



International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP): information for pastoralist organisations in Southern Africa

What is the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists?

In August 2019, the Government of Mongolia – a country in Asia where livestock farming forms a huge part of their agricultural economy – proposed that the United Nations (UN) declare an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP). The UN designates specific years as times to promote a particular topic through awareness-raising and other activities. For example, the year 2024 has been named the International Year of Camelids (camel-like animals). In early October 2020, the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) endorsed the Mongolian proposal for a Year devoted to the topic of rangelands and pastoralists in 2026. However, the final decision still has to be made by the UN General Assembly in September 2021.

What do we mean by:

“Pastoralists” are people who – as their primary source of living – raise livestock, wild or semi-domesticated animals on plants that grow naturally, often called rangelands, grasslands, savannas, shrublands or veld. In Southern Africa, we typically call these people livestock farmers, herders, communal livestock farmers, traditional livestock keepers and commercial livestock farmers. They raise livestock on private, communal, tribal and/or state land, commonages, land-reform farms, conservancies, farming reserves, etc.

A **“pastoralist organisation”** is a group of pastoralists who act together to improve the lives of the members, for example, by facilitating their access to information, markets or drought relief. The organisation may be registered (formal) or not (informal).

A **“pastoralist support organisation”** is a nongovernmental or governmental group of people who support pastoralists in their development and advocacy, but most of them do not practise pastoralism themselves.

Why was an IYRP proposed?

Over half (50%) of the Earth’s land surface is considered rangeland (grazing lands for animals) where the vegetation is made up of natural or naturalised grasses, shrubs, trees herbs and reeds that are grazed by livestock and wildlife. These rangelands are critical for the livelihoods and cultures of more than 500 million

pastoralists worldwide. However, billions more people who are not pastoralists benefit from these rangelands through the provision of meat, wool and other animal products, construction materials, spiritual home, tourism, wildlife and biodiversity conservation, fuelwood, renewable energy, and many other ecosystem uses.

An IYRP will be celebrated to raise the profile of pastoralists and rangelands and increase recognition of how they contribute to the economy, environment, society and culture at a local, national and global level. An IYRP will also raise awareness of the challenges and threats to rangeland sustainability. In Southern Africa, our rangelands are threatened by overstocking, improper livestock and veld management, bush encroachment, invasive plants, land degradation, uncontrolled fires and climate-change-related extreme events such as floods, droughts, sand and dust storms, etc. The IYRP could highlight the need for better legislation and policies that will support pastoralists and their rangelands.

Who is and can be involved in the IYRP?

The Government of Mongolia drew up its proposal in partnership with national and international organisations, including government bodies, in several countries. The Mongolians have formed a National Support Group (NSG) with people from civil society organisations and its Ministries to coordinate the campaign to promote the IYRP. An International Support Group (ISG) with 75 members from around the world is working closely with the NSG. One third of the ISG members are with pastoralist and pastoralist-support organisations, and other members are with international organisations, government agencies, universities, research institutes and nature-conservation groups.

Regional groups (such as in Eastern and Southern Africa) are being formed to plan and implement activities in the time leading up to the IYRP and during the IYRP. Any organisations wanting to actively promote pastoralists and rangelands in their region are welcome to join the relevant regional group as they can play a key role in shaping the IYRP.

Why is an IYRP important for pastoralists?

- It could increase respect for the achievements of pastoralists around the world in producing food and other products in harsh and challenging environments such as dry, mountainous and remote areas, as most of these lands are not suitable for any other agricultural activity such as cultivation.
- It could recognise that rangelands are critical for achieving food, nutritional and water security.
- It could strengthen pastoralist organisations and networks (local, national and international) and make them more visible by providing a global platform i) to advocate for their rights to development programmes and laws that meet their needs and ii) to exchange their knowledge and good practices.
- It could showcase pastoralists' pride in their work and culture, also among young people, and reinforce their traditions and diversity, thus supporting their quest for greater recognition of their way of life.

- By making pastoralists more widely known and valued, it could enhance opportunities for them – including women and youth – to generate additional income through new products and markets.
- It could improve collaboration between pastoralists and scientists to help pastoralists innovate and adapt to change so that their wellbeing is ensured.
- It could help integrate pastoralists' concerns into national and regional planning and stimulate development of better policies that allow pastoralists to make the best possible use of the rangelands while peacefully negotiating access to grazing and water and to secure livestock routes. This could help reduce conflicts with cropping, national parks, wildlife reserves, privatised grazing areas, tourism and mining companies.
- It could boost efforts for investment in restoring and rehabilitating degraded rangelands, wetlands and croplands. After crops have been harvested, livestock graze the stubble as a source of fodder during the dry season.

What is happening when?

The focus of all regional IYRP support groups now builds on the successful endorsement by the COAG and seeks approval by the UN General Assembly in September 2021. A website with brief information, statements, short video films and photos of pastoralists and rangelands has been developed as an “online booth” for these events. This will allow national delegates participating (and voting) in these high-level events to see and hear pastoralists and learn about rangelands from different parts of the world.

State departments and organisations in Southern Africa can add their voice to the proposal by contacting:

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For more information, please see:

www.iyrp.info (online-booth)

and

<http://globalrangelands.org/international-year-rangelands-and-pastoralists-initiative>
(archival website with all the relevant documents)