

Silent Demise of Vast Rangelands Threatens Climate, Food, Wellbeing of Billions: UN Convention to Combat Desertification

Degradation of Earth's extensive natural pastures and other rangelands threatens the food supply and wellbeing of billions of people, UN warns

BONN, GERMANY, May 21, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Degradation of Earth's extensive, often



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*UNCCD Executive Secretary
Ibrahim Thiaw*

immense natural pastures and other rangelands due to overuse, misuse, climate change and biodiversity loss poses a severe threat to humanity's food supply and the wellbeing or survival of billions of people, the UN warns in a stark new report.

Authors of the Global Land Outlook Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralists, launched May 21 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia by the [UN Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#), say up to 50% of rangelands are degraded.

Symptoms of the problem include diminished soil fertility and nutrients, erosion, salinization, alkalinization, and soil compaction inhibiting plant growth, all of which contribute to drought, precipitation fluctuations, and biodiversity loss both above and below the ground.

The degradation is driven largely by converting pastures to cropland and other land use changes due to population growth and urban expansion, rapidly rising food, fibre and fuel demands, excessive grazing, abandonment (end of maintenance by pastoralists), and policies that incentivize overexploitation.

(Full release with detailed statistics and analyses of rangeland degradation by region: <https://conta.cc/3wBgejp>)

What are rangelands?

The rangelands category of Earth's land cover consists mostly of the natural grasslands used by livestock and wild animals to graze and forage. Also included: savannas, shrublands, wetlands, tundra and deserts.

Altogether, these lands constitute 54% of Earth's land cover, account for one sixth of global food production and represent nearly one third of the planet's carbon reservoir.

"When we cut down a forest, when we see a 100-year-old tree fall, it rightly evokes an emotional response in many of us. The conversion of ancient rangelands, on the other hand, happens in 'silence' and generates little public reaction," says UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw.

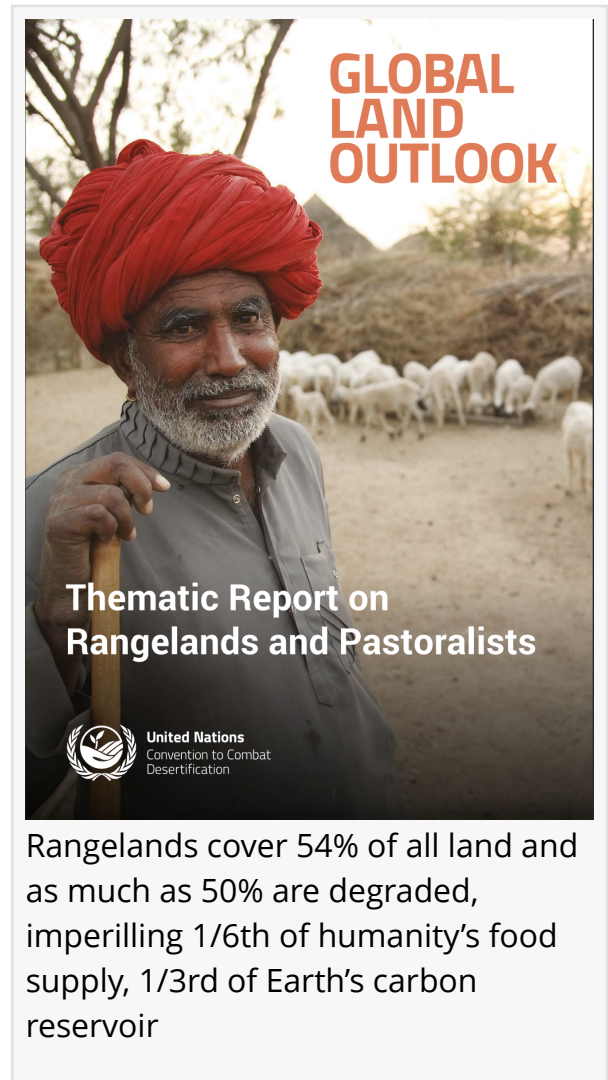
"Sadly, these expansive landscapes and the pastoralists and livestock breeders who depend on them, are usually under-appreciated," Mr. Thiaw adds. "Despite numbering an estimated half a billion individuals worldwide, pastoralist communities are frequently overlooked, lack a voice in policy-making that directly affects their livelihoods, are marginalised, and are even often seen as outsiders in their own lands."

Mongolia Environment Minister H.E. Bat-Erdene Bat-Ulzii says: "As custodian of the largest grasslands in Eurasia, Mongolia has always been cautious in transforming rangelands. Mongolian traditions are built on the appreciation of resource limits, which defined mobility as a strategy, established shared responsibilities over the land, and set limits in consumption. We hope this report helps focus attention on rangelands and their many enormous values – cultural, environmental, and economic – which cannot be overstated. If these rangelands cannot support these massive numbers of people, what alternatives can they turn to?"

Mongolia will host the 17th UNCCD Conference of the Parties meeting in 2026, the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), declared by the United Nations General Assembly on Mongolia's initiative.

Two billion people – small-scale herders, ranchers and farmers, often poor and marginalised – depend on healthy rangelands worldwide.

Indeed, in many West African states, livestock production employs 80% of the population. In



Central Asia and Mongolia 60% of the land area is used as grazing rangelands, with livestock herding supporting nearly one third of the region's population.

Ironically, the report underlines, efforts to increase food security and productivity by converting rangelands to crop production in mostly arid regions have resulted in degraded land and lowered agricultural yields.

The report calls out "weak and ineffective governance," "poorly implemented policies and regulations," and "the lack of investment in rangeland communities and sustainable production models" for undermining rangelands.

An innovative approach

The new report's 60+ expert contributors from over 40 countries agree that past estimates of degraded rangeland worldwide – roughly 25% – "significantly underestimates the actual loss of rangeland health and productivity" and could be as much as 50%.

Rangelands are often poorly understood and a lack of reliable data undermines the sustainable management of their immense value in food provisioning and climate regulation, the report warns.

The report details an innovative conceptual approach that would enable policy-makers to stabilise, restore and manage rangelands.

The new approach is backed by experience detailed in case studies from nearly every world region, drawing important lessons from successes and missteps of rangeland management.

A core recommendation: protect pastoralism, a mobile way of life dating back millennia centred on the pasture-based production of sheep, goats, cattle, horses, camels, yaks, llamas or other domesticated herbivores, along with semi-domesticated species such as bison and reindeer.

Says Mr. Thiaw: "From the tropics to the Arctic, pastoralism is a desirable default and often the most sustainable option that should be incorporated into rangeland use planning."

The economic engine of many countries

Rangelands are an important economic engine in many countries and define cultures. Home to one quarter of the world's languages, they also host numerous World Heritage Sites and have shaped the value systems, customs and identities of pastoralists for thousands of years.

The report includes detailed analyses of individual countries and regions.

For example, livestock production accounts for 19% of Ethiopia's GDP, and 4% of India's.

Brazil – with over 250 million cattle -- produces 16% of the world's beef, valued at \$7.6 billion in 2019.

In Europe, many rangelands have given way to urbanization, afforestation and renewable energy production.

In the United States, large tracts of grassland have been converted to crops, while some Canadian grasslands have been left fragile by large-scale mining and infrastructure projects. There are also positive developments noted, such as growing efforts in both countries to reintroduce bison – an animal of great cultural importance to indigenous peoples – to promote rangeland health and food security.

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For the news release in full, including detailed statistics and analyses of rangeland degradation issues by region: <https://conta.cc/3wBgelp>

The UNCCD Global Land Outlook Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralists is available at unccd.int

To view a recording of the May 21 report launch event: www.youtube.com/@THEUNCCD.

Photos: <https://bit.ly/3UqU31m>, video: <https://bit.ly/3U8K9QI>

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