

Published by the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization

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Priority themes and issues for the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

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Key words: multi-sectoral; restoration; sustainability; mobility

Abstract

The objective of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralism (IYRP) is to increase world-wide awareness and recognition of the value and contributions of rangelands and pastoralists. The aim is to influence country policies, legislation, and programs; and to encourage development, research, extension and educational initiatives that will lead to sustainability of rangelands and pastoral/livestock systems. Although each country should decide on how they would celebrate the IYRP, the adoption of a global framework of 12 monthly themes will help to a) provide suggestions and ideas, b) highlight urgent and topical issues, and c) show how pastoralism and rangelands across the globe share similar issues and concerns. This paper proposes major themes, such as: including securing access to rangelands by pastoralists; services for pastoralists; climate change; biodiversity and ecosystems services; water use; sustainable consumptions of livestock products; indigenous knowledge and culture; women, youth and innovative technologies. These define the global priority issues in the social, economic, environmental, and governance nexus.

Introduction

A coordinated set of priority themes and issues for the IYRP would help achieve the best possible world-wide awareness and recognition of the value and contributions of rangelands and pastoralists to global society and ecosystems. Although each country should decide on how they would celebrate the IYRP, the global framework of 12 monthly themes should help to provide suggestions and ideas, and highlight urgent and topical issues. Across the world, rangelands and the pastoralists who use them are diverse in characteristics and dynamics, although the same thematic issues often resonate in different countries. Thus, one theme alone would be insufficient to capture the diversity and complexity of these systems. However, despite this great diversity, it is still possible to identify at least 12 themes (one for each month of the International Year) that are common to and have meaning for the majority of countries whether they are developing or developed.

Methods

A small working group was established in early 2017 by the International Support Group (ISG) of the IYRP and tasked to prioritize and select 12 monthly themes including relevant sub-themes. This group consisted of experts in various fields: rangelands and grasslands ecologists and production specialists; conservationists; social-ecologists; anthropologists; and an expert on the recently approved Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations. These experts also represented both developed and developing countries. The aim was to create a fully integrated and inter-disciplinary set of themes that would be relevant world-wide.

The working group relied on the guidance of the International Support Group, including its conceptualization for an IYRP ("[Open Flyer](#)") and the ISG terms of reference (all available on the [Rangelands Partnership website](#)). The working group adopted the basic definitions of the ISG, namely that "Rangelands" are those lands on which the indigenous vegetation is predominantly grasses, grass-like plants, forbs or shrubs that are grazed or have the potential to be grazed, and which are used as a natural ecosystem for raising grazing livestock and wildlife. Rangelands may include native grasslands, savannas, shrublands, deserts, steppes, pampa, llanos, cerrado, campos, veld, tundras, alpine communities and marshes (<http://globalrangelands.org>). "Pastoralists" are people who raise livestock or wild animals on rangelands, including ranchers, nomads and transhumant herders (IUCN/UNEP 2014 - http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wisp_green_economy_book.pdf). The IYRP will also celebrate other sustainable users of rangelands, such as hunters, gatherers, agropastoralists, fisherfolk, tourists, recreationists and conservationists.

Results

The working group developed the following principles and criteria to frame the selection process:

1. **Expand awareness on the diversity of rangelands and pastoralists:** Popular opinion varies between countries but in general, pastoralists are perceived as wandering nomads or cowboys living in drylands. The IYRP would celebrate a broad diversity of rangeland ecosystems and pastoral cultures.
2. **Highlight new insights:** Knowledge of rangelands and pastoralists has evolved over the last two decades. We now have a better understanding, among others, of the value of: livestock mobility for both production and conservation; the worth of indigenous and local knowledge systems; the benefits of organic nature-based livestock products; and the non-equilibrium (dynamic) character of rangelands.
3. **Issues of concern to pastoralists:** Many pastoralists in developing countries are struggling to benefit from equitable development. Many pastoralists in industrialized countries are concerned with the abandonment of small family operations, and the challenge of making organic farming profitable. They both share a concern for equitable and affordable access to adequate and sustainable land and services.
4. **Balanced coverage:** The 12 themes would be balanced between themes reflecting the four main sectors of sustainability: environmental, social, economic, and political issues.

The 12 themes were then arranged, as much as possible, so as to coincide with an already designated International Day as these are when nations typically raise awareness on various issues within their countries. Other major events were also considered, such as international conferences (e.g. the Conference of Parties of various environmental treaties and conventions including those on Climate Change, Desertification, and Biodiversity).

Figure 1 shows a summary graphic of the proposed themes for each month, based on the four principles described above. Table 1 elaborates the themes and sub-themes by month. The column “link to SDGs” reinforces the connection to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. In two cases no directly relevant International Day could be identified.

Conclusions/Implications

Each designated International Year typically focuses on a specific set of topics and themes that are then globally coordinated. The International Support Group of the IYRP has proposed a set of 12 monthly themes, many of which coincide with official International Days. The proposal has been translated into French, Spanish and Russian and has been distributed through various networks for consultation. A period of wide consultation among all stakeholders, and through the Regional IYRP Support Groups (established in Dec 2020) is expected so as to refine the list and to solicit “key messages” that are meaningful in each region and country of the world. The advice of communications experts will be sought in order to fine-tune the messaging for mass/social media.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all members of the International Support Group of the IYRP.

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Figure 1: Monthly themes for IYRP



Table 1 : Proposed monthly themes and sub-themes for IYRP

Month	Theme and Link to SDGs	Description of Sub-themes
January	Importance of rangelands, grasslands, pastoralists ----- SDG 15 SDG 1 SDG 2 SDG 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Diversity of rangeland and grassland landscapes, how they function, goods and services provided, and how we protect them ✓ Diversity of pastoralists, pastoral systems, and land use models - where do they live, what do they do and why; what animals and breeds do they herd ✓ Little known rangeland landscapes – Arctic, Mountains, Islands/coastal areas ✓ Benefits of livestock mobility for wildlife and ecosystems, food production, forage access, and livelihoods; how to reverse trends of declining mobility and degrading rangelands Challenges: degradation, abandonment, benign neglect, drought, loss of livelihoods ✓ Bright spots: examples of viable pastoral and rangeland systems
February 20 th Feb = World Day of Social Justice	Securing access to rangelands by pastoralists ----- SDG 1 SDG 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Challenges: privatization of commons, rule enforcement, conflicts between farmers, herders and town folks ✓ Legal protection of ownership of rangelands and access rights; good governance and stewardship of collective/public rangelands and private lands ✓ Equitable distribution of land and water resources ✓ Balanced development; balanced private and public rights; balanced benefits to both herders and farmers; common or collective lands in drylands help sustain livelihoods of many poor peoples ✓ Diversity of mobile pastoralism and transhumance; implications for land use and land tenure; transboundary transhumance (between nations, between regions or states, between counties) ✓ Bright spots: examples where rangeland tenure security has contributed to sustainability, co-management and good governance
March 8 th March = International Women's Day 20 th March = World Water Day	Services and resources for pastoralists ----- SDG 3 SDG 4 SDG 1 SDG 6 SDG 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Access to mobile schools, vocational training, distance learning ✓ Access to health clinics in remote areas, and for mobile populations ✓ Access to credit, insurance schemes for mobile peoples ✓ Access by pastoral women to services and resources ✓ Adequate and equitable political representation of pastoralists ✓ Access to potable clean water and sanitation ✓ Do's and don'ts of water development for livestock, including mobile ones ✓ Access to marketing infrastructure, decentralized slaughterhouses ✓ Access to appropriate communications and transport infrastructure ✓ Challenges: adopting suitable development policies, commercialization of rangeland and pastoralist products, livelihood diversification ✓ Bright spots: examples of viable and effective services for pastoralists
April 22 nd April = International Mother Earth Day	Rangelands, pastoralism climate change ----- SDG 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Impacts of climate change on rangelands and pastoralists ✓ Research on GHG emissions from livestock sector (extensive vs intensive systems) ✓ Adaptation measures, and ways to cope with extreme events ✓ Carbon sequestration from rangelands through restoration and rehabilitation ✓ Turn vulnerability into resilience ✓ Bright spots: mobility of livestock
May 10 th May = World Migratory Bird Day 22 nd May = International Day for Biological Diversity	Rangeland biodiversity, ecosystem services and pastoralism ----- SDG 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Biodiversity and ecosystem values; ecosystem fragmentation, landscape connectivity and transhumance and wildlife corridors ✓ Threatened biomes and species, including combating alien invasive species, overhunting, habitat loss, and protecting genetic resources of livestock, wildlife and rangeland plants ✓ Wild foods in rangelands for food security, better nutrition and sustainability ✓ Compatibility of livestock and wildlife, including examples of viable conservancies, game areas, and public, community and private conservation areas; benefit sharing schemes from conservation and National Parks ✓ Tourism and conservation in rangelands, tourism benefits to pastoralists ✓ Indigenous products and opportunities for commercialization while protecting indigenous intellectual property

June 5 th June = World Environment 17 th June = Combat Desertification	Rangelands, pastoralists, soils, water and land use ----- SDG 15	✓ Multiple uses of rangelands (wildlife, pastoralism, renewable energy, etc.) ✓ Solving land degradation, achieving land degradation neutrality ✓ Droughts are frequent in drylands, water solutions can become sustainable ✓ How/why pastoralism could be the best land use for rangelands ✓ Managing minerals, mining, carbon extraction ✓ Dumping wastes on rangelands because they are considered as “wastelands” ✓ Rapid pace of land use change, preventing land grabbing
July 11 th July = World Population Day	Sustainable consumption of livestock products ----- SDG 12	✓ Rising demand for meat due to population increase, rise of middle class ✓ Healthy and environmentally friendly consumption of meat and meat products ✓ Diversity of milk and meat products, examples of pastoral foods; rangeland foods and fibres; hides and skins and other livestock/wild animal products ✓ Rangeland products can contribute to nutrition, health and hygiene ✓ Specialty or novelty foods (e.g. camel’s milk and its role in helping diabetics) ✓ Livestock trade and markets, including the need to prevent illegal trade of donkeys, cattle rustling, and other illegal activities
August 9 th August = International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples	Pastoralist indigenous and local knowledge, culture, innovation ----- SDG 10 SDG 4	✓ Value of local knowledge and worldviews; cultural diversity and conservation of cultural heritage and ways of managing land; valuing knowledge held by elders, protection of languages, customs, spiritual traditions ✓ Indigenous peoples, First peoples, and their rights ✓ Pastoral art and music ✓ Challenges: negative impacts of some alternative technologies; reconciling extractivism with conservation and generation of local knowledge ✓ Bright spots: indigenous knowledge and innovation that is recognized and valued by decision makers; examples of traditional mobility solutions that work
September 27 th Sept = World Tourism Day	Sustainable livestock production ----- SDG 12	✓ Diversity of livestock breeds; livestock and herd management, tools and techniques (e.g. how to build a robust herd; mixing species, etc.) ✓ Sustainable livestock nutrition, health, hygiene, welfare ✓ Link between cities and pastoral areas; “greening” of feed ✓ Environmentally friendly animal products; chemical-free processing of milk and meat; sustainable fibre production ✓ Challenges: emerging diseases, disease control, policies promoting a transformation of polluting industrial livestock systems ✓ Bright spots: livestock/wildlife tourism that benefits pastoralists
October 15 th Oct = International Rural Women Day	Pastoralist women ----- SDG 5 SDG 8	✓ Gender equality; visions and needs for participation, empowerment ✓ Pastoral women’s contributions to economies, environment and culture ✓ Pastoral women and parliaments ✓ Challenges: adopting adaptive community-based land management including women
November 20 th Nov = Universal Children’s Day	Pastoralist youth ----- SDG 4 SDG 8	✓ Youth music, art and culture; vision, participation, empowerment ✓ Youth contribution to economies and environment ✓ Young herder’s associations and entrepreneurship ✓ Vocational training, specialized training for pastoral youth ✓ Challenges: inhibited and/or reverse migration; abandonment of rangelands; lack of opportunities for youth ✓ Bright spots: certification of herders, rodeos and other related festivals; pastoralist youth innovation
December 5 th Dec = World Soil Day	Sustainable technologies, innovations ----- SDG 9 SDG 7 SDG 17	✓ Rangeland and grassland restoration and improvement; soil improvement ✓ Renewable energy production; sustainable water solutions ✓ New technologies; capital costs and requirements; transformation ✓ Internet and communications; risk and insurance; mobile money ✓ Education and training that secure the future of pastoralism ✓ Governance arrangements; benefit sharing