

UN International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026

Key Messages

April 2026: Climate Change

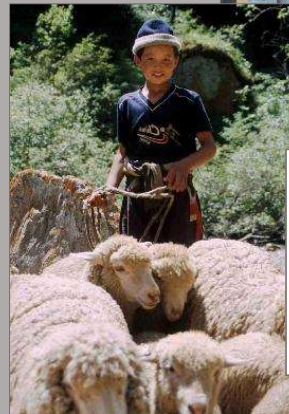


IYRP INTERNATIONAL
2026 YEAR OF
RANGELANDS AND
PASTORALISTS

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IYRP Climate Change Working Group

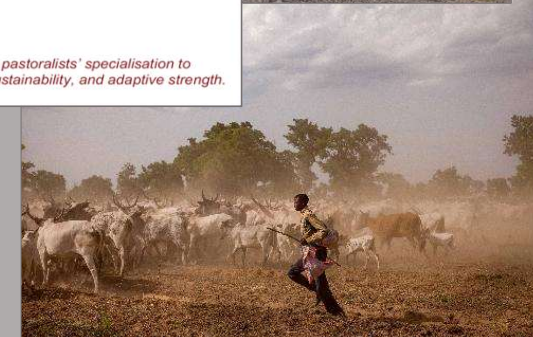
- The 75+ members of IYRP Climate Change Working Group reside across the globe. Members represent civil society pastoralist groups, governments, the international development and humanitarian community, academic and research institutions, conservation organizations, and/or are livestock producers and ranchers by profession.
- Working Group members collaborated to produce the Policy Brief: *Powered by Variability: Rethinking Climate Policy for Pastoralism* as well as the messages contained in this presentation.
- Working group members care passionately about pastoralism and the protection and wise use of rangelands. We believe that pastoralism is not a problem to be fixed, but an agroecological system specialised to climate variability while managing its risks. It is a system that must be acknowledged, rewarded, and governed wisely as a global infrastructure/asset in the face of climate change. Investing in rangeland-pastoralism systems is one of the most certain, fairest, and scalable paths to climate action.



Powered by Variability: Rethinking Climate Policy for Pastoralism

Policy brief prepared by the IYRP Working Group on Pastoralism & Climate Change
October 2025

This brief calls for climate policies and finance that recognise pastoralists' specialisation to manage climate risk as the foundation of their productivity, sustainability, and adaptive strength.



1. Pastoralism is a model of sustainable climate adaptation

- Pastoral systems are *powered by variability*, turning short-lived and unpredictable grazing opportunities into productivity through ecological integration.
- Rangelands are climate assets, not marginal lands. Investing in pastoralism unlocks adaptation, mitigation, biodiversity and livelihoods at scale.
- In arid and semi-arid lands, pastoralism is often the most productive and sustainable land use available.
- **Policy implications:** Climate policies must build on this adaptive intelligence, not suppress it.





2. Mobility is climate adaptation in action

- Resilience in mobile livestock systems lies in using and managing climate variability, not in eliminating it.
- Mobility aligns herds with shifting ecological opportunities, regenerates rangelands, and maintains biodiversity — all without fossil-fuel dependence.
- Mobility can dramatically reduce pastoralists' exposure to climate risk.
- **Policy implication:** Restricting mobility (through borders, fencing, or sedentarisation) increases pastoralists' exposure to climate risk.



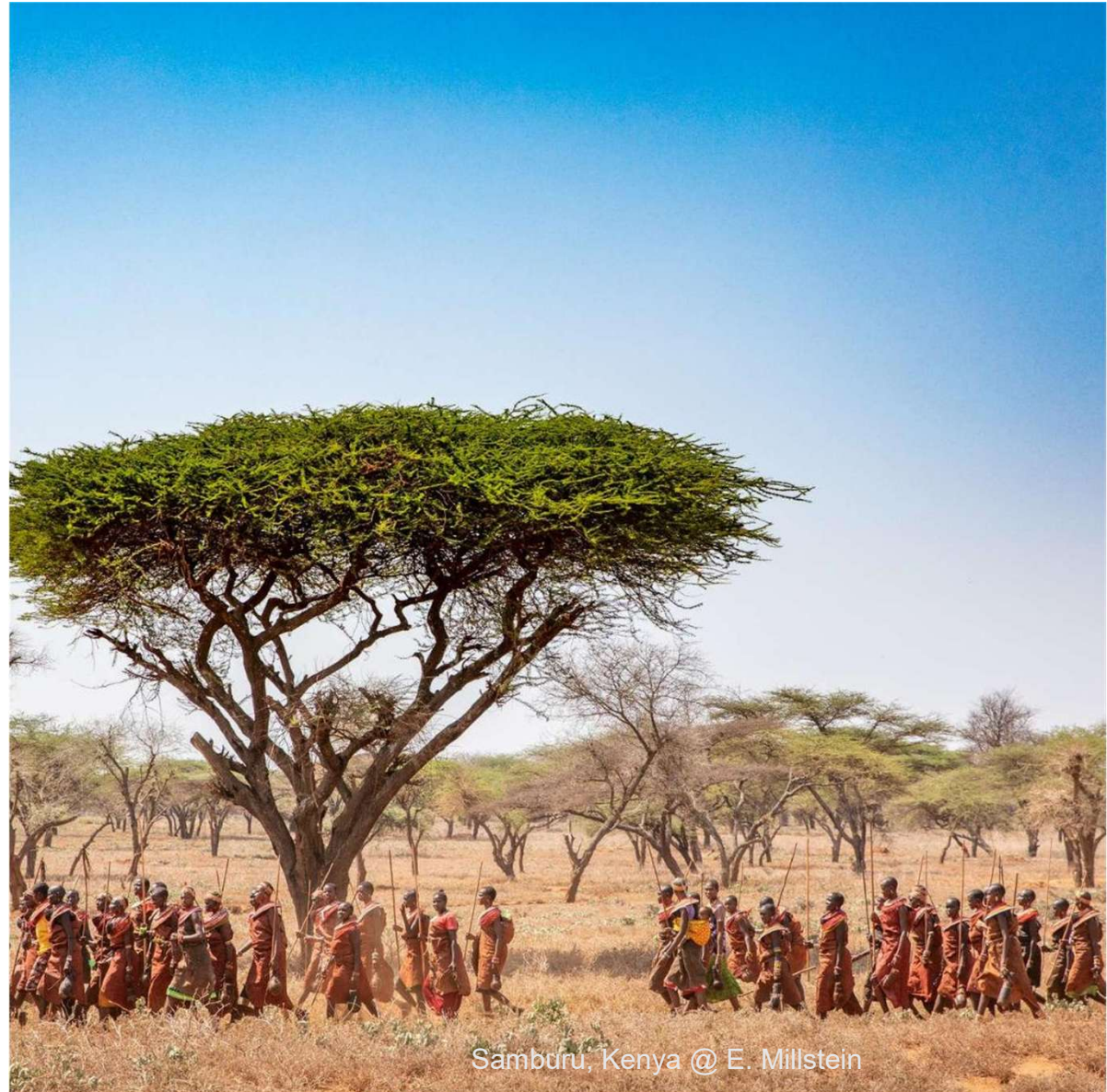
Mongolia @ M. Foggin

3. Climate change is a challenge—but pastoralists are failed by poor policy, not climate

- Climate change is reshaping rangeland variability, requiring pastoralists to adapt their specialisation accordingly.
- Pastoralists' climate adaptation is obstructed by policies that undermine flexibility.
- Restrictions on mobility, combined with land-use conversion and fragmentation, and exclusion from governance—all trigger exposure to climate risk.
- **Policy implication:** Address restrictions to mobility, and land-use constraints, as part of addressing climate risks.

4. Indigenous knowledge is a climate resource

- Pastoralist climate expertise is embedded in daily practices, herd composition and breeding systems, and the institutional infrastructure of mobility, including collective governance.
- This climate intelligence complements scientific forecasting and early-warning systems.
- **Policy implication:** Co-design climate services with pastoral communities.



Samburu, Kenya @ E. Millstein

5. Degradation is driven by exclusion, not use

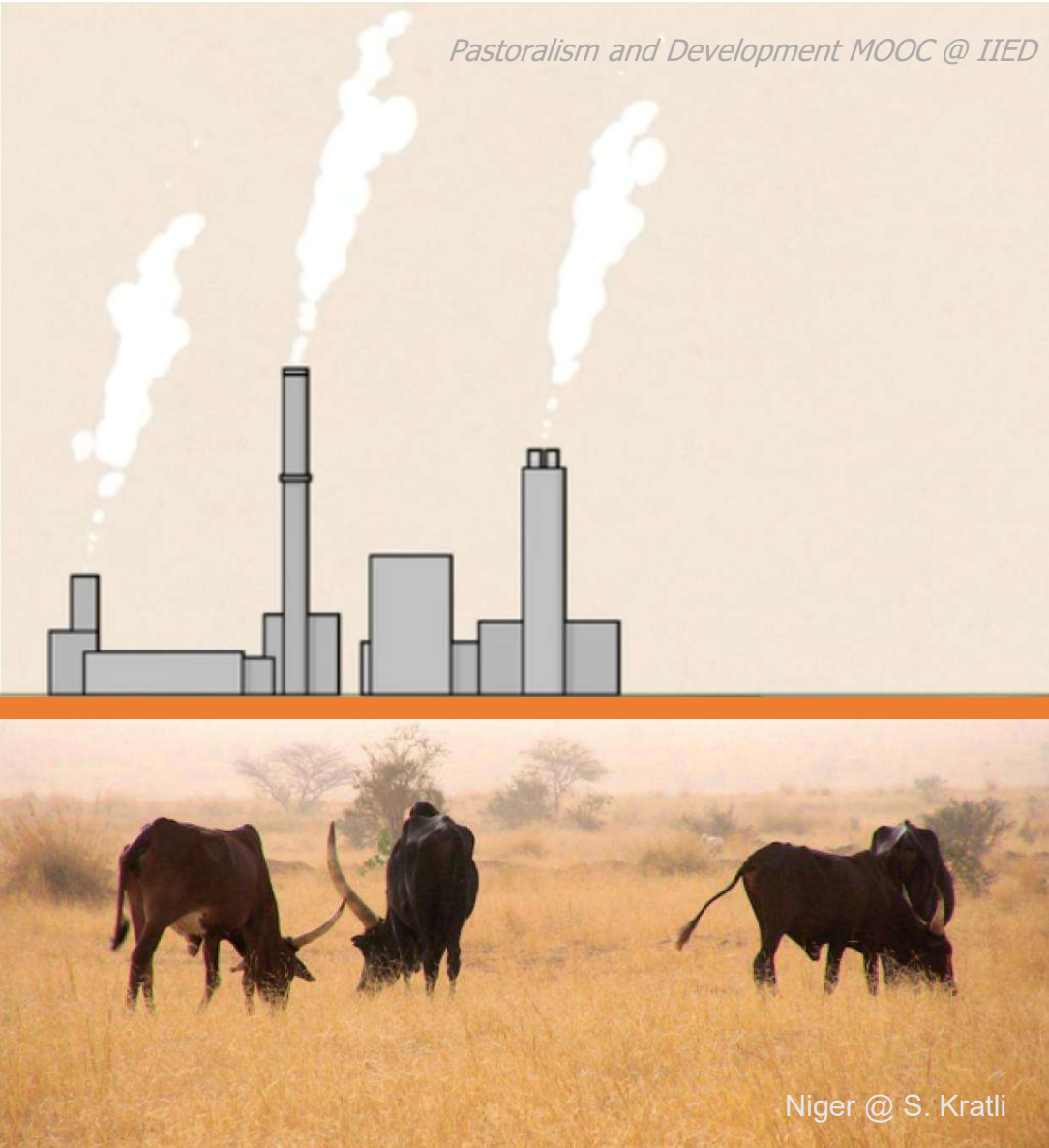
- Most rangeland degradation occurs after loss of access, fragmentation, and use.
- Most governance systems evolved to manage variability.
- **Policy implication:** Securing access for pastoralism restores stewardship and rangelands



A photograph of a herd of camels in Marsabit, Kenya. The camels are light brown and have blue eye-like markings painted on their backs. They are standing in a line, facing away from the camera. The background is a cloudy sky with a bright sun. The text '6. Conflict is often linked to stress and weak governance' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

6. Conflict is often linked to stress and weak governance

- Climate change, with only little room for adaptation, intensifies competition over water and pasture.
- Conflict is more likely where customary institutions are undermined and conflict-resolution mechanisms are weak.
- **Policy implication:** Invest in local governance, cross-border agreements, and peace-building as part of climate adaptation.



7. Not all carbon emissions are equal

- Carbon is life and carbon is climate change: whether or not carbon is a problem depends on its context—its relations to Earth's natural systems.
- Climate change is driven by fossil carbon, not by natural emissions from living systems like rangeland-pastoralism.
- Treating natural emission as equivalent to fossil-fuel emissions undermines both science and justice.
- **Policy Implication:** Climate action should target fossil carbon, not living systems. Living systems like rangeland-pastoralism should be protected and rewarded.

8. Gender and youth dimensions matter - Women and youth are key to rangeland resilience

- Women manage critical resources
- Youth sustain mobility and innovation.
- Exclusion weakens adaptive capacity.
- Climate impacts are not gender-neutral: women often face increased workloads and reduced access to resources.
- Youth exclusion from land and livestock systems increases migration and conflict risks.
- **Policy implication:** Inclusive tenure strengthens climate outcomes. Design and resource climate and livestock policies that explicitly include women and youth.



9. Investing early is cheaper than responding to crisis

- Proactive investments in rangeland-pastoralism systems cost far less than humanitarian aid, conflict response, or forced migration.
- Every dollar invested in rangeland resilience reduces future disaster spending.
- **Policy implications:** Proactive investments in rangelands and pastoralism are among the most cost-effective climate investments available.



10. Investment in pastoralism and rangelands are cost-effective climate action

- Early warning systems, basic services that work with mobility rather than against it, drought insurance that effectively helps recovering from losses, and functional access to grazing opportunities **cost less than emergency aid.**
- Supporting pastoralism—by strengthening mobility and flexibility—reduces humanitarian crises and displacement.
- **Policy implication:** Shift funding from reactive external aid to proactive support for pastoralist specialization and resilience.




Bolivia @ J. Dillan

Summarized Policy and Advocacy Messages

- **Fund mobility and pastoralist flexibility**
 - Invest in the core adaptive strategies — mobility, herd diversity, flexible tenure, and collective governance — instead of infrastructure that locks people in place.
- **Fund climate action not carbon accounting**
 - Redirected climate finance away from enabling fossil emissions and toward public investment that strengthens pastoralist livelihoods and institutions on their own terms.
- **Remove structural barriers**
 - Reform laws and finance mechanisms that restrict access to rangelands, criminalize mobility, or exclude pastoralists from decision-making.
- **Align climate and security agendas**
 - Mobility and trust-building are the foundation of both peace and resilience in pastoral regions.

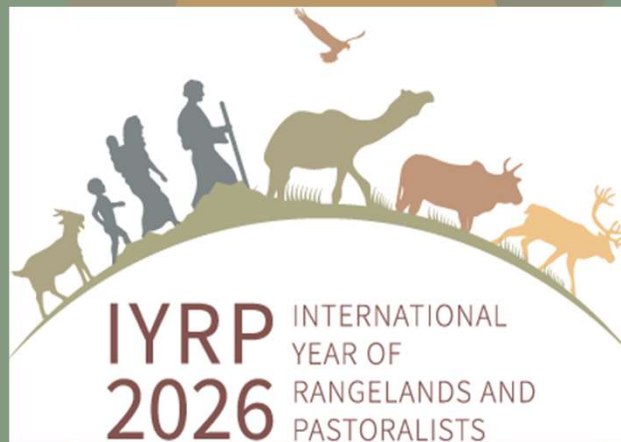




Pastoralism is not a problem to be fixed, but an agroecological system specialised to use climate variability while managing its risks — it must be acknowledged, rewarded, and governed wisely.

Investing in rangeland-pastoralism systems is one of the most certain, fairest, and scalable paths to adaptation.

Thank you



For nature, for climate, for society and for the future