



Calling for Your Support to designate an International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists

*The condition and productivity of the world's rangelands are critical to our sustainable future – not only for people directly depending on these lands for their livelihoods but also for the billions more benefiting from them for tourism, wildlife and biodiversity, meat and milk and other agricultural products, mining, renewable energy and other uses. To increase knowledge and understanding about these unique ecosystems and the people who rely on them, please join the effort to gain a United Nations resolution designating an **International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists (IYRP)**.*

Justification

Over half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangeland¹, and its health and productivity is directly critical to the livelihoods and cultures of more than 500 million people around the world, many of whom are indigenous peoples. Included are also people who raise animals on pasturelands/grasslands². Pastoralists³ and other people who derive their livelihoods from rangeland⁴ are both users and environmental stewards of the land⁵. Typically, pastoral systems are low-input and more environmentally friendly than many intensive/confined agricultural systems. Many examples of sustainable pastoralist practices exist⁶. Such systems are critical for achieving food and water security as well as resilient local and national economies, and for improving environmental conditions such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity and protection of land and ecosystems.

Conversion of native rangelands to produce soybean, other crops and feed for livestock is among the greatest threats to these ecosystems. Unhealthy and unproductive rangelands, native grasslands and pasturelands destabilize countries, endanger national security, compromise economic productivity and rob our youngest generation of opportunities for a prosperous future.

Many forces threaten the productivity and ecological integrity of these lands and their caretakers. Common threats in both developed and developing countries include: restrictions on moving animals, programs to settle pastoralists, unsustainable grazing practices, expansion of arable farming into areas best suited for grazing, breakdown of common property systems, land fragmentation, urbanization, generational succession and rural exodus⁷, damaging fire, invasive plants, and harmful subsidies and

¹ Rangelands are those areas on which the indigenous vegetation comprises predominantly grasses, grass-like plants, forbs or shrubs that are or can be grazed, and which are used as a natural ecosystem to raise grazing livestock and wildlife. Rangelands may include native grasslands, savannas, shrublands, deserts, steppes, pampa, llanos, cerrado, campos, veld, tundra, alpine vegetation and marshes. Adapted from: *The International Terminology for Grazing Lands and Grazing Animals*, 2011 (<http://globalrangelands.org>). The Rangeland Atlas provides the most recent evidence of the extent of these systems (<https://www.rangelandsdata.org/atlas>).

² Pasturelands/grasslands are synonymous when referring to modified/improved ecosystems that are managed for grazing. They can include meadows managed for hay and silage, cultivated and permanent pasturelands, and naturalized and semi-natural grasslands. Adapted from: *The International Terminology for Grazing Lands and Grazing Animals*, 2011.

³ Pastoralists are people who – as their primary source of livelihood – raise livestock, wild or semi-domesticated animals wholly or partly on rangelands in production systems that are extensive in terms of land use and usually involve some degree of animal mobility. Adapted from: *Pastoralism and the Green Economy*, 2014 (http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wisp_green_economy_book.pdf).

⁴ Other users of natural resources on rangelands include hunters, gatherers, fishers and agropastoralists.

⁵ Background statement for side event on "Transformations toward sustainable pastoralism in drylands" at UNEA-2 in May 2016.

⁶ See for example: <http://globalrangelands.org>

⁷ In many developed countries, but also increasingly in developing countries, the younger generation is unable or unwilling to take over their family operations.

policies. Having been impacted by “benign neglect”⁸ in many developing countries for generations, pastoralists are among the most marginalized groups in these countries. Basic services barely reach them. Mobile pastoralists such as nomads and transhumant herders face discrimination and conflict. Products derived from rangelands such as meat and milk face intense competition from products from unsustainable confined livestock systems. Unregulated use of animal growth hormones and pesticides, and unbalanced subsidies, can lead to unfair competition for pastoralists.

Rangelands face increasingly dry and erratic climatic conditions, rapidly increasing human populations, fast pace of unsustainable land-use changes and other threats. The growing environmental and public health concerns about over-consumption of animal-source foods by some segments of the world’s population is unfairly impacting nature-based production, leading to growing economic inequalities. Conflicts associated with drought and access to diminishing natural resources are increasing. These landscapes and livelihoods need urgent attention from many sectors (e.g. agriculture, environment, health, education, trade) and many stakeholders (e.g. herders, land managers, environmentalists, legislators, business people, scientists, civil society, youth, women and policymakers).

An International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) could provide the impetus and momentum necessary for realizing this ambitious change agenda. It would increase a worldwide understanding of the importance of rangelands for global food security, nature conservation and environmental services, and call attention to the need for sustainable management and enlightened policies in both developed and developing countries. It would enhance the perceived natural and cultural values of rangelands and pastoral livelihood systems, strengthen pastoralists’ rights and pride in their own cultural systems and traditions (especially among youth) and foster innovation toward sustainability and overcoming poverty. It would show-case the many successful practices already in place, including community-based conservation, mobile social and financial services, decentralized energy and telecom access, and more. It would boost efforts for investment in restoring and rehabilitating degraded rangelands, native grasslands and pasturelands. It would increase capacities of local and national scientists and researchers to monitor and predict future trends in rangeland areas and to provide high-quality information to the people living in and managing the rangelands. It would encourage those countries with a large area under rangelands/ grasslands to exchange experiences, share best practices, and perhaps form a network or caucus to continue to enhance awareness on rangelands and pastoralists well beyond the IYRP.

Relevance to United Nations (UN) goals

Healthy and productive rangelands throughout the world are needed to realize the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and its targets, the Sustainable Development goals – specifically for sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), poverty alleviation (SDG 1), pastoralist access to basic services and justice (SDGs 3, 4 and 16), water management (SDG 6), sustainable energy (SDG 7), economic growth (SDGs 5, 8, 9 and 10), sustainable consumption and production of livestock products (SDG 12), combating and adapting to climate change (SDG 13), and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15). The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes pastoralists as a group of people who should benefit from the achievement of the SDGs. Over 75 countries have pastoralists and rangelands – we cannot afford to continue to neglect them or to assume they will be replaced by confined livestock production. The IYRP campaign has already begun to build a powerful global partnership

⁸ Johnsen KI, Niamir-Fuller M, Bensada A & Waters-Bayer A. 2019. A case of benign neglect: knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands. UNEP and GRID-Arendal, Nairobi and Arendal. <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/case-benign-neglect-knowledge-gaps-about-sustainability-pastoralism-and-rangelands>

(SDG 17). An IYRP would offer an important opportunity to assess progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda targets and to adapt the trajectory as needed.

An IYRP would allow low-forest-cover countries to demonstrate their commitments to the UN climate change agreements and to more accurately quantify their nationally determined contributions. In December 2016 during a side event at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of Parties 13 in Cancun, 28 governmental and 48 civil society organizations signed a statement that recognizes the value of rangelands, grasslands and pastoralism for biodiversity.⁹ The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has recognized sustainable pastoralism as one solution for achieving land degradation neutrality. A better understanding of the benefits of sustainable pastoralism for achieving global environmental goals can enhance countries' ability to access multilateral funding such as through the Global Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development, etc.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recently released a Technical Guide on "Improving governance of pastoral lands".¹⁰ Its Pastoralist Knowledge Hub advocates for sustainable pastoralism, pastoralist-friendly policies and a strong pastoralist civil society. In 2020–21, the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG), Council and Conference resolved to support the IYRP.¹¹ Improved rangelands and pastoral systems are a critical step toward food security, not only for pastoralists but also to meet the growing world demand for healthy livestock products.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) urges development and implementation of national and regional policies, programmes and measures to prevent, control and reverse land degradation and mitigate the effects of drought through scientific and technological excellence, raising public awareness, thereby contributing to poverty reduction.¹² Improved pastoral systems can reverse the destructive effects of drought, achieve land degradation neutrality and create economic opportunities for rural populations.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recognized the importance of sustainable pastoralism and responsible consumption of livestock during its second meeting in May 2016 (UNEA-2), when 158 countries passed Resolution UNEA L.24 on "Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands". This called for raising global awareness and conducting scientific research, starting with a gap analysis of existing data on rangelands and pastoralism.¹³ In March 2019, UNEA-4 requested UNEP to, among other things, support countries to undertake regional assessments to fill these knowledge gaps, and "to promote innovative solutions to sustainably manage rangelands and, where appropriate to promote sensitive development interventions specific to resolving disputes and supporting traditional governance with particular attention to recognizing the role of traditional institutions and community participation".

IFAD supports governments, pastoralists and crop farmers in negotiating and strengthening local solutions for rangeland governance including agreements securing pastoralists' migratory routes, improving access to and management of water points, animal health services, and creating additional income opportunities, in particular for women, through new pastoralist products and markets. IFAD

⁹ <http://vsf-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-Cancun-Statement-Endorsed-22Dec2016.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5771e.pdf>

¹¹ <https://globalrangelands.org/sites/globalrangelands.org/files/FAO%20COAG%20Document%20IYRP%20proposal%20Aug%202020.pdf>

¹² https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2018-08/cop21add1_SF_EN.pdf

¹³ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27530/GAP_Summary_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

hosts the biennial Indigenous Peoples Forum, which provides a platform for exchange and informs IFAD's support globally and locally for pastoralists and other indigenous communities.

Growing recognition

The IYRP initiative builds on recognition that development actions in rangelands need to be sustainable and to benefit pastoralists equitably. A growing global pastoralist movement has emerged over the past decade and has frequently called for increased international recognition of their culture and land-use systems. Since 2010, at least 10 such declarations and statements have emanated from gatherings of pastoralists around the world. The heightened profile resulting from an IYRP will help pastoralist associations and networks to have a more visible profile and platform to press for their rights to development, exchange good practices and solutions, and revive/reinforce cultural traditions and diversity. They will take center stage in activities to mark the IYRP.

Since 2008, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recognized 45 instances of Intangible Cultural Heritage involving pastoralists, such as Transhumance in the Mediterranean and the Alps and the *Gada* System of the Oromo in Ethiopia.

Starting in 2016, an [International Support Group \(ISG\) for an IYRP](#) has engaged with interested parties around the world. It has coordinated numerous meetings and events, and has worked with members of the initiative to gain the support of their respective governments for the IYRP. In October 2018, the Government of Mongolia – supported by the Government of Ethiopia – proposed an IYRP to the FAO. In June 2021, the FAO Conference endorsed the IYRP proposal, and recognized the strength of support from governments (at least 60 countries have sent letters or spoke in support) and non-governmental partners (294 organizations and institutions worldwide; see <https://www.iyrp.info>). A draft Global Action Plan has been prepared on the basis of their commitments.

Some examples of outreach actions for an IYRP

- Coordinated global, regional and national campaigns to raise awareness on 12 themes, one for each month of the year (see those developed by the ISG)
- National-level events, including showcasing successful sustainable pastoral systems, awards and prizes, technology fairs, video documentaries, a World Herder Day, educational material, etc.
- Scientific congresses, such as the Joint International Grassland and International Rangeland Congress in Kenya in 2021 and the International Rangeland Congress in Australia in 2025, to consider the state of the art in science and knowledge on rangelands and pastoralists
- Launching actions aimed at implementing the recommendations of the UNEP gap analysis/global assessment on rangelands and pastoralists
- Social media campaign and video productions to raise awareness of producers, consumers and policymakers worldwide
- Pastoralist gatherings to share local knowledge and strategize practical solutions
- Special focus on pastoralists and rangelands during global conferences such as Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), CBD, UNCCD and High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, bringing together environmental, social and economic aspects in an integrated vision.