POLICY BRIEF

WWF FOOD PRACTICE • MARCH 2022

Response to the first draft post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: Grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems: Targets 2, 3 and 10

The post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework provides a unique opportunity to focus attention on the protection, management and restoration of grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems.

Globally, these ecosystems are in urgent need of three overarching actions:

1. **Protect**: increasing the area conserved in ecologically representative protected and conserved areas to include viable, well-connected examples of all relevant ecoregions – **Target 3**: "Ensure that at least 30%globally of land areas … are conserved through … well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures".

2. **Manage:** improving management of the world's grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems to increase carbon storage, optimise grazing levels, boost biodiversity to support adaption to climate change, reduce compaction and erosion, and increase other ecosystem services, such as water security – **target 10**: "Ensure all areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably…"

3. **Restore:** implementing large-scale restoration to re-establish ecosystem services and improve the livelihoods of over a billion people living on degraded farmland. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration provides a mandate – **Target 2**: "Ensure that at least 20% of degraded … ecosystems are under restoration…" should be increased to 50% to meet wider GBF goals.

Grasslands, savannahs and rangelands play critical but often hidden roles in a wide range of ecosystem services, including climate change mitigation and adaptation.

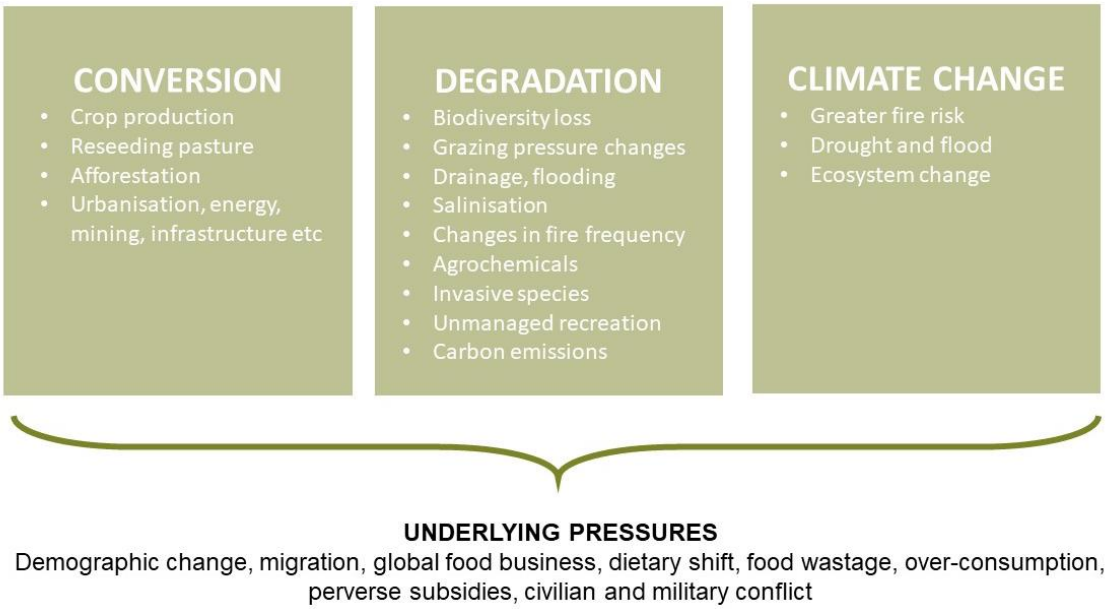

Figure 1: Some of the ecosystem services from grasslands, savannahs and rangelands

Ecosystem services from grassland, savannah and rangeland are far more valuable than usually recognised[1]. They provide carbon stores to mitigate climate change[2], possibly more reliable than forests in places at high fire risk[3], with huge restoration potential[4]. Grasslands reduce desertification[5] and dust storms and protect water supplies[6]. Grasslands support a quarter of the world's people with a huge cultural diversity, from gauchos in South America to nomadic pastoralists of Central Asia[7], and many contain sacred landscapes[8]. They cover 54% of the land[9] and support food security[10] through livestock[11] and wild food collection[12], and are the basis for almost all agricultural lands.

But these ecosystems are amongst the most threatened in the world: under pressure on three fronts, from conversion, degradation and the impacts of climate change.

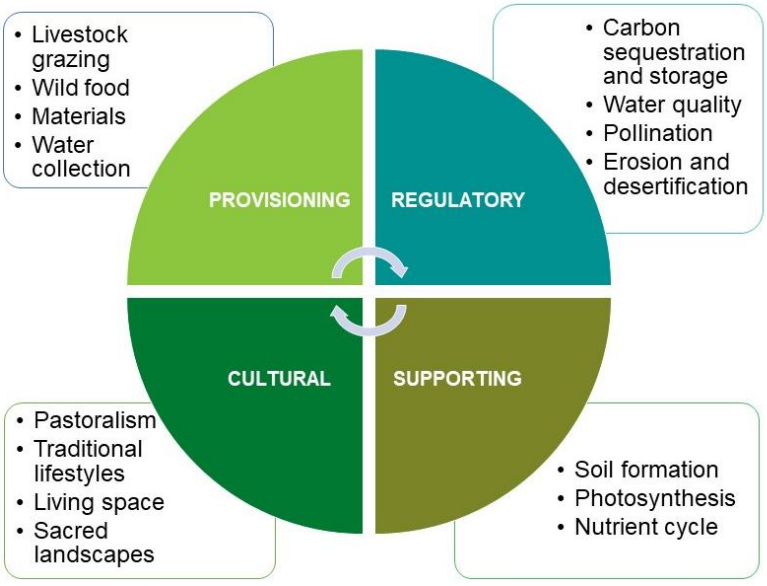

Figure 2: Threats to grassland and savannah ecosystems

Grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems are at high risk. Over 40% have been converted[13]. From 1998 to 2013, 19% of grasslands, and 27% of rangelands showed persistent declining productivity trends[14]. Grasslands are poorly protected, with only 4.5% of temperate grasslands protected,[15] leaving the biome liable to fragmentation and loss,[16] with national laws often too weak to provide security.[17]

Losses come from conversion to agricultural crops[18] and tree plantations,[1920] the latter sometimes under the auspices of "reforestation policies";[21] from reseeding for intensive livestock production;©[22] and through the impacts of urbanisation,[23] transport infrastructure,[24] mining[25] and other factors.

Equally serious, but more difficult to measure, are the various forms of degradation, caused by changes in grazing pressure (both over-grazing[26] and under-grazing), drainage of wet grasslands, poor irrigation leading to salinisation,[27] agrochemical[2829] and other forms of pollution, the impact of invasive species[30] and poorly controlled recreational activities including off-road driving.[31]

Meanwhile, climate change increases the likelihood and severity of many of these pressures by increasing the chances of both droughts[32] and floods, boosting the risk of disastrous fires[33] and shifting the baseline for entire ecosystems.

The GBF provides a unique opportunity to focus attention on the protection, management and restoration of grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems.

Globally, these ecosystems are in urgent need of three overarching actions:

1. **Protect:** increasing the area conserved in ecologically representative protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) to include ecologically-representative, viable and well-connected examples of all grassland and savannah ecoregions – GBF Target 3.
2. **Manage:** improving management of the world's rangelands to increase carbon storage,[34] optimise grazing levels, boost biodiversity to help adaption to climate change,[35] reduce compaction and erosion,[36] and increase other ecosystem services – GBF target 10.
3. **Restore:** implementing restoration over large areas of degraded land to restore ecosystem services and improve the livelihoods of over a billion people living on degraded farmland. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration provides a clear mandate – GBF Target 2.[37]

WWF's asks

Target 2 needs to increase its ambition and strengthen restoration of 50 % of degraded freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems and pay a special attention to restoration of grasslands, savannahs and rangelands as over 40% have already been converted.

All ecosystems are to be given equal weighting in **Target 3**, which WWF supports, but given their high rate of loss and low level of protection, grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems require particular attention to level up with other biomes in terms of protected area coverage.

The sustainable management components of **Target 10** should include explicit recognition of ecosystem services alongside agricultural production, particularly in respect to carbon sequestration, water security and soil conservation.

Redirect, repurpose, reform or eliminate all incentives harmful for biodiversity (**Target 18**) including elimination of financial support for afforestation of ecologically significant natural grasslands ecosystems and increasing the targeted amount of subsidy redirecting, repurposing, reforming, or eliminating from US$500 bn to $US1 trillion.

Explicit indicators are needed to focus attention on grasslands, savannahs and

Experience with the Aichi targets shows that targets without measurable indicators tend to fail. Quantitative targets hold governments accountable and help them plan coherent action programmes. To highlight the key role of grasslands and savannahs, we suggest:

• Data on the World Database on Protected Areas, WD-OECMs and Protected Planet is broken down by major biome to help to achieve ecological representation in protected and conserved area networks (Target 3)

• Carbon sequestration in livestock rangelands and natural grasslands and savannahs be included as an indicator to measure progress in sustainable management (Target 10)

• The restoration target be increased to 50%, to match better the ambitions of other conventions and the overarching target of living in harmony with nature by 2050(Target 2)

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