

SUMMARY OF MINISTERIAL BREAKFAST MEETING, 12TH MARCH 2019 UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY 4 (UNEA4), NAIROBI

The meeting highlighted several key messages:

- The global significance of rangelands and pastoralists, and their contribution to sustainable development;
- The importance of an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) for Mongolia and other countries where pastoralism is key;
- The significant gaps in data on rangelands and pastoralism that remain—and the importance of filling these;
- The need for governments and the UN to address the challenges facing rangelands and pastoralists including gaps in data, and the importance of drawing attention to these.

There were around 60 participants drawn from government, UN agencies (UN Environment, FAO, UNCCD), independent, donors, NGOs, research organisations.

Government included:

- His Excellency Tserenbat Namsrai, Minister of Environment and Tourism for Mongolia (speaker);
- Aboud Gabir Saeed, State Minister, National Council for Environment Sudan (speaker);
- Ernest Mbogo, Deputy Director Range Resources Development, State Department for Livestock, Kenya
- Innocent Onu Alenyi, Chief Forest Officer, NAGGW Federal Ministry of Environment, Nigeria (participant)

The meeting was moderated by Shirley Tarawali, Deputy Director General, ILRI. The presentations followed the Agenda, with an extra statement of support from Mr Aboud Gabir Saeed (as above). The discussion was interesting, though did feel that it was a discussion amongst “the converted”! Several participants emphasized the lack of adequate data and called for a gap analysis to address this need. Pablo Manzano made some good points including that there hadn’t been an adequate census of animals and livestock keepers in Nigeria for 30 years. There was a broad consensus on the importance of drawing on local knowledge and using existing resources and social practices to formulate pragmatic solutions to ongoing environmental and economic challenges. As Shirley noted, the goal is not to treat pastoralism as a problem to be solved, but as an important part of the solution.

Some quotations:

H.E. Mr Tserenbat Namsrai, Minister of Environment and Tourism:

“Mongolia does recognize the importance of rangelands and pastoralism in addressing environmental challenges we face, not only to the biodiversity and ecosystem services, but its impact on food security, life cycle supply chains, sustainable tourism and socio-economic development.”

“Mongolia believes the power of community based sustainable management and also all type of user groups those really do strengthen the implementation while localizing national and international environmental goals and objectives. Mongolia has 1450 pasture user groups.”

“Last week, with the initiative of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry, National Stakeholders meeting was held with participations of organizations such as relevant ministries and international donors FAO, UNDP, SDC and research institutes and representative of NGOs, National Federation of Pasture User Groups of herders. The National technical working group has been formed to work on the Mongolian proposal for the International year.”

“The Government of Mongolia, with its national and international partners, is appealing all of your support in this room and to spread out to your respectful ones to join us to have the international year.”

Enkh-Amgalan Tseelei: “The health of Mongolian rangelands is at the crossroad. 57% of national rangelands is degraded, 13% of which has passed the threshold of recovery. Mongolian rangelands is one of the few natural grasslands left on earth. If nothing is done now, we might soon face the danger of losing this beautiful land and having the livelihood of thousands of nomadic herder families at threat.”

Dana Kelly, President of the International Rangelands Continuing Committee, provided an overview of the importance of pastoralism, an issue she said rarely receives the attention from policymakers that it deserves. “Rangelands are great for diversity,” she said. “Up to 500 million people are pastoralists, and they occupy as much as 75% of the land surface.” Pastoralists are natural stewards of the environment,” she said, since they rely on low external inputs and provide a variety of sustainable eco-system services. Yet, she said, they remain “among the most marginalized and disadvantaged of peoples.”

Iain Wright, Deputy Director General of ILRI, said he was gratified by the UN’s attention to the issue: “Despite the many challenges that remain, we are finally really pushing for a pastoral agenda. I’m more optimistic than I have been in 25 years of working on this issue. There is a groundswell of support for pastoralism, and I’m happy to be part of it.”

Jonathan Davies, Director of Drylands, IUCN, commented that the SDGs are explicit about not neglecting rangelands. As an example, the scientific framework adopted for SDG Target 15.3 clearly states that land degradation neutrality cannot be achieved in some biomes at the expense of others: for example, in forests at the expense of rangelands. 120 countries have set, or will soon complete setting, their national targets for LDN and this includes a disproportionate number of rangeland countries. This represents a major opportunity to support those countries to leverage appropriate investments for large-scale action on rangeland restoration and sustainable pastoralism.

Musonda Mumba, Chief of the Terrestrial Ecosystem Unit, launched UN Environment report on ***A case of benign neglect: Knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands.*** <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/case-benign-neglect-knowledge-gaps-about-sustainability-pastoralism-and-rangelands>

The report identifies the need for an integrated global assessment of rangelands and pastoralism. She highlighted that a good knowledge base will help countries develop appropriate policies and programs that reach out to the mobile pastoralists and support their role in building a green economy.