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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Rangelands in Silent Demise

DOWN TO EARTH

17 June 2026 · ENVIRONMENT · GS3 · GS1

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Rangelands in Silent Demise

 **Down to Earth**

17 June 2026

GS3

GS1

 Source: ujyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped

INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Why do rangelands, which cover nearly half the planet's land, remain invisible in mainstream conservation policy?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)

Down to Earth

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

On June 17, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, a new UN assessment delivers a sobering finding: up to half the world's rangelands are degraded, nearly double earlier estimates. The 2026 theme, "Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore," hosted by Kenya, shines a rare light on ecosystems that cover nearly half the planet yet remain invisible in policy.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

A UN assessment finds up to half the world's rangelands degraded, far more than previously thought. These grasslands store carbon, sustain biodiversity and support pastoralists, yet are treated as wasteland. In India, rangelands cover around 121 million hectares, about 40 percent of grazing land, sustaining communities like the Gujjars and Bakkarwals. Restoration and pastoralist rights are now a national priority.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
Rangelands	Grasslands, savannahs and shrublands	Cover nearly half the planet; store soil carbon
Degradation	Loss of productivity and ecological function	Up to half of global rangelands are affected
Pastoralists	Mobile grazing communities	Their livelihoods and rights depend on healthy rangelands
UNCCD theme 2026	“Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore”	Hosted by Kenya; foregrounds neglected ecosystems

THE ANALYSIS: THE COST OF INVISIBILITY

- ❶ **Rangelands are undervalued.** Classified as wasteland, they are overlooked despite storing vast soil carbon and supporting global biodiversity.
- ❷ **Degradation drivers compound.** Overgrazing, conversion to cropland, climate change and policy neglect together erode these lands at scale.
- ❸ **India’s stake is large.** Around 121 million hectares, roughly 40 percent of grazing land, sustain pastoral economies and ecological balance.
- ❹ **Pastoralists are custodians, not encroachers.** Communities like the Gujjars and Bakkarwals practise mobile pastoralism that is itself an ecological management system.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Up to half the world’s rangelands degraded, nearly double earlier estimates.

“Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore,” host Kenya.

Around 121 million hectares, about 40 percent of land used for grazing.

Gujjars and Bakkarwals among others.

June 17, World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

THE DEBATE

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Argument for prioritising rangelands: They cover nearly half the land surface and sustain millions of pastoralists, so their degradation has outsized climate and social consequences.

Argument for forest priority: With scarce restoration funds, some argue forests deserve precedence because they sequester more carbon per hectare.

Balanced verdict: Rangelands and forests are not substitutes. Rangelands deliver distinct soil-carbon, water and livelihood benefits that forests cannot, so neglecting them is a false economy.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

Watch for the ecosystem or group rendered . Labelling rangelands as “wasteland” predetermines neglect. The analytical move is to question the category itself: who decided this land was worthless, and what does that framing hide?

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Overgrazing + conversion + climate -> Rangeland degradation -> Carbon and water loss -> Pastoralist distress -> Recognize, Respect, Restore

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Recognise rangelands in policy** rather than treating them as wasteland.
- ② **Secure pastoralist land rights** so custodians can sustain mobile grazing systems.
- ③ **Restore native grasslands** with locally appropriate species and grazing management.
- ④ **Align with UNCCD goals** on land degradation neutrality and desertification.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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Case study for desertification, grassland ecology and pastoralist livelihoods.

“Rangelands are dying quietly because they are seen as nothing.”

*UNCCD 2026 theme and host (Kenya), India’s rangeland area, Gujjars and Bakkarwals, June 17
Desertification Day.*

The justice of recognising marginalised communities as ecological custodians rather than encroachers.

GS1 questions on geography and society; GS3 on land degradation and conservation.

UNCCD, desertification, pastoralism, biodiversity, climate resilience (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/resilience/>).

Sources: *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

Source: Rangelands in Silent Demise — [Ujijari.com](https://ujijari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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A UN assessment finds up to half the world's rangelands degraded, nearly double earlier estimates, threatening climate resilience, food and water security, and pastoralist livelihoods.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- Rangelands store carbon, support biodiversity and underpin pastoral economies.
- Degradation drivers include overgrazing, land conversion, climate change and policy neglect.
- In India rangelands span around 121 million hectares, about 40 percent of land used for grazing.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Some argue scarce restoration funds should prioritise forests, which sequester more carbon per hectare.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Recognise rangelands in policy, secure pastoralist land rights, restore native grasslands and align with UNCCD goals.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

Rangeland degradation is an overlooked dimension of the desertification crisis. Examine its causes, consequences, and the case for restoration in India. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

On World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, a UN assessment warns that up to half the world's rangelands are degraded, nearly double earlier estimates. This silent crisis threatens climate, food and pastoral livelihoods alike.

BODY

Rangelands, the grasslands, savannahs and shrublands that cover nearly half the planet's land surface, are among the most neglected ecosystems in conservation policy. Yet they store vast amounts of soil carbon, sustain biodiversity and underpin the livelihoods of pastoralist communities worldwide.

The 2026 UNCCD theme, "Rangelands: Recognize. Respect.

Restore," with Kenya as host, foregrounds this neglect. The drivers of degradation are familiar: overgrazing, conversion to cropland, climate change and a policy gaze that classifies grasslands as wasteland ripe for other uses.

In India, rangelands span around 121 million hectares, roughly 40 percent of the land used for grazing, and sustain communities like the Gujjars and Bakkarwals whose mobile pastoralism is itself an ecological practice. Treating these lands as empty invites both ecological loss and social injustice.

Restoration must combine native grassland revival with secure land tenure for pastoralists, recognising them as custodians rather than encroachers. The carbon, water and food security stakes are national.

CONCLUSION

Rangelands are dying quietly because they are seen as nothing. Recognising their ecological and social value, securing pastoralist rights and restoring native grasslands must become a national priority aligned with India's UNCCD commitments.


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