

GLOBAL LAND OUTLOOK

Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralists Executive Summary



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

Key Messages

The conversion and loss of rangelands is done in silence and attracts little public attention. Often marginalised or considered outsiders, many pastoralist and rangeland communities are unable to influence the policies and programmes that directly impact their food security, livelihoods, and cultural identity. They are voiceless and powerless and represent a small minority in the political and administrative machinery that governs development and investment decisions in the rangelands.

Pastoralist livelihoods and cultures around the world are under threat from shortsighted policies, weak governance, and economic incentives that undermine their production systems. Pastoralists are broadly defined as extensive livestock farmers, herders, and ranchers – whether indigenous or not – whose way of life is closely linked to the health and productivity of rangelands. Up to 500 million people across the world practise this form of animal husbandry. Yet, in many regions, they have little recourse to address the conversion, fragmentation, and degradation of rangelands.

Rangelands operate as complex social-ecological systems with critical values, processes, goods, and services. They are diverse, multifunctional, and encompass a wide variety of ecosystems (e.g., drylands, grasslands, savannahs) that have co-evolved with human communities. Covering over 50 per cent of the Earth's land surface, rangelands are comprised of grasses, herbaceous plants, and shrubs that are grazed by livestock and/or wildlife. In addition to meat, dairy, fibre, and other animal products, rangelands and their biodiversity underpin critical ecosystem services from local to global scales (e.g., nutrient/water cycling, carbon sequestration, animal/human health).

Despite the extraordinary diversity and intrinsic value of rangelands and pastoralist systems, they rarely feature in global policy discussions or national development priorities. Rangelands provide important environmental, social, and economic benefits that are often taken for granted, in part due to the lack of understanding of their extent, condition, use, value, and diversity. While there are many threats to rangeland health, one is the imbalance in the supply and demand for animal forage which leads to overgrazing, invasive species, and bush encroachment as well as the increased risk of drought and wildfires.

Pastoralism and extensive livestock production systems are deeply rooted in the rangelands and often the most effective means to protect, sustainably manage, and restore rangelands. Appreciating that food and fibre production is the most common economic use of rangelands, sustainable grazing is a proven, cost-effective management approach to enhancing their health, productivity, and resilience. Traditional and regenerative grazing practices can often mimic natural processes that build soil organic matter, increase water retention, sequester carbon, conserve biodiversity, and reduce the spread of invasive species.

Greater political attention and informed investments are urgently needed to safeguard and improve the health and productivity of the rangelands and their inhabitants. This report offers insights and guidance on the policy and operational frameworks and other enabling factors for attracting greater attention and investments in sustainable rangeland management projects and programmes. Illustrated with case studies and good practices from around the world, it highlights the critical role of pastoralist communities in the planning and implementation of rangeland initiatives that deliver benefits in all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Key Actions

Sustainability Framework: National and sub-national authorities can design and implement legal and operational frameworks that align rangeland management and pastoralist livelihoods with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fully considering the environmental, social, and economic dimensions, and support efforts to:

- **Endorse and enact national laws and regulations** that are aligned with international treaties, obligations, and commitments that support the diversity, resilience, and multiple values of extensive livestock systems and rangeland ecosystem services.
- **Recognise and enforce legitimate land rights** that respect the unique circumstances and needs of rangeland communities (e.g., extensive livestock production, transhumance, communal governance) and recognise their critical role in the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of rangelands.
- **Facilitate multistakeholder platforms and networks** for research and learning, knowledge co-creation and exchange, and monitoring and evaluation – and to create accessible databases and repositories that collect and disseminate information on rangelands and pastoralist systems.

Environmental Dimension: National and sub-national authorities can take measures to support the ecological integrity, connectivity, and functioning of rangelands through conservation, sustainable use, and restoration activities that safeguard and enhance the multiple benefits they provide to societies and economies, and support efforts to:

- **Reduce and avoid rangeland conversion** resulting from inappropriate land uses (e.g., crop monocultures, tree plantations, afforestation) that diminish the diversity and multifunctionality of rangelands, especially on indigenous, pastoral, and communal lands.
- **Adopt and support pastoralism-based strategies** that directly address the natural and human-induced drivers of rangeland degradation, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, overgrazing, soil erosion, invasive species, drought, and wildfires.
- **Design and implement nature conservation measures** that reduce and halt biodiversity loss (above and below ground) by harnessing synergies with pastoralist practices and extensive livestock production systems that boost rangeland health, productivity, and resilience.
- **Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures** into sustainable rangeland management plans and programmes (or vice versa) to increase carbon sequestration and storage while enhancing the adaptive capacity of rangelands and their communities.

Social Dimension: National and sub-national authorities can take measures to build social capital in rangeland communities through participatory governance and adaptive management approaches that promote gender equality, social cohesion, and trusted institutions to foster collective action, and support efforts to:

- **Provide capacity building, skills training, and technical support** to build the human and social capital needed for collective action that safeguards rangeland health and livelihoods, with particular attention to mobility, gender-responsiveness, and social inclusion.
- **Support rangeland and pastoralist associations and networks** that celebrate and defend their cultural heritage and values, increase connectivity and social services, and ensure the provision of human resources and expertise needed for responsible and inclusive rangeland governance.
- **Facilitate women-led, women-driven, and women-only initiatives**, groups, and institutions (along with mixed gender ones) to ensure that women's voices are heard and respected and to activate their contribution to all dimensions of sustainable development in the rangelands.
- **Establish trusted institutions and mechanisms to manage wildlife and resource conflicts**, resolve territorial and land tenure disputes, reduce inequalities in access and benefit sharing, and negotiate trade-offs and leverage synergies for the benefit of rangelands, their communities, and society-at-large.

Economic Dimension: National and sub-national authorities can take measures to support the economic viability of extensive livestock production and the livelihoods they support through flexible long-term investments and incentives, including context-appropriate strategies and programmes that link markets and value chains to sustainable rangeland production systems, and support efforts to:

- **Create innovative economic and financial mechanisms** that are accessible to rangeland stakeholders, incentivise good management practices, provide decent work, stimulate market participation, and increase investments in sustainable pastoralism from public and private sources while avoiding adverse consequences for rangeland communities.
- **Develop market and value chain strategies and action plans** that support economic livelihoods and income diversification – and expand innovative and profitable opportunities for rangeland communities engaged in extensive livestock production.
- **Promote adaptive investment and risk management tools**, such as livestock and drought insurance, resource pooling and sharing, and community credit schemes, to better manage risks and uncertainties in a creative but economically sound manner.
- **Conduct economic valuations of rangeland ecosystem services** to better understand their contribution to people, nature, and climate, to help inform rangeland policies, planning and programmes, and to attract donor funds, private sector investments, and public sector allocations for sustainable rangeland management and restoration.

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The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) recognizes that addressing and reversing land degradation is a key sustainable development priority for many countries, particularly in the developing world. In response, the UNCCD secretariat and its partners publish strategic communications products under the Global Land Outlook (GLO) flagship to facilitate insights, debate, and discourse on transformative pathways to improve land use policy, planning, and management practice at various scales.

The aim of the GLO publications is to raise awareness and communicate evidence-based, policy-relevant information to a variety of stakeholders, including national governments designing and implementing their commitments to sustainably manage and restore land resources under the Sustainable Development Goals, including targets to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The data and evidence presented in the GLO reports demonstrates that more informed and responsible decision making can help to reverse the current worrying trends in the state of our land resources.

All GLO reports and working papers, can be found at: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/global-land-outlook/overview>



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