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**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme
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Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/15 on
innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism**

Report of the Executive Director

Introduction

1. In its resolution 4/15 on innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP to support, upon request, countries undertaking regional assessments of the status of, and conditions and trends in, rangeland, pastoral land and pastoralism, taking into account the information and knowledge gathered through the gap analysis undertaken by UNEP and the work carried out by other United Nations organizations and relevant stakeholders. It also requested the Executive Director to support Member States in their quest to promote innovative solutions for the sustainable management of 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. It encouraged the Executive Director to continue to explore collaborative financing efforts to promote sustainable rangelands and pastoralism. Finally, it requested the Executive Director to report to the Environment Assembly at its fifth session on progress in the implementation of resolution 4/15 and of resolution 2/24, on combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands.

2. The present report provides an update on progress in the implementation of resolutions 4/15 and 2/24. UNEP is addressing the requests in those resolutions mainly through collaboration with national and international institutions, the organization of side events at high-level events, and the initiation of new projects on sustainable land management, which contribute to achieving the expected accomplishments of the Environmental Ecosystems Management subprogrammes in the UNEP programmes of work for 2016–2017 and 2018–2021.

* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

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I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 4/15

3. A global gap analysis report on sustainable rangelands and pastoralism requested by the Environment Assembly in its resolution 2/24 has been developed, printed and translated into the six United Nations languages. The report, entitled “A case of benign neglect: Knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands”, was launched during the fourth session of the Environment Assembly. One of the key findings of the analysis was that variation in definitions and a lack of disaggregation of data have led to significant gaps in knowledge of conditions and trends in pastoralism and rangelands. Thus, despite existing for millenniums, pastoralist societies are poorly understood, and little is known about the interlinkages between their practices and the rangelands on which they depend. As a consequence, pastoralism and rangelands tend to be under-recognized and undervalued.¹
4. No countries have yet undertaken a regional assessment as follow-up of the gap analysis recommendations or requested UNEP support for such an assessment.
5. In a technical discussion held during a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Pastoralist Knowledge Hub workshop on the implementation of resolution 4/15, it was agreed that a regional assessment of sustainable rangelands and pastoralism would be conducted, with a focus on Africa. The workshop was attended by more than 30 participants from FAO, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the International Land Coalition (ILC), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), the Central Asia Rangelands Initiative/Central Asia Pastoral Alliance, the World Resource Institute and the Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism.
6. During the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, a ministerial breakfast meeting was organized to support a proposal by Mongolia to institute an international year of rangelands and pastoralism.² The proposal was presented to and approved by the FAO Committee on Agriculture and will be submitted to the FAO Council at its 165th session, in December 2020, for adoption by the FAO Conference at its forty-second session, in June 2021. It is then expected to be forwarded to the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 2021.
7. A memorandum of understanding between UNEP and ILRI has been developed with the goal of deepening the collaboration between the two partners. The main objective of the memorandum of understanding is to identify areas of collaboration, such as sustainable rangelands and pastoralism, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystems Restoration (2021–2030) and recovery efforts necessitated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, taking into account the One Health approach.
8. UNEP is also working with ILRI on the establishment of a global data system on changes in rangeland land and resource use, including conversion and restoration. Given the significant data gaps that exist at the global, national and local levels regarding rangelands and the linkages between them, the aim is to mobilize big data to contribute to a global rangeland restoration initiative that would also be relevant for the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
9. On 20 and 21 November 2019, the partners in the global component of the Rangelands Initiative, including UNEP, met to discuss the recent achievements of the global component and to start developing a three-year strategy for the period 2020–2022. In addition to UNEP, the partners attending included the FAO Pastoralist Knowledge Hub, ILRI, IUCN, the World Resources Institute, CIRAD, the Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism and the Central Asia Rangelands Initiative/Central Asia Pastoral Alliance. A UNEP representative gave a presentation on resolution 4/15, and a discussion took place on how to move forward jointly with its implementation. An open plenary discussion then followed on the challenges and future direction of the Rangelands Initiative and the value of its global component.
10. In September 2019, UNEP, as a Rangelands Initiative partner, hosted a session on drylands and rangelands at the Global Landscapes Forum, organized as a starting point for planning the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The aim of the session was to highlight the contribution of rangelands and pastoralism to the global restoration agenda and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 15. Participants took a tour to three parts of the world – Latin America, Central Asia and Africa – to hear the stories of pastoralists and others, including the challenges faced and the innovations being developed to overcome them and harness the productivities of drylands and

¹ <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/case-benign-neglect-knowledge-gaps-about-sustainability-pastoralism-and-rangelands>.

² <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/newsroom/case-international-year-rangelands-and-pastoralists/>.

rangelands/pastoralism for local and national economies, food production and biodiversity conservation. The session included a discussion on mainstreaming rangelands and pastoralism into the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

11. UNEP is working with GRID-Arendal and its partners on the preparation of the International Grassland and International Rangeland Congress, to be held in Kenya in 2021.

II. Resources for implementation and resource mobilization

12. Resources supporting the implementation of resolution 2/24 have included an agreement with GRID-Arendal to carry out a global gap assessment. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency allocated \$70,000 to this activity, which seeks to address the request, in paragraph 9 of resolution 2/24, “to explore whether there are gaps in the current provision of technical support and environmental and socioeconomic assessments of grasslands, rangelands, soil erosion, land degradation, land tenure security and water security in drylands, including the ongoing assessments of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, in order to better understand the implications for sustainable livelihoods, while taking into consideration local and indigenous knowledge and technologies”, as called for in the resolution.

13. No resources have yet been identified for the implementation of resolution 4/15 in terms of supporting countries in undertaking regional assessments of the status of, and conditions and trends with regard to, rangeland, pastoral land and pastoralism.

III. Lessons learned

14. Rangelands and pastoralism are firmly placed on the global agenda and called to contribute to the global restoration agenda. Resolutions 2/24 and 4/15 have contributed to an increase in awareness of and advocacy for sustainable pastoralism and rangelands, which resulted in the approval of a proposal to designate 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

15. A significant challenge is the immense variation in the definition of pastoralists and rangelands across the regions and languages of the world. For example, the estimated number of pastoralists ranges from 22 million to half a billion, and estimates of land area covered by rangelands vary from 18 per cent to 80 per cent of the world’s land surface.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

16. The Environment Assembly may wish to encourage Member States and stakeholders to increase their engagement and support, including financial resources, to raise awareness and promote innovation solutions for sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralism, including traditional knowledge.

17. The Assembly may also wish to encourage Member States to strengthen global efforts to conserve rangelands and use them sustainably, in particular in the context of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

18. Finally, the Assembly may wish to encourage Member States to develop national plans to combat sand and dust storms and to collaborate at the regional and subregional levels on collective action to combat cross-border transport of sand and dust.