

New report makes the investment case for the world's rangelands

Rangelands Rising, launched at UNCCD COP17, calls on investors and governments to recognize the world's largest overlooked landscape and to back the 500 million pastoralists who sustain it

Ulaanbaatar, 24 August 2026 — Rangelands cover more than half the planet's land surface, hold a third of its key biodiversity areas and generate benefits worth an estimated US\$21–47 trillion a year (up to US\$5,000 per hectare). Yet these landscapes remain almost invisible to the people who finance and govern the natural world. A new global report launched today at the **17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** makes the economic case for investing in rangelands and recognizes the labor and stewardship of the 500 million pastoralists who manage them.

[*Rangelands Rising: Investing in Sustainable Management and Restoration*](#)—published by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), GIZ, the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative, UNCCD and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)—overturns a century-old assumption. Mobile livestock herding has long been blamed for driving land degradation.

Research increasingly demonstrates that many rangelands have evolved with grazing and that well-managed pastoral systems have created and maintained some of the world's most biodiverse landscapes. Yet that stewardship is under growing strain, as drought intensifies and grazing land is lost to crop expansion, urban encroachment and fragmentation.

“For too long, the world has looked at rangelands and seen empty, degraded land, and looked at pastoralists and seen a problem to be fixed,” said Prof. Appolinaire Djikeng, Director General, ILRI. “The evidence tells a different story. These are among the most valuable landscapes on Earth, and the people who manage them are their frontline investors.”

Far from being the wasteland they are often taken for, rangelands are a mainstay of the food supply, producing high-value animal protein — meat, milk and more — from land that could not support crops without heavy and costly inputs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, pastoralism contributes an estimated 5–10% of national GDP and accounts for 15–40% of the value added in agriculture. But their full worth — in water, carbon, biodiversity and protection against drought — stays invisible to markets. The cost of that neglect is steep. Land degradation drains trillions of dollars a year in lost services, while restoring rangelands typically returns US\$4–6 for every

dollar invested, and, where public benefits such as water supply are counted, as much as 36 to one.

The report's most striking economic finding is a mismatch between who does the work and who captures the value. In Jordan, reviving a traditional practice of resting grazing land returned just US\$0.80 for every dollar the herders themselves spent. But the return to Jordanian society as a whole was 18 to one, driven mainly by groundwater recharge.

It is a vivid illustration of the report's central argument. Pastoralists are already the primary investors in rangelands, putting in labour, knowledge, livestock and generations of stewardship, yet they cannot capture the value they create for everyone else. Public investment is needed to reward that stewardship and unlock the private capital that follows.

“We are not asking for rangelands to be treated as a special case. We are asking for them to be counted. A landscape worth up to US\$47 trillion a year cannot remain a blank space on the investment map,” Jonathan Davies, co-author of the report and independent rangelands researcher.

For governments, the report also reframes a familiar budget line. Drought response is overwhelmingly reactive, with aid typically arriving well into a crisis, after families have already started to lose their animals. The bill can be enormous: drought relief reached an estimated 7% of national GDP in Niger during the 2021 crisis. Yet, one evaluation cited in the report found that every US\$1 spent on timely support is worth an estimated US\$3 in later humanitarian spending. The report's central call to funders and finance ministries is to shift from paying for disasters to investing in resilient rangeland management before they strike.

The report also guides where money should go, noting that the strongest returns come not from the most degraded land, but from restoring lightly to moderately degraded rangelands. Restoring the latter can cost as little as US\$20 per hectare, against more than US\$70,000 for severely degraded land. It also cautions against “green” fixes — planting trees on natural grassland, or ploughing drylands for crops — that often damage ecosystems adapted to open grazing. For most drylands, the smartest investment works with the pastoral systems already there rather than replacing them.

But money alone is not the answer. The report is clear that financial investment on its own often fails without the conditions that let it work: secure land rights, strong community institutions and inclusive governance. Where tenure is contested or pastoralists are shut out of decisions, restoration funding may go to waste. Where rights are secure and communities lead, it endures. Getting the governance right, the report argues, is as important as the finance itself.

“Rangelands are not marginal landscapes. They cover more than half of the world’s land and are fundamental to food security, biodiversity, water security and resilience to drought,” said Dr. Barron Joseph Orr, UNCCD Chief Scientist. “This report shows that investing in rangelands is not simply about restoring degraded land. It is about recognizing the value of these ecosystems and supporting the pastoralists whose knowledge and management have sustained them for generations. As governments gather at UNCCD COP17, the evidence provides a strong case for putting rangelands more firmly into land restoration, drought resilience and investment decisions.”

The climate opportunity hiding in plain sight

The report makes the case that rangelands’ neglect is the starkest when it comes to climate policy. The word “rangelands” appears in the national climate plans of just 24 countries under the Paris Agreement; “forests” appear in the plans of 181 countries.

That blind spot overlooks two climate services rangelands already provide at scale: they are a vast carbon store and they are one of the world’s most effective natural defences against drought.

Rangelands offer mitigation, adaptation and resilience to climate change from a single investment across more than half the planet’s land. Writing rangelands into national climate plans, and directing climate finance towards them, represents one of the largest and most cost-effective opportunities for governments and investors seeking greater climate returns.

The report’s launch comes during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists and at UNCCD COP17 in Mongolia, one of the world’s great pastoral nations, where the future of rangelands and the communities who depend on them is a major focus of the conference agenda. The findings bring new economic evidence to COP17 discussions on land restoration, drought resilience and sustainable rangeland management.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- **Read the full report:** <https://www.ilri.org/rangelands-rising-investing-sustainable-global-restoration>
- **Funding:** This work was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- **Interviews** with report authors and pastoralist representatives are available before and during the launch.
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