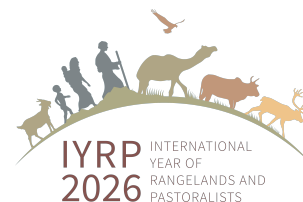


# IYRP WORKING GROUP ON PASTORALISTS & WATER

## CONCEPT NOTE



### Introduction

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) will be observed in 2026 to increase worldwide understanding of the importance of rangelands and pastoralists for global food security and environmental services, and to direct attention to the relevance of their improved management for better development outcomes. These objectives will be reached through diverse activities by and with key stakeholders at local, regional and global levels aimed at generating, collating and disseminating knowledge, as well as engaging in dialogue with others on the importance, opportunities and challenges of rangelands and pastoralists with regard to sustainable development.

In the run-up to the IYRP, several Working Groups (WGs) are being constituted to spearhead research, analysis, knowledge exchange and advocacy on different issues important to reaching its objectives. The WGs are critical platforms for mobilising, creating awareness and networking among key stakeholders both within and beyond the rangelands. These include rangeland communities, governments, researchers, civil society, the private sector, funding bodies and UN agencies. The WGs are expected to influence programmes, processes and policies, as well as support cross-sectoral engagement to ensure success of the IYRP. Activities of the WGs and their outputs will feed into the 12 monthly themes that actors shall engage with during the IYRP.

### The case for a WG on Pastoralists and Water

Water is essential to life and livelihoods in the rangelands. Its availability depends on the management and health of rangelands. Rangeland health is affected by the amount of water available in the soils as well as open water and access to groundwater sources. Both *blue* water in rivers, lakes, aquifers and reservoirs and *green* water<sup>1</sup> in soils influences the lives of livestock keepers and their livestock, the grazing patterns and the continued use of rangeland resources (Gomes 2006, Opiyo et al 2011). Rangeland health, water availability and pastoral land rights are closely linked. For example, control of water points determines the tenure, use and management of other rangeland resources in the surroundings.



For these reasons, *'Soils, water and land use'* was identified as one of the 12 themes for the IYRP. During June 2026, efforts will be made to: i) increase awareness of lessons learnt in rangeland health, water governance and water resource development in the world's rangelands; and ii) promote good practices to ensure improved rangeland and livelihood outcomes for pastoralists and other people living in the rangelands. Strategies developed under this theme will integrate environmental, social, economic, technical and political dimensions of soils, water and land use.

A WG on Pastoralists and Water was launched in April 2023 to spearhead research, reflection and development of advocacy messages that will be disseminated through the *'Soils, water and land use'* theme. The WG has prioritised three topics: i) rangeland health – “the degree to which the integrity of the soil, vegetation, water, and air, as well as the ecological processes of the rangeland ecosystem, are balanced and sustained” (USGS 2017); ii) water governance – the manner and processes by

<sup>1</sup> *Green water* is water found in the soil, typically accumulating as part of the rainfall-infiltration process, subsequently consumed by plants and the ecosystem through transpiration or evaporation from the soil surface (Mao et al, 2020). The accumulation of green water can be supported by rainfall-harvesting techniques, collecting runoff and enabling it to infiltrate the soil surface. Directly infiltrated green water is the basis for rainfed agriculture and water consumed in forage by grazing livestock. *Blue water* is contained within rivers, lakes, aquifers and behind dams. Irrigated agriculture and drinking water supply services use blue water.

which decisions about access to, distribution, use and conservation of water are made, including the institutional arrangements through which such decisions are processed and mediated; and iii) water resource development – the construction or modification of infrastructure, at any scale, to provide freshwater access to humans, livestock, crops and industry. Access can be year-round or seasonal, with scales ranging from household to large urban settlements. The extent to which the health of rangelands cause or exacerbate drought impacts cannot be separated from water governance or water resource development. All three depend on *'how decisions are made, by whom, at what geographical scales, and for whose benefit'* (IWRA 2019).

Although rangelands and pastoralism are well documented, pastoralists are often overlooked by the land and water development stakeholders when they plan and implement interventions. This lack of engagement with pastoralists is undermining their resilience. It is one of the primary causes of the high rate of failure of development projects and has often accelerated the deterioration of rangeland health and the fragmentation of rangelands.

### **Scope of Work for the WG**

The overall purpose of the WG is that improved rangeland health together with equitable governance of water resources and appropriate water resource development are well understood. This is with the vision of securing improved livelihood outcomes for the world's pastoralists and other people living in the rangelands.

The WG will consider experiences of rangeland health improvement, water governance and water resource development in the rangelands worldwide. It will capture and document lessons learnt – including what has worked well, what has worked less well and what didn't work at all. These lessons will be used to articulate strategies and policy options for better outcomes for rangeland health and for the diverse communities that live in rangelands. The WG will seek to promote the role of customary and local pastoralist institutions in improving rangeland health, water governance and water resource development.

Specifically, the WG shall undertake research and analysis, conduct case studies and disseminate knowledge products as well as facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue. Outputs will include policy briefs, animated videos, webinars and blogs. These are intended to:

1. Increase understanding among policymakers and project implementers about the importance of engaging with pastoralists, how to do so, how to identify needs, and how to understand rangeland health, water tenure and use, and water resource development options alongside good water governance; and
2. Increase understanding among development planners and implementers working in rangeland areas about pastoral and other livestock-production systems and the central role of rangeland health in improving the livelihoods of pastoralists and others living in the rangelands.

### **Membership of the WG**

Membership of the WG is open to any member of the IYRP International Support Group (ISG) interested in the theme. The Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) interest group 'Fellow Pastoralists and Water Teammates' has joined the WG to strengthen the partnership between RWSN members and the ISG.

In the run-up to the IYRP, members of the WG shall actively engage with fora and events that offer opportunities for reflection on the theme, especially international conferences related to tenure, governance, management and development of land and water resources.

Communication within the WG will be mainly through email and video-conferencing but, where several members are participating physically in a conference, they may take advantage of such an opportunity to convene a face-to-face meeting.

***All IYRP ISG and RWSN members who are interested in joining this WG are invited to contact the co-facilitators Kerstin Danert ([kerstin.danert@ask-for-water.ch](mailto:kerstin.danert@ask-for-water.ch)) and Adrian Cullis ([adriancullis19@gmail.com](mailto:adriancullis19@gmail.com)).***

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