



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, we urge you to join the effort to gain a United Nations (UN) resolution designating an **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP)**.*

Justification

Nearly half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangeland¹, and the health and productivity of this land are directly critical to the livelihoods and cultures of more than 500 million people around the world, many of whom are indigenous peoples. Livestock are also raised on managed ecosystems, such as 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 agricultural systems, and 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 grasslands to produce soybean and 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.

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>).

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 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>

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 as rangeland, breakdown of common property systems, land fragmentation, generational succession and rural exodus⁷, damaging fire, invasive plants, and harmful subsidies and policies. Having been impacted by “benign neglect” in many developing countries for generations, pastoralists are among the poorest and most marginalized groups in these countries. Rural 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 intensive livestock systems. Unregulated use of animal growth hormones and pesticides, and unbalanced subsidies, can lead to unfair competition for pastoralists.

Given increasingly dry and erratic climates, rapidly increasing human populations, fast pace of unsustainable land-use changes and threats to ecosystems, growing public health concerns about over-consumption of animal-source foods by some segments of the world’s population, growing economic inequalities and uncertainties, and increasing conflicts associated with drought and access to diminishing natural resources, 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 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 the youth) and foster innovation toward sustainability and overcoming poverty. 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.

Furthermore, an IYRP would enhance governments’ awareness of and capacities to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global development and environmental goals in rangelands. It 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, all of which can enhance their ability to access multilateral funding such as through the Global Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development, etc. It could 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.

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

Relevance to the United Nations Goals

The “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” outlines specific goals and targets for sustainable agriculture, water management, sustainable energy and economic growth, combating and adapting to climate change, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. *Healthy and productive rangelands throughout the world are needed to realize these goals.* Pastoralists are explicitly recognized as a group of peoples who should benefit from achievement of the SDGs – countries cannot afford to continue to neglect them. An IYRP would offer an important opportunity to assess progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda targets and to adapt the trajectory as needed.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recently released a Technical Guide on “Improving governance of pastoral lands”. Its Pastoralist Knowledge Hub advocates for sustainable pastoralism, pastoralist-friendly policies and a strong pastoral civil society. This initiative supports the IYRP through its events and communication channels. *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.” *Improved pastoral systems can reverse the destructive effects of drought and create economic opportunity 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 (http://www.unep.org/about/sgb/cpr_portal/Portals/50152/2-24/K1607149_UNEPEA2_RES24E.pdf). This is expected to be completed in 2018.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (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 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.

In December 2016 during a side event at the Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of Parties 13 in Cancun, 28 government and 48 civil society organizations signed a strong statement that recognizes the value of rangelands, grasslands and pastoralism for biodiversity. In addition, several Environment Ministers and many other eminent people have called for support to designate a United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

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. Pastoralist organizations and pastoralist representatives will take center stage in activities to mark the IYRP. 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 best practices and solutions to problems, and revive/reinforce cultural traditions and diversity.

Since 2016, an International Support Group for an IYRP (see <https://globalrangelands.org/international-year-rangelands-and-pastoralists-initiative>) 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. At UNEA-2 in May 2016, it organized a side event on “Sustainable Pastoralism and the Responsible Consumption of Livestock”. The resolution that came out of UNEA-2 called upon organizations around the world to “contribute to raising the awareness of sustainable pastoralism and rangelands.” In October 2018, the Government of Mongolia – supported by the Government of Ethiopia – proposed an IYRP at the FAO Committee of Agriculture (COAG) meeting in Rome. The COAG put the issue for formal review/approval at their next meeting in October 2020. Efforts are now focused on facilitating the Mongolian Government in formulating a Resolution for an IYRP and gaining support for this from other national governments and inter-governmental organizations.

Some examples of outreach actions for an IYRP

- National-level events, including showcasing successful sustainable pastoral systems, awards and prizes, technology fairs, video documentaries, a World Herder Day, educational material, etc.
- Joint International Rangelands and International Grasslands Congress to consider the state of the art in science and knowledge on rangelands and pastoralists
- Launching of 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 sponsored by the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (WISP) and the FAO Pastoralist Knowledge Hub to share local knowledge and strategize practical solutions
- An international conference on SDGs and their impact on pastoralists and rangelands, bringing together environmental, social and economic aspects in an integrated vision.

For more information, please visit:

<http://globalrangelands.org/international-year-rangelands-and-pastoralists-initiative>

