



KEY MESSAGES AND CALLS TO ACTION

Unleashing the potential of Africa's rangelands and pastoralists

Five key messages and calls to action
from the GLF Africa 2026 conference

GLF Africa 2026 campaign reach

6,544

Total registered participants
(Nairobi + online)

5,626

Online participants

918

In-person participants

2

Days

4

Languages

171

Speakers

133

Participating organizations

67

Sessions

50%

Female

6

Exhibitors

173,302

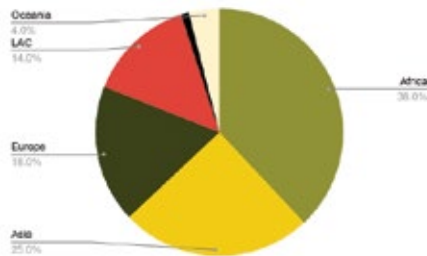
Session views

60%

From Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean

288

Participants in **10 local gatherings** in **6 countries**



135

Countries, incl. **51 African countries**

Top 5 countries:

1. Kenya
2. Nigeria
3. India
4. USA
5. South Africa

Social media #GLFAfrica

#ActLandscape

40.1 million

Reach¹

75 million

Impressions²

1.3 million

Engagement³

Media

22.4 million

Potential reach

72

Media hits

14

Countries

128

Total press registrations

62.7 million

Total event reach⁴

¹ **Social media reach:** The number of unique users who saw content related to event hashtags.

² **Impressions:** The number of times content was displayed

³ **Engagement:** The number of interactions on content received from users (likes, comments, shares, saves, etc.) related to event hashtags.

⁴ **Total event reach:** Including social media reach, media reach, event



Summary of key messages

The following is a brief summary of each theme, which is further elaborated in the rest of this document.

1. Governance and institutional coherence

- Rangeland governance still carries colonial-era assumptions and a value deficit that must be systematically named and reformed, with rights-based safeguards embedded throughout.
- Mobility is a governance, climate adaptation, livelihood and cultural right that existing regional frameworks must urgently operationalize and protect.
- Communal tenure and customary institutions are prerequisites for sustainable and just rangeland management.
- IYRP 2026 and the Rio Convention cycle offer a rare policy window that must translate into rights-based, accessible and predictable financing and implementation, not visibility alone.
- Rangeland health must be embedded in national One Health strategies and financed accordingly, not left as an afterthought.
- Fragmented coordination wastes resources and erodes trust and territorial, co-governed approaches close the implementation gap.

2. Science, data and knowledge systems

- Dominant dryland narratives of fragility and scarcity must be rewritten using evidence, participatory research and locally-led narratives, connected directly to financing and policy.
- Indigenous and local knowledge, including women's distinct ecological knowledge, are primary evidence sources rather than supplementary inputs.
- Monitoring, data and technology systems must be co-designed and co-created with pastoralists, reflecting mobile realities rather than outdated historical datasets borrowed from settled systems.
- Anticipatory action should be rebuilt around pastoralist logics of mobility and uncertainty, not rigid, historically dated triggers.
- Research and innovation platforms need multi- and transdisciplinary coordination, from camel, livestock and tree commodity value chains to landscape science.

3. Finance, investment and implementation

- Financing must shift decisively from emergency response toward long-term, proactive stewardship.
- Rangelands are productive, investable landscapes whose undervaluation reflects a governance failure.
- Investment in pastoralist value chains must generate local nutritional, economic and ecological benefit, including in the rangeland ecosystems these markets depend on, not just export volume.

4. Inclusion, equity and local action

- Pastoralists must move from the margins of decision making to its center, with real authority over agendas and resources.
- Community-led governance consistently outperforms externally imposed models across diverse African contexts.
- Women's leadership and youth engagement are preconditions for resilient rangeland systems, not optional add-ons.
- Benefit sharing and community ownership determine whether external investment strengthens or undermines pastoral systems.

5. Pastoral societies as guardians of rangeland biodiversity and ecological functionality

- Pastoralism is not a threat to rangeland biodiversity; grazing and mobility actively create the heterogeneity much rangeland biodiversity depends on.
- The narrative of pastoralism as incompatible with conservation has deep colonial roots that persist in research, development and conservation practice today.
- New instruments, including OECM recognition and emerging nature credit and certification mechanisms, can formally reward pastoral stewardship.



Introduction

Rangelands and other open ecosystems that support extensive livestock and wildlife grazing cover roughly 54 percent of the world's terrestrial surface. They support the livelihoods of up to 500 million pastoralists, with a further 2 billion people relying on them indirectly for food, water, energy and cultural identity.

In Africa, rangelands cover an estimated 45 percent of the continent's landmass, and livestock production employs a significant proportion of rural workers (FAO; UNCCD, 2024). Rangelands are among the most extensive, biodiverse and economically significant land systems on the continent, sustaining pastoral, agropastoral and ranching economies that have shaped African landscapes for centuries.

Rangelands have considerable ecological potential, containing 67 percent of the world's biodiversity hotspots and 38 percent of key biodiversity areas. However, only around 12 percent are formally protected, meaning most rangeland biodiversity today is stewarded by the pastoral societies who manage it.

The United Nations General Assembly has designated 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026), converging with the UNCCD's 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to create what may be a once-in-a-decade policy window for rangelands and the communities who steward them.

Yet this potential remains under-realized and, in many places, under threat. Up to half of the world's rangelands are considered degraded or at risk, driven by unsustainable land use conversion, blocked mobility corridors, land fragmentation and privatization, and recurrent drought intensified by climate change.

Pastoralist communities are simultaneously exposed to conflict over shrinking resources, chronic

underinvestment and colonial-era policy frameworks that treat rangelands as "wastelands" and mobile livestock keeping as backward.

These narratives continue to shape land use planning, conservation practice and investment decisions today, despite ecological and economic evidence to the contrary. Pastoralists vary widely across geographical, ethnodemographic and historical contexts, and any agenda for rangelands must acknowledge this diversity.

This document draws together the key messages and calls to action that emerged from **GLF Africa 2026: Stewarding Our Rangelands**, structured around five interlinked themes: governance and institutional coherence; science, data and knowledge systems; finance, investment and implementation; inclusion, equity and local action; and the biodiversity and ecological stewardship that pastoral societies provide. It is intended to be read alongside the companion discussion paper, *Rangelands on their own terms*, which develops several of these arguments in greater analytical depth.

Pastoralist communities across Africa are far from homogenous: they differ enormously by geography, ethnicity, gender, generation and history, and any reading of the messages below should hold that diversity in mind. Women, and youth and Indigenous Peoples are central protagonists throughout every theme that follows, not only where they are explicitly named toward the end of this document.

Each message below pairs a key learning from GLF Africa 2026 with a relevant call to action addressed to the governments, donors, conservation actors, researchers and pastoralist institutions best placed to act. These themes should be viewed through a rights-based lens, including free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), accountability mechanisms, and social and environmental safeguards.

1. Governance and institutional coherence

Policies, institutions, rights and coordination

a. Overcoming the governance and value deficit

Africa's rangelands are governed by colonial-era frameworks that misclassify these productive ecosystems as "wastelands" or perpetrate fortress conservation strategies, treating pastoralism as a problem to be managed rather than a sophisticated adaptive system maintaining unique ecosystems to be supported. This narrative has shaped land use policies, conservation approaches and investment decisions in ways that undermine mobility; undervalue rangelands, biodiversity and pastoralist economies; fragment communal lands and displace pastoral communities.

GLF Africa called for a deliberate, systematic narrative shift backed by institutional reform and fast-tracking pro-pastoralist policies for inclusive and equitable governance of rangelands and pastoralist systems. This includes embedding rights-based approaches, including free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), accountability mechanisms and social and environmental safeguards.

b. Institutionalized mobility as a governance, environmentally-friendly and climate adaptation right

Pastoral mobility and transhumance are not barriers to development; they are the ecological, livelihood and cultural foundations of rangeland resilience. Pastoralists are therefore just as dependent on



rangelands as rangelands are on pastoral societies. Despite broad formal recognition at the African Union, IGAD and other regional policy spaces, mobility continues to be constrained by sedentarization biases, conflicting sectoral policies, land privatization and infrastructure expansion.

Existing frameworks including the IGAD Transhumance Protocol, national ASAL policies and community land acts must be urgently ratified, domesticated and implemented with measurable indicators, dedicated financing and accountability mechanisms. Mobility corridors should be mapped, demarcated and legally protected to enable pastoralist mobility as an adaptive livelihood strategy without disrupting existing development establishments based on sedentism.

c. Communal land tenure as a prerequisite for sustainable rangeland governance

The fragmentation and privatization of communal lands represent one of the most acute threats to pastoralist systems. Securing communal land rights alongside the formal recognition of customary governance institutions is vital to sustainable and just rangeland management and the perpetual survival of pastoralists. GLF Africa called for governance processes anchored within public institutions while actively strengthening collaboration with customary systems, rather than replacing them with externally designed frameworks.

d. Translate regional and global policy coherence into local action

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026) has created an exceptional window of opportunity for pastoralism to be understood as a leveraging system to steward rangelands. Pastoralism should be presented as promoting agroecological principles that support climate, biodiversity and ecological functioning and the restoration of dry and arid habitats. National plans for implementing the **Rio Conventions** must integrate pastoralists' perspectives and strengthen their role and participation.

There is a persistent gap between formal political commitment and on-the-ground implementation. Governments must operationalize existing frameworks with concrete action plans, rights-based financing commitments linked to accessible, flexible and predictable finance for local actors, and community-level accountability systems. It is also important to create a global oversight institution or body established to carry forward the agenda of rangelands and pastoralists beyond 2026.

e. Integrate One Health governance into rangeland and pastoralist systems

The global One Health agenda largely fails to include rangeland health as a foundational dimension. As defined in 2022 by the Quadripartite Alliance (WHO, FAO, WOHA, UNEP), One Health aims to build “healthy ecosystems with healthy people, plants and animals,” which provides an opportunity to frame the health of pastoralism and rangelands as coproduced and interdependent.

Rangeland health must be embedded within national One Health strategies, frameworks and implementation cycles, with community-level delivery systems such as One Health community units, community rangeland health workers and local task forces formally recognized and financed within national extension systems.

f. Coordination failures multiplying the cost of inaction

Fragmented and duplicated implementation efforts across actors continue to limit impact, waste resources and erode community trust. On the other hand, exclusionary conservation models that displace pastoral communities, weak intersectoral policy coordination and mismatch between donor priorities and local community needs all compound the governance deficit. Stronger coordination mechanisms, co-governance arrangements between national and local institutions, and community-driven accountability systems are essential to close the implementation gap.

Operational models such as HEAL’s integrated One Health units, community-based observation networks and multi-stakeholder innovation platforms (e.g. living labs) have demonstrated viable pathways to scale landscape solutions in rangelands. These must be backed by institutional recognition, sustained financing and inter-agency coordination. Governments should embed these models within national systems, such as national and interministerial One Health platforms, rather than leaving them dependent on donor-dependent project cycles and fragmented coordination.

2. Science, data and knowledge systems

AI, technology, research, monitoring, technology, Indigenous and local knowledge

a. Rewrite dryland narratives from the ground up

The dominant narrative around drylands and pastoralism as spaces of fragility, scarcity, conflict, degradation and mismanagement actively misdirects investment

and policy, contributing to high interests on loans, risk aversion and policies of sedentism. This narrative must be confronted through participatory research, community-led observatories, Indigenous knowledge documentation systems, and locally-led storytelling initiatives. It is vital to systematically build, communicate, and connect the evidence to policy processes, including financing, investment and development decisions and programs.

b. Indigenous and local knowledge systems are irreplaceable assets

Indigenous knowledge systems represent centuries of co-evolution between pastoral societies and the rangelands and savannas they steward. It is important to recognize these knowledge systems as primary sources of evidence in monitoring, planning, and policy design and implementation. The key focus should be the interweaving between knowledge systems – a genuine two-way relationship between traditional knowledge holders and scientific institutions and technology developers, rather than extracting knowledge without reciprocity.

This knowledge is also deeply gendered: in human-wildlife conflict contexts, for example, women often hold specific ecological knowledge about wildlife behavior and encounter patterns, shaped by the gendered tasks they perform. Yet they are rarely consulted in monitoring, planning or mitigation design. This also creates an opportunity for emerging technologies and solutions to be tailored to the local context.

c. Redesign and co-create technological innovation and data systems around pastoral realities and priorities

While there are large amounts of data and evidence on rangelands, a critical evidence gap persists on pastoralists as an integral part of rangelands. Most existing monitoring and assessment methodologies are poorly suited to the dynamics of pastoralists mobile systems. Localized meteorological data is sparse in some regions, historical datasets are weak and national monitoring frameworks rarely disaggregate outcomes for pastoralists populations.

Monitoring and evaluation systems should be codesigned with and by pastoralists and data collected by them when possible to ensure that they own the data and that it is tailored to their needs. Data collection and monitoring should be conducted with pastoralist communities using methodologies designed for rangeland contexts, such as community-based observation networks (CBONs) that integrate local weather stations, satellite data, and community-generated health and nutrition indicators. In some ecosystems, pastoralists also need to be on the frontline of wildlife population and health monitoring.

AI-based and digital tools, including early warning systems, mobile applications for market access and price comparison, drought-related information sharing platforms and traceability systems for livestock value chains, offer significant potential to strengthen pastoralists' resilience. However, technology adoption requires sustained community involvement, adequate capacity support, and alignment with existing pastoralist livelihood dynamics. Emerging technological innovations and AI must be designed with pastoralists rather than imposed upon them.

d. Rebuild anticipatory action around pastoralist logics of uncertainty and mobility

Several current anticipatory action frameworks in drylands fall short of what pastoralist communities need. They are event-focused, assume stability and settlement and rely on linear trigger-based models often built on historical data that is no longer fit for purpose. A fundamentally different approach is needed – one that is flexible enough to support dynamic improvisation, targets collective institutional vulnerabilities rather than individual ones, strengthens local weather and climate information ecosystems through two-way relationships and supports existing informal local service provision including transportation and informal credit.

e. Shift from fragmented to coordinated and integrated research platforms

Emerging opportunities, such as the Kenya Camel Centre of Excellence and IGAD-ICPALD, demonstrate the potential to shift from scattered interventions to coordinated systems linking research, innovation, governance and/or commercialization. The wider camel and livestock value chains, for example, suffer from low research investment, weak veterinary infrastructure, processing and distribution gaps and unfavorable market policies, all of which could be



addressed through a holistic, collaborative approach. The principle of coordination applies more broadly: rangeland science must move toward integrated, multi- and transdisciplinary platforms that connect ecological, health, economic, social and political dimensions through a landscape approach lens.

3. Finance investment and implementation

Funding, stewardship economy, sustainable business models and scaling solutions

a. Shift the investment paradigm from emergency response to long-term, proactive stewardship

The overwhelming majority of current funding in pastoralist regions flows toward short-term humanitarian responses rather than long-term resilience and prevention. This has created a costly cycle: chronic underinvestment in preventive and adaptive systems generates repeated crises that require expensive emergency interventions. Donors, governments and development partners need to fundamentally reorient financing toward long-term, landscape-based ecosystem stewardship approaches that sustain biodiversity, peace dividends, livelihoods, productivity and climate resilience simultaneously. These approaches need to acknowledge the polycrisis context that drives extreme events and instability and confront the perceived versus actual risks in rangelands and pastoralist systems.

b. Reposition rangelands as productive and investable landscapes

GLF Africa 2026 made one thing crystal clear: rangelands are not marginal territories. They are functional ecosystems and social territories supporting food systems, rural economies, biodiversity, cultural heritage and economies. Rangelands must be recognized as both ecological and economic systems and pastoralism as both a livelihood strategy and dynamic climate adaptation mechanism to attract investment at scale.

Climate and biodiversity-related projects and programs must actively channel resources to pastoralist communities and economies as drivers of rangeland investment. This will require overcoming structural and political barriers. Very little climate or development finance currently reaches local NGOs or community institutions directly, with a significant proportion falling to intermediaries. Participatory budgeting, direct community financing mechanisms and the decentralized localization of decision-making power over resources are essential.



c. Investment in rangeland and pastoralist value chains must generate local benefits

Sustainable livestock value chains, traceability systems and growing global demand for grass-fed livestock products create real commercial opportunities in pastoralist regions. However, much of the produce from pastoralist communities currently generates few nutritional or economic benefits locally, as they are mostly exported raw. Investment must be structured to ensure that value chain development strengthens local food security, builds local community economic agency, sustains rangeland ecosystems, promotes innovation and the valorization of local resources and is governed by equitable benefit-sharing arrangements. Strengthening the local consumption of nutritious pastoralist foods, such as beef, milk and tree-based rangeland commodities, is in itself a high-reward investment.

4. Inclusion, equity and local action

Pastoralist leadership, gender, youth, community agency and benefit sharing

a. Put pastoralists at the center of decision making

The most consistent failure across governance, science and investment systems is the exclusion of pastoralist communities from the decisions that shape their lives. Communities are routinely invited into policy processes for representation or visibility, sometimes compensated with facilitation allowances, without genuine influence over agendas,

priorities or outcomes. Pastoralists must be engaged in program design from the beginning and equipped to shape agendas, define success metrics, participate in monitoring and hold institutions accountable. Real localization requires shifting both power and resources.

b. Community agency is foundational to rangeland resilience

Evidence from across Africa has consistently demonstrated that rangelands thrive where communities retain governance authority, mobility rights and stewardship responsibility. Kenya's community conservancy model, in which local institutions retain direct control over land use decisions and a share of tourism and enterprise revenue, is one of the clearest examples of a funding and governance system that works at scale.

Pastoralist communities are knowledge holders, first responders, ecological guardians and primary investors in rangeland systems. They invest more than financial capital: their livelihoods, food security and survival are directly bound to the outcome, a form of investment no external financier can match. Programming and policy must build on existing community capacities and institutions.

c. Institutionalize and structurally support women's and youth leadership

Women are central to pastoral adaptation and resilience across Africa. They manage milk production and nutrition, sustain household food security during drought and maintain community social networks that underpin collective action. Yet their leadership and knowledge remains insufficiently recognized in governance systems, underrepresented in formal decision-making processes and largely excluded from direct resource flows.

It is essential to recognize pastoralist women's contributions within formal laws and policies, invest in their leadership development and ensure that they participate meaningfully in governance, innovation and financing processes.

Meanwhile, young people are migrating away from pastoralist areas due to economic and social pressure, representing a critical demographic shift and long-term threat to the transmission of ecological knowledge, availability of labor and the continuity of pastoralist systems. To reverse this, we must institutionalize youth leadership through long-term involvement in governance structures, financing processes, SME development and capacity strengthening initiatives. Mobile education services, youth representation in governance bodies and economic opportunities within pastoralist value chains are all essential investments.



d. Benefit sharing and community ownership determine the sustainability of investments

External investments in rangelands, whether in energy, infrastructure, agriculture, conservation or commercial land, continue to generate value that flows away from pastoral communities. Large-scale land investments accompanied by private property rights and tenure are undermining communal systems, mobility and seasonal resource access.

Benefit-sharing arrangements must be co-designed with communities, embedded in legal frameworks governing communal land, and monitored through community-led accountability systems. Integrated livestock-wildlife systems under pastoral stewardship consistently demonstrate stronger biodiversity and ecosystem resilience outcomes than exclusionary conservation models that displace communities.

5. Pastoral societies as guardians of rangeland biodiversity and ecological functionality

Stewardship, coexistence and the colonial legacy of exclusionary conservation

a. Pastoralism is not a threat to rangeland biodiversity but one of its primary stewards

Pastoral livestock keeping does not degrade nature and compete with conservation. In fact, sustainable pastoralism is recognized as a primary strategy for meeting global biodiversity targets. Grazing, fire

management and seasonal mobility create and sustain the landscape heterogeneity that much rangeland wildlife has adapted to over centuries. Removing pastoral communities from their territories can reduce, not enhance, ecological function.

b. Confronting colonial legacies in conservation, research and development

Much of the tension between pastoralism and conservation is rooted in colonial history. Many protected areas in Africa were established by colonial authorities by removing or restricting the pastoral communities that had shaped those landscapes for generations.

This pattern persists in research, development and conservation practice today. Funding, authority and recognition still tend to route through external institutions rather than pastoral societies. This legacy must be explicitly recognized and addressed.

c. New instruments should formally recognize and reward pastoral stewardship

There is now a policy opening to translate this recognition into practice. *Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)* allow governments to count community-managed rangelands toward global conservation targets without the exclusion-based model of formal protected areas. Emerging “nature credit” and biodiversity certification instruments, anchored in Target 19 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, could similarly be adapted to recognize territory-level bundles of good governance for climate, biodiversity and people, provided that pastoral communities, rather than external intermediaries, are the ones certified and rewarded.





About Global Landscapes Forum

The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) is the world's largest knowledge-led platform on integrated land use, dedicated to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Climate Agreement and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and committed to the landscape approach. The Forum takes a holistic approach to create sustainable landscapes that are productive, prosperous, equitable and resilient and considers five cohesive themes of food and livelihoods, landscape restoration, rights, finance and measuring progress. It is led by Landscape Alliance – CIFOR & ICRAF in action, in collaboration with its co-founders UNEP and the World Bank and Charter Members.

Charter members: CIAT, Landscape Alliance, CIRAD, Climate Focus, Conservation International, Crop Trust, Ecoagriculture Partners, The European Forest Institute, Evergreen Agriculture, FAO, FSC, GEF, GIZ, ICIMOD, IFOAM – Organics International, The International Livestock Research Institute, INBAR, IPMG, IPAM Amazonia, IUFRO, Rainforest Alliance, Rare, Rights and Resources Initiative, SAN, SouthSouthNorth, TMG-Think Tank for Sustainability, UNCCD, UNEP, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation part of Wageningen Research, World Farmer Organization, World Bank Group, World Resources Institute, WWF International, Youth in Landscapes Initiative (YIL)

Funding partners

