

27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture

Item 4.4: FAO's work on Rangelands and Pastoralism, and proposal for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

Introduction notes

Rangelands and pastoralism support the livelihoods and food security of millions of people while delivering nature-based services. Around half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangelands. Rangelands are among the harshest production environments, mostly located in drylands or steep mountains unsuitable for crop production. Pastoral systems rely on seasonal mobility of animals and people within and across borders. In many countries, pastoralism generates significant employment and contributes to national GDP.

Healthy and productive rangelands and pastoralism have great potential to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They provide ecosystem services including nutrient cycling, seed dispersal, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and erosion and wildfire protection, thus contributing to SDG 13 and SDG 15. Low-input nature-based pastoral systems produce animal-source food that contribute to reducing poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2).

Pastoralists and rangelands are facing challenges and threats, increasing climate variabilities, land degradation, insecure tenure rights and land use change as well as limited access to markets, education and health services. These can result in conflicts, disruption of mobility and access to land and water, and reduction in workforce to manage the herds and landscapes. Addressing these challenges leads to improved access to education and learning opportunities (SDG 4), health services (SDG 3), increased attention to the needs of pastoral women, elderly and rural youth (SDG 5) and promoting sustainable peace (SDG 16).

FAO has been working on sustainable management of rangelands, governance, data and knowledge generation, empowering pastoralists for policy advocacy initiatives, prevention and response to emergencies and support to intergovernmental mechanisms securing pastoral tenure rights and animal health coordination.

The resolutions and decisions adopted by UN agencies such as the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) have shown their commitment to sustainable rangeland management and pastoralists.

For mainstreaming and better coordinating FAO's work on rangelands and pastoralism, three areas of action are proposed:

1. Data and knowledge generation and development of monitoring protocols,
2. Support to pastoral systems, mobility, customary institutions and knowledge systems.
3. Fostering effective representation and participation of pastoralists in policy and decision-making processes, social and economic inclusion of youth and women, and capacity development.

Acknowledging the role of rangelands and pastoralism, the Government of Mongolia proposes the observance of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) in 2026 to raise awareness on the perceived natural and cultural values of rangelands and pastoral systems while fostering innovation towards sustainability and poverty reduction through investments in pastoral systems and addressing degradation of rangelands.

The Committee is invited to:

- Request FAO to mainstream rangelands and pastoralism to ensure their systematic consideration in its technical and policy programmes.
- Review the proposal led by the Government of Mongolia, advocate for support from other Members to establish the observance of an IYRP in 2026 and provide guidance and follow-up actions as deemed appropriate.
- Review and revise, as needed, the Draft Conference Resolution to consider 2026 as the IYRP and submit it for the consideration to the 165th session of the Council for adoption by the 42nd session of the Conference.

Badi Besbes, Senior Animal Production Officer, NSA