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# COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

## Twenty-seventh Session

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

#### Executive Summary

Rangelands and pastoralism support the livelihoods and food security of millions of people and deliver multifunctional nature-based services. Healthy and productive rangelands and pastoralism have great potential to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. They face several challenges and threats including drought, degradation, pressure on land and increasingly erratic climate.

FAO contributes to addressing some of these challenges by working on sustainable management of rangelands, governance, data and knowledge generation, and supporting pastoralists' advocacy initiatives. To enable a long-term and coordinated approach sustaining the natural and cultural values of rangelands and securing the pastoral systems, FAO should put in place a corporate technical and policy programme on rangelands and pastoralism.

As requested by the 26th session of the Committee of Agriculture, this document includes the Government of Mongolia's proposal for the observance of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) in 2026. The IYRP will raise awareness on the importance of rangelands and pastoralists for livelihoods, healthy ecosystems, and other relevant dimensions of sustainable development. More than 75 percent of Member Nations will benefit from this decision.

#### Suggested actions by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- Request FAO to mainstream rangelands and pastoralism to ensure their systematic consideration in technical and policy programmes for their sustainable management and development.
- Review the proposal led by the Government of Mongolia and advocate for support of other Member Nations to establish the observance of an International Year on Rangelands and Pastoralists (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 International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists presented in the Appendix, and submit it for the consideration of the 165th session of the Council for adoption by the 42nd Session of the Conference.

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## I. Introduction

1. Rangelands are defined as the indigenous vegetation of grasses, forbs or shrubs and include native ecosystems. They sustain domestic animals and wildlife for grazing and browsing, and host pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and ranchers as main populations. Pastoral systems are livestock-based livelihood and food systems, interacting with natural environments highly variable in seasonality and biodiversity.
2. Around half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangelands. Estimates on the number of people in pastoral systems depend on the categories included (e.g. nomadic). All figures being speculative, the number of people raising livestock globally in pastoral and agro-pastoral systems is likely to be greater than 200 million. They are located in approximately 75 percent of countries and their practices vary according to the diversity of ecosystems.
3. Pastoral systems are highly diverse, but all share a specialization in improving the animals' diet and welfare by managing their grazing itineraries at a variety of scales in time and space. The diversity of livestock species optimizes the use of mosaic rangeland resources, plays a buffer role against diseases and meets various trading and nutritional needs.
4. Pastoral systems rely on seasonal mobility of animals and people within and across borders. They have evolved into diverse, multi-functional and complex systems, ensuring food security and providing multiple socioeconomic assets to millions of rural families together with ecosystem services.
5. This document explains the importance of rangelands and pastoralism, the services they provide and the challenges they face. It presents FAO's related work within the UN system, proposes to put in place a corporate technical and policy programme on rangelands and pastoralism, and introduces the request for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists led by the Government of Mongolia.

## II. Why should we care about Rangeland and Pastoralism?

6. By working with nature, pastoralism represents an alternative perspective and a promising avenue for innovation on a multitude of global challenges. Healthy and productive rangelands and pastoralism have great potential to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
7. Supporting or re-enabling land management through securing traditional pastoral systems (e.g. Hima in Jordan) has proven to be an effective approach to rangeland restoration. In India, pastoralist herds help reduce forest fires by decreasing the amount of biomass. Healthy rangelands provide multifunctional benefits such as traditional medicine, tourism, and ecosystem services including nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, soil formation and protection from erosion, contributing to SDG 13 and SDG 15.
8. Pastoral systems engage in a circular interaction with the ecosystem, providing multifunctional services, capital insurance, goods and cultural and social values. The role of diverse pastoral herds in seed dispersal, soil fertility and biodiversity is well documented. Pastoralism secures connectivity between ecosystems and is a major contributor to in-situ conservation of biodiversity (SDG 15). The low-input pastoral systems produce healthy animal-source food that contribute to reducing poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2). Their local breeds are efficient in using available water and pastures in arid and semi-arid areas<sup>1</sup>.
9. Pastoralism is a means of livelihood for millions of families, generating employment and economic value. In 2018, by incorporating self-consumption as an important component of gross

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/j8919e/j8919e.pdf>

revenue, the contribution of pastoralists reached 27%, 12% and 1.4% of the GDP, in Chad, Mongolia and Argentina, respectively<sup>2</sup>. These contributions are higher than usually indicated in the literature.

10. Rangelands are facing unsustainable land-use change due to unbalanced and short-term options of land management, including cropland expansion. Breakdown of common tenure rights can result in conflicts and disruption of mobility and access to natural resources. Sedentarization programmes, urbanization, extractive industries and wildfires are other threats to the productivity and ecological integrity of these lands and pastoralism.

11. Research, including in drylands, shows that pastoral landscapes can have a neutral carbon balance as emissions from animals are offset by carbon sequestration in soils and plants. A range of specific practices can be deployed to improve the carbon balance and overall resilience. Climate change can have devastating impacts on pastoral systems, rangelands health and livelihoods with dire consequences, particularly when movements are restricted.

12. Droughts, floods, degradation, pressure on land and increasingly erratic climate compromise the economic productivity of rangelands and pastoralism and can exacerbate rural poverty due to the loss of pastoralists' productive assets. Herds' recovery can take several years. Prolonged and recurrent droughts cause animal prices to fall due to bodyweight loss, while staple food prices increase, resulting in chronic poverty and hunger.

13. Barely reached by the public veterinary and extension services, pastoral herds are affected by transboundary animal diseases such as Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia, Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), and Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD). The lack of such services plays an active role in disease patterns. Pastoralists are exposed to zoonotic diseases (e.g., Rift Valley Fever, brucellosis).

14. Public data on pastoralism is scanty and unreliable, and conventional methodologies for modelling and economic analysis are inadequate. Livestock production is locked into a representation of the animal in isolation from the natural environment, and variability is viewed as an obstacle. This issue has contributed to structural misjudgement and representation of pastoralism and its potential.

15. Having been impacted by "benign neglect" in many developing countries for generations, pastoralists face poverty, malnutrition, hunger and marginalization. Basic health and education services barely reach them, with consequences on the development of children, including child labour. Discrimination, insecurity, conflict and rural exodus affect pastoral communities, reducing the workforce to manage the herds, grazing and watering. There is a need for improved access to services inter alia 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).

16. Adapted support and sustained access of pastoralists to financial services and markets will enhance their social and economic inclusion. Access to markets, technology, veterinary and animal production services and innovation will improve the competitiveness of pastoral animal-source food. Valuing the role of rangelands and pastoralism in national policies will enhance their contribution to the development of the national economy. Therefore, these landscapes and livelihoods need urgent attention of Member Nations, development agencies and other stakeholders.

### **III. FAO's and other UN Agencies' work on Rangeland and Pastoralism**

17. FAO develops and fosters the implementation of knowledge, tools and guidelines, such as the guidelines on sustainable rangeland management; the technical guidelines for improving governance of pastoral lands, within the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure; and the Participatory Rangelands and Grasslands Assessment tool. The latter has been implemented in five countries<sup>3</sup> through a participatory approach based on traditional knowledge of pastoral communities

<sup>2</sup> Finding of the projects Pastoral driven information management system (GCP/GLO/779/IFA)

<sup>3</sup> Kyrgyzstan, Burkina Faso, Niger, Kenya and Uruguay

while contributing to Land Degradation Neutrality. FAO supports intergovernmental mechanisms on securing tenure rights (e.g. in ECOWAS and African Union), including cross border natural resources sharing and animal health<sup>4</sup> coordination.

18. Through its Action Against Desertification Initiative, FAO supports its Members<sup>5</sup> in the sustainable management and restoration of their dryland forests and rangelands, e.g., the Great Green Wall for the Sahara.

19. On request of the 23rd session of the Committee on Forestry held in July 2016, FAO has set up a working group on dryland forests and agro-sylvo-pastoral systems.

20. Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems recognises pastoral systems in the Republic of Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania.

21. FAO's work on pastoralism is included in the technical support provided to Members and Regional Economic Communities on sustainable development of the livestock sector, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development/FAO Livestock Policy Initiative. FAO promotes inclusive and sustainable meat value chains, implements assessment of greenhouse gas emissions, feed and nutrient balance in pastoral areas worldwide. As social and economic inclusion go hand in hand, FAO is engaging specific actions to extend social protection to pastoralism (e.g. in Kenya and Pakistan) and to support youth from pastoral communities (e.g. in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Chad).

22. The Pastoralist Knowledge Hub<sup>6</sup> established by FAO with the support of the Government of Germany systematizes available information, literature and knowledge as well as technical tools, assessments and research results. By filling the data gap, the Hub aims to better inform evidence-based decisions affecting pastoral communities, while building a strong partnership among stakeholders.

23. In the framework of rural service provision for women's empowerment in the pastoralist context, FAO has piloted a study in Kenya focusing on Maasai pastoral women. The initiative involved the development of capacities on small-scale irrigation and nutrient management, using water and nutrient saving technologies and mobile phones. Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization participated in this work.

24. FAO supports the capacity development of pastoral organizations and key actors in data collection, analysis and information management. FAO and partners have been using the Agro-Pastoral Field Schools approach in the East African region over time, then expanded it to other regions, in particular the Sahel and Southern Africa.

25. FAO facilitates the involvement of pastoral organizations in different multi-stakeholders' partnerships such as the Livestock Environmental Assessment and Performance Partnership and the Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock. It also facilitates the participation of indigenous pastoralists in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to advocate for their rights and produces profiles of indigenous pastoralists' food systems.

26. FAO endeavors to prevent and respond to pastoral-related emergencies by:

- a. Supplying feed to pastoralists and developing early warning and prediction tools, such as the Predictive Livestock Early Warning System and national feed security assessment tools<sup>7</sup> for a rapid response to crisis, as well as Global Information and Early Warning System to monitor the food security situation and alert on emerging food shortages.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7178en/ca7178en.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gambia, Morocco Niger, Nigeria and Senegal

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fao.org/pastoralist-knowledge-hub/en/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7178en/ca7178en.pdf>

- b. Assessing and responding to crisis' impacts in protracted crisis scenarios, such as the current rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on pastoral communities and the livestock sector.
- c. Preventing livestock-related transboundary diseases emergencies and zoonotic diseases and promoting best practices on animal health, welfare and livestock production. For example, between 2016 and 2019, FAO conducted approximately 30 million small ruminant vaccinations against PPR in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia.
- d. Supporting neighboring countries in hosting refugees and their herds during conflicts.

27. FAO developed the above-mentioned activities in collaboration with other UN agencies, Member Nations, international financial institutions such as the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), World Bank (WBG), Global Environment Facility (GEF), international and research centers such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and pastoralists' organizations.

#### **Relevant UN policy decisions supporting rangelands and pastoralists**

28. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) recognized the importance of sustainable pastoralism during its second meeting in May 2016. A resolution (UNEP/EA.2/Res.24) was passed on "Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands". In its fourth meeting in March 2019, UNEA adopted the Resolution UNEP/EA.4/RES.15 on "Innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism", encouraging new and relevant scientific information, and acknowledging ongoing global efforts to introduce a proposal for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists to FAO's Committee on Agriculture.

29. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at its 14th session held in December 2019 adopted the decision 14.COM 10.b.2 to inscribe Transhumance, the seasonal droving of livestock along migratory routes in the Mediterranean and in the Alps<sup>8</sup> on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

30. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Decision 16/COP.14 and Decision 26/COP.14, took up land tenure as an integral part of the achievement of land degradation neutrality. Part of the target includes combatting desertification. This approach provides opportunities for strengthening tenure of pastoral land and rangelands.

#### **IV. Priority Technical and Policy Areas of Action**

31. The interventions described above have been implemented by a range of technical units and decentralised offices through projects, without appropriate coordination. Mainstreaming FAO's work on rangelands and pastoralism and coordinating the related corporate technical and policy programme of work will ensure sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralism and support countries' requests on:

32. Monitoring protocols: rangelands are less monitored in comparison to other biomes. There is a need for monitoring protocols to assess rangelands' health, building on local and traditional knowledge, and adapted to variability in space and time. Such protocols would provide inputs for evidenced-based decision.

33. Data and knowledge generation: rangelands and pastoralism are notoriously weak on data. Participatory approaches are needed to better define data requirements. The generated data and knowledge help designing restoration programmes and improve understanding of rangelands and pastoralism by key stakeholders and policy makers.

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<sup>8</sup> For Austria, Italy and Switzerland

34. Pastoral mobility: National mobility needs to be supported. While regional policies in support of cross-border movements exist, they are not always implemented or harmonized. FAO and partners should continuously work with national governments and regional bodies to enhance the regulation of pastoralists' mobility and trade, and inform conflict-sensitive interventions in affected contexts.
35. Support to customary institutions and knowledge systems: developed over centuries, customary knowledge systems and rules upon which pastoralism is based contribute to the sustainable management of rangelands. If not adequately acknowledged and supported they may disappear. Their sustainability requires their recognition and integration in modern legislations.
36. Effective representation and participation of pastoralists in various dialogue fora is necessary to influence decision-making. Pastoralists and other users of rangelands must be consulted and represented when designing projects and programmes to be implemented in their landscapes.
37. Gender issues: women empowerment and social and economic inclusion of youth is critical. At the same time, specific gender roles need to be considered when designing interventions to avoid increasing women's burden of work.
38. Improving capacities in pastoral communities: pastoral communities lag behind in many development indicators including education. Member Nations and stakeholders should design strategies aimed at strengthening pastoralists' capabilities in areas such as governance, land management, inclusive development, one health approach, access to services and markets, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Pastoral communities' access to formal education should be supported, including through alternative schooling models adapted to mobile livelihoods.
39. The elements of the programme highlights the opportunities for institutionalization of pastoralism in FAO, while leveraging on external partners. The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists would provide an impetus to the process.

## **V. Proposal for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists**

### **A. Objectives and main expected outputs**

40. Given the importance of rangelands and pastoralists for nutrition, healthy ecosystems, income and employment generation and other relevant dimensions of sustainable development, the Government of Mongolia proposes to establish 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 livelihood systems. The IYRP will increase global understanding of their importance to global food security and environmental services, highlighting valuable traditional knowledge. It will foster innovation towards sustainability and overcoming poverty of pastoralists and boost efforts for investment in pastoral systems and restoration of degraded rangelands. The IYRP will push for increased recognition by policy, decision-makers and stakeholders of how pastoralism can support the achievement of SDGs while contributing to the achievement of expected results of the UN Decade on Family Farming and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition.

### **B. Institutional arrangements and commitments**

41. The proposal to establish observance of the IYRP has received strong support by the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and by UN agencies such as UNEP, international institutions, research centres e.g. CGIAR, NGOs and pastoralists' organizations. They all showed a firm commitment to the objectives and outputs of the proposal.
42. The IYRP will offer an opportunity to review the achievements of the proposed FAO technical and policy programme on rangelands and pastoralism.



## Appendix A

### Draft FAO Conference Resolution

**Recognizing** that pastoralism is a dynamic and transformative livelihood linked to the diverse ecosystems, cultures, identities, traditional knowledge, historical experience of coexisting with nature;

**Re-affirming** that healthy rangelands are vital for contributing to economic growth, resilient livelihoods and the sustainable development of pastoralism;

**Aware** that a significant number of pastoralists in the world inhabit rangelands, and that pastoralism is globally practiced in many different forms;

**Noting** that more than half of the Earth's land surface is classified as rangelands and that these areas are suffering considerable desertification, including in countries with substantial drylands;

**Recalling** the UN General Assembly resolution proclaiming the United Nations Decade of Family farming and the UN General Assembly resolution proclaiming the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the need to support pastoralists and sustainable rangeland management;

**Acknowledging** that efforts aimed at achieving sustainable rangelands and pastoralism need to be rapidly up-scaled so as to make significant impact in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals;

**Acknowledging** that rangelands and pastoralism have suffered from "benign neglect" in many countries and are currently facing urgent and different challenges around the world;

**Recalling** that legal protection of natural resources is needed, in order to manage grazing areas, wildlife, water sources, livestock movement, risk and resilience, and to enable land-use planning and ecosystem management by pastoralists and relevant public entities;

Also **emphasizing** that well-developed and fair production pastoral value chains can provide equitable economic opportunities and end extreme poverty among various groups;

**Acknowledging** that FAO has a long-standing work developed in supporting sustainable rangelands and pastoralists from different approaches and thematic areas;

**Recognizing** the significant contributions being made by the scientific community, non-governmental organizations, pastoralist associations, and other relevant civil society actors; including innovative approaches towards achieving sustainability;

Further **recognizing** the relevance of sustainable rangelands and pastoralism to several subprograms and thematic areas of the United Nations, including the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and International Fund for Agricultural Development, and acknowledging their collaborative efforts with intergovernmental, private sector and civil-society partners;

**Stressing** that costs for the implementation of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists and the FAO involvement will be covered by extra-budgetary resources to be identified;

**Observing** that Member Nations have done considerable work on rangelands and pastoralism;

**Urging** Member Nations to further build the capacity of and continue or increase responsible investment in the pastoral livestock sector, including for sustainable land management practices, improved and/or restored ecosystems, access to markets, livestock health and breeding, and enhanced livestock extension services, in order to improve productivity, contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and maintain and enhance biodiversity;

**Requests** the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider at its next session, declaring 2026 as the International Year Rangeland and Pastoralists.