



Advancing Rangeland Ecology and Pasture Management in Africa

Grassland Society of Southern Africa

58th Annual Congress

Omaramba Resort & Conference Centre, Rustenburg, South Africa

24 – 28 July 2023



Report on IYRP participation in 58th Annual Congress of Grassland Society of Southern Africa (GSSA)

Dr Igshaan Samuels, co-chair of the IYRP, was invited by the Grassland Society of Southern Africa (GSSA) to deliver a keynote address entitled ***“International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists – insights into this unprecedented journey”*** at the GSSA’s annual congress held on 24–26 July 2023 in Rustenburg, South Africa. The conference included both an in-person and a virtual audience of rangeland scientists, government officials, policy developers, the private sector and the media.

The reference to ‘unprecedented’ in the title of the presentation was sparked by a comment made during an IYRP event that emphasised the magnitude of the work that has already been done by the coalition well in advance in preparation for 2026.

The keynote presentation outlined the timeline of the processes and how the International Year was proclaimed. Currently, 103 governments and 339 pastoralist and supporting organisations have pledged support for the IYRP. Delegates were made aware of the ILRI-led Rangeland Atlas and the global pastoralist map led by Dr Paul Mundy and the League of Pastoral Peoples. Dr Samuels highlighted the challenges faced in rangelands and by pastoralists all over the world.

The presentation further reiterated the significance of the IYRP and particularly for those in Africa who continually bear the brunt of pressures from other land uses and land users as well as from climate change and various social issues. In South Africa, where rangelands cover about 75% of the country, a concerted effort will now be made to develop evidence-based policy that would support the objectives of the IYRP through advocating for healthy rangelands and sustainable, resilient pastoralist livelihoods. Currently, four policies in South Africa are under revision or in development that have direct bearing on rangelands, including two rangeland-specific policies.

Another important outcome from the discussions at the conference was the commissioning of a special issue on rangelands and conservation by Prof. Urs Kreuter for the *African Journal of Range and Forage Sciences*, as there was great interest in the topic and an urgent need was expressed to find common ground that would not compromise the rangeland health and pastoralist livelihoods.

Further outcomes were that the GSSA community is now well informed about the IYRP, its processes and the importance for them to contribute towards the IYRP goals. As such, a process has commenced to develop a national action plan for rangelands in South Africa.

We hope that regular updates on the IYRP could be made on other national and regional platforms by IYRP members involved in the Regional IYRP Support Groups (RISGs), the thematic working groups or the global team to ensure that people stay informed and contribute to the process.