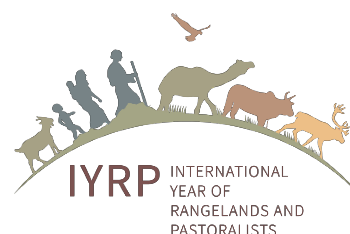


## IYRP WORKING GROUP ON RANGELANDS & BIODIVERSITY



### Introduction

On 15 March 2022, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP). The IYRP aims to create awareness on the valuable role that rangelands play in providing diverse and valuable ecosystem services, including food security to global citizens and carbon sequestration, among others. The IYRP will also highlight the crucial role that pastoralists<sup>1</sup> play in shaping and conserving rangelands, including their unique biodiversity and habitats.

The IYRP aspires to achieve these objectives through implementation of diverse activities with key stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels aimed at generating, collating, integrating and disseminating knowledge on the importance, opportunities and challenges of rangelands and pastoralists.

In the run-up to the IYRP, a number of Working Groups (WGs) are being constituted to spearhead research, analysis and advocacy on different issues important for reaching its objectives. The WGs are critical frameworks for mobilising, creating awareness and networking among key stakeholders to create the critical mass needed to inform policies and processes by 2026.

### A Working Group on Rangelands & Biodiversity

More than half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangeland. Rangelands comprise not only grasslands but also different landscapes and ecosystem types, such as savannahs, shrublands, wetlands, drylands, open forests, alpine habitats, etc. Rangelands have historically been grazed and browsed by native wildlife and that key ecological role in these landscapes has largely been transferred to domesticated livestock through pastoralist activity. Historically, the use of indigenous, traditional and local knowledge and practices such as livestock mobility had positive impacts on biodiversity<sup>2</sup>. However, growing pressures exerted on rangelands, spanning climate change and land-use and land-cover changes, affect not only the livelihoods of millions of pastoralists, but also the biodiversity contained in pastoral lands. Moreover, poor land-use management practices, removal of pastoralists from historic rangelands, inappropriate fire management, weak governance institutions and inappropriate policies often result in negative impacts for biodiversity and pastoralists alike.

Pastoralists are the custodians and often creators of rangeland biodiversity through the meticulous management of their animals and the lands they graze. This has resulted in rangelands being a major repository for the world's biodiversity because extensively managed rangelands are rich in native flora and fauna. Consequently, biodiversity conservation (incl. preventing habitat loss to arable lands and other intensive land uses) is among the greatest additional values that pastoralists and rangelands have for human society.

In order to protect these valuable natural and cultural resources, a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach is required, where knowledge on biodiversity in pastoral lands and access to

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<sup>1</sup>Pastoralists are people who – as their primary source of living – raise domesticated or semi-domesticated animals that graze predominantly on natural vegetation on rangelands. Livestock mobility is a key strategy to manage pastoral livestock, but the pastoralists may be sedentary, e.g. ranchers. Pastoralists identify themselves with a myriad of names (IYRP Newsletter, May 2023: downloaded at: <https://iyrp.info/iyrp-newsletter-may-2023#what>).

<sup>2</sup>Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth; it includes all organisms, species, and populations; their genetic variation and complex assemblages of communities and ecosystems (Maclaurin J & Sterelny K. 2008. What is biodiversity? Univ. Chicago Press).

information and the best available empirical and scientific evidence are key to the development of appropriate policies.

A WG on Rangelands & Biodiversity has been formed to help the IYRP achieve its objectives with specific regard to biodiversity conservation and enhancement and to elevate the recognition of pastoralists as managers and stewards of the rich biodiversity of rangelands. The WG will identify the appropriate avenues and important fora for disseminating its tailored messages in the years leading up to and during the IYRP in 2026.

### **Possible objectives to consider and prioritize**

- To review, quantify and reach consensus on the value of biodiversity in global rangelands (and in other contexts) including the perspectives of pastoralists and global actors
- To prepare concise papers on biodiversity in rangelands building on best available evidence from science and indigenous, traditional and local knowledge
- To establish a global network with the participation of pastoralists for producing and sharing information on rangeland biodiversity, educating citizens and empowering local communities
- To elevate the profile of pastoralists as managers, stewards and creators of biodiversity
- To increase understanding among policymakers regarding the interconnections between biodiversity, pastoralist-centred governance, landscape restoration, carbon sequestration, protected and conserved areas (including other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)) and pastoral management systems in rangelands
- To determine future strategies, tools and pathways to encourage change on the ground in favour of healthy rangelands and sustainable pastoralism
- To investigate the applicability and develop a common conceptual framework for governing global rangelands, which should be a key focal point for the IYRP report by FAO in 2027
- Review initiatives (incl. different conservation models and pastoral governance systems) that support biodiversity conservation in rangelands with a view to their feasibility in pastoral settings, e.g. payment for environmental services (PES), and propose improvements to benefit pastoralist livelihoods and biodiversity management

### **The approach**

Scientists' and conservationists' understanding of biodiversity and conservation often differs from the understanding of various pastoralist groups. A better understanding of each others' goals, interests, knowledge, practices and values can help find better solutions, for both biodiversity and pastoral livelihoods. Collaboration, inclusive decision-making and knowledge co-production are key for the future of rangelands and their biodiversity. Thus, this WG will:

- Strive for diverse membership, especially the inclusion of pastoralists (male and female), to develop key tailored messages and recommendations for pastoralists in different settings using different online tools, videos, photo books, translations, peer learning, etc.
- Engage with intergovernmental organisations (e.g., UNCBD, IPBES) and conservation agencies on the ground to enhance their view and approach toward pastoralism and biodiversity conservation
- Translate existing knowledge on rangeland biodiversity and make it accessible and useful for policymakers and the public
- Identify upcoming impactful rangeland- and biodiversity-oriented events leading to 2026 to convey key messages
- Undertake action research, generating evidence based on pastoralists' practical experience and perspectives

## Key themes for consideration

- The role of pastoral mobility on rangeland functionality, biodiversity and ecosystem services
- The role of different pastoral governance models for rangeland biodiversity and ecosystem services
- The positive and negative impacts of legislation, policies and regulations on rangeland biodiversity and pastoral livelihoods
- The economic contribution of pastoralism and rangeland biodiversity (in collaboration with the Pastoralist Economy WG)
- The impacts of invasive non-native species on rangeland biodiversity and pastoral livelihoods
- Exploring how inappropriate rangeland policies are influencing human–wildlife conflict
- Conservation and protected area management compatible and synergistic with pastoral land use and livelihoods, and pastoral territories as other conservation measures, also considering the IUCN Greenlist of governance indicators
- Pastoralists' knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem processes
- Deploy rangeland monitoring initiatives scalable from local to global levels, encouraging the participation of local and regional players
- Fire management on rangelands

## Short-term outputs

- A short narrative paper ( $\pm 3000$  words) on the current status of global rangeland biodiversity
- A short communication on the impact of a lack of a coherent policy on rangelands and pastoralists
- Prepare an overview of successful monitoring initiatives designed to assess the status and trends of rangelands, to derive essential elements as common denominators potentially applicable at larger /global scales.
- Prepare a Special Issue on Plant Diversity in Pastoral Landscapes (including pastoralists' understanding of biodiversity) in a scientific journal to build a knowledge base on the topic

## Indicators of success

- Number of local, national, regional or global policies that are revised in recognition of the value of biodiversity in rangelands and of the contribution of pastoralists in maintaining and enhancing this biodiversity
- Number of intergovernmental agencies engaged in support of rangeland biodiversity and inclusive with pastoralists
- Rangeland connectivity/intactness maintained or increased, biodiversity increased or maintained and pastoralist livelihoods and risk management enhanced
- Number of new rangeland-related monitoring initiatives underway
- Increased recognition of pastoralism from local to global level
- Increasing number of pastoralists involved in and benefitting from rangeland monitoring initiatives

## Membership of the WG

Membership of the WG is open to any member of the IYRP International Support Group (ISG) interested in biodiversity in rangelands and its nexus with pastoralism. Members of the WG shall actively engage with fora and events that offer opportunities for reflection on the theme. Communication within the WG will be mainly through email and video-conferencing.

All ISG members who are interested in joining this WG are invited to contact Igshaan Samuels, IYRP International Support Group co-chair ([isamuels@uwc.ac.za](mailto:isamuels@uwc.ac.za)).