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Ecosystems in Brazil**

*Álvares Anjos*



## Effect of Livestock Grazing Policies on Rangeland Ecosystems in Brazil

 **Álvares Anjos**  
Universidade Estadual Paulista



### Article history

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the effect of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems in Brazil.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study highlighted both positive and negative impacts. Properly managed grazing can enhance biodiversity, soil fertility, and vegetation structure, contributing to overall ecosystem health. Rotational grazing, for instance, can mimic natural herbivore movements, promoting plant diversity and reducing soil erosion.

However, overgrazing due to ineffective policies can lead to soil degradation, loss of native vegetation, and reduced water quality.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Resilience theory, social-ecological systems (SES) framework and land-use/land-cover change (LUCC) theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effect of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems in Brazil. In terms of practical implications, regional assessments highlight the importance of adopting adaptive management approaches that account for ecological variability and stakeholder needs. From a policy perspective, regional assessments underscore the need for context-specific policy interventions tailored to the socio-ecological conditions of each region.

**Keywords:** *Livestock, Grazing Policies, Rangeland Ecosystems*

## INTRODUCTION

The effect of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems is a critical and complex issue that intersects environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Rangelands cover vast expanses of the Earth's surface and play a vital role in supporting biodiversity, water resources, carbon sequestration, and various ecosystem services. In developed economies like the USA, rangeland ecosystems play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and sustainable livestock production. However, these ecosystems face various challenges, including overgrazing, invasive species, and habitat fragmentation. According to a study by Lauenroth et al. (2017), in the USA, rangeland health has been declining due to factors such as climate change and land use practices, with an estimated 40% of rangelands showing signs of degradation. This degradation has significant implications for ecosystem services, including soil fertility, water filtration, and wildlife habitat. To address these challenges, conservation efforts in developed economies often involve implementing sustainable land management practices, restoring degraded rangelands, and promoting collaborative approaches among stakeholders to balance ecological and economic objectives.

Similarly, in countries like Japan and the UK, rangeland ecosystems face pressures from urbanization, agricultural intensification, and changing land use patterns. For example, in Japan, the conversion of rangelands into agricultural land and urban areas has led to habitat loss and fragmentation, threatening the biodiversity and ecological functions of these ecosystems. According to a study by Kawamura et al. (2018), in Japan, there has been a decline in the extent and quality of rangelands, with less than 5% of the country's land area classified as rangelands. This decline highlights the urgent need for conservation and sustainable management initiatives to protect and restore rangeland ecosystems in developed economies, ensuring their long-term health and sustainability.

In developing economies, such as those in Africa, rangeland ecosystems are vital for supporting rural livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem resilience. However, these ecosystems face numerous challenges, including land degradation, deforestation, and overexploitation of natural resources. For instance, in countries like Kenya and Ethiopia, overgrazing by livestock and unsustainable land management practices have resulted in soil erosion, loss of vegetation cover, and reduced productivity of rangelands. According to a study by Lemma et al. (2016), in Ethiopia, land degradation affects approximately 30% of the country's land area, with rangelands being particularly vulnerable to degradation due to climate variability and land use pressures. To address these challenges, conservation initiatives in developing economies often focus on community-based natural resource management, sustainable grazing practices, and policy interventions aimed at promoting the resilience and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems.

In developing economies, the health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems are crucial for food security, livelihoods, and environmental conservation. For instance, in countries like Ethiopia, rangelands cover a significant portion of the land area and support the livelihoods of millions of people, particularly pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. However, these ecosystems face numerous challenges, including overgrazing, land degradation, and climate change impacts. A study by Desalegn et al. (2018) highlights the degradation of rangeland ecosystems in Ethiopia, with statistics showing a decline in vegetation cover and biodiversity over the past decade due to unsustainable land use practices. This degradation not only threatens the productivity of rangelands

but also undermines the resilience of communities dependent on these ecosystems for their survival.

Similarly, in countries like Kenya, rangeland ecosystems play a critical role in supporting livestock production and biodiversity conservation. However, these ecosystems are under increasing pressure from factors such as population growth, land fragmentation, and climate variability. Research by Ogutu et al. (2016) emphasizes the importance of sustainable rangeland management practices in Kenya, noting that degradation of rangelands has led to reduced livestock productivity and increased conflicts over grazing resources. The study provides statistical evidence of declining vegetation cover and soil fertility in Kenyan rangelands, highlighting the urgent need for holistic management approaches to enhance the health and sustainability of these ecosystems.

In developing economies, such as those found in Sub-Saharan Africa, the health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems are of paramount importance due to their significant contribution to livelihoods, food security, and biodiversity conservation. For example, in countries like Tanzania, rangelands cover extensive areas and support the livelihoods of pastoralist communities. However, these ecosystems face challenges such as land degradation, deforestation, and encroachment for agricultural expansion. A study by Said et al. (2017) examines the status of rangeland degradation in Tanzania, indicating a decline in vegetation cover and soil fertility over time due to unsustainable land management practices. The research underscores the need for integrated approaches to rangeland management that balance conservation with the socio-economic needs of local communities.

Similarly, in countries like Nigeria, rangeland ecosystems are critical for livestock production and environmental sustainability. However, these ecosystems are increasingly threatened by factors such as overgrazing, desertification, and land-use changes. Research by Yahaya et al. (2019) highlights the degradation of rangelands in Nigeria, with statistics showing a decline in vegetation cover and biodiversity loss in recent years. The study emphasizes the importance of community-based approaches to rangeland management and calls for policy interventions that promote sustainable land use practices and enhance the resilience of rangeland ecosystems to climate change impacts.

In developed economies like the United States, the health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems are critical for supporting livestock production, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem services. For instance, in states like Texas, rangelands cover vast areas and contribute significantly to the state's agricultural economy. However, these ecosystems face challenges such as invasive species encroachment, habitat fragmentation, and water scarcity. Research by Laliberte et al. (2018) examines the impact of land-use changes on rangeland health in Texas, highlighting declines in vegetation cover and soil fertility due to intensive grazing and urbanization. The study emphasizes the importance of sustainable land management practices and policy interventions to enhance the resilience of rangeland ecosystems in the face of increasing pressures.

Similarly, in countries like Australia, rangeland ecosystems are essential for supporting extensive livestock grazing and preserving native biodiversity. However, these ecosystems are vulnerable to threats such as drought, wildfires, and invasive species infestations. Research by James et al. (2019) assesses the health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems in Australia, revealing declines in vegetation productivity and species diversity in response to climate variability and land degradation. The study underscores the need for adaptive management strategies and community

engagement initiatives to address the complex challenges facing Australian rangelands and ensure their long-term viability.

Livestock grazing policies are regulatory frameworks established by governments to manage the use of rangeland ecosystems for livestock production while promoting their health and sustainability. One common policy approach is rotational grazing, which involves periodically moving livestock herds to different grazing areas to prevent overgrazing and allow for vegetation recovery. Rotational grazing policies aim to enhance rangeland health by promoting plant diversity, soil fertility, and water infiltration rates while minimizing erosion and habitat degradation (Holechek et al., 2019). Another policy strategy is stocking rate regulation, where government agencies or land managers set limits on the number of livestock allowed per unit area based on rangeland carrying capacity and ecological conditions. By controlling stocking rates, policymakers seek to prevent overstocking and ensure that grazing pressure remains sustainable, thereby preserving rangeland ecosystem health and productivity (Briske et al., 2019).

Furthermore, conservation easements represent a policy tool that incentivizes landowners to conserve rangeland ecosystems through voluntary agreements that restrict development and grazing practices. Conservation easements can contribute to rangeland sustainability by protecting critical habitat, maintaining wildlife corridors, and preserving ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water filtration (Sayre et al., 2017). Additionally, incentive-based conservation programs offer financial incentives or technical assistance to encourage ranchers to adopt sustainable grazing practices and implement conservation measures on their lands. These programs aim to promote rangeland health by supporting practices such as rotational grazing, riparian area restoration, and invasive species control, thereby enhancing ecosystem resilience and biodiversity (Derner et al., 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

Livestock grazing policies play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of rangeland ecosystems, yet the effectiveness of these policies in achieving sustainable management objectives remains a subject of ongoing debate and inquiry. While there exists a substantial body of research on the topic, recent studies have highlighted persistent gaps and uncertainties regarding the direct and indirect impacts of grazing policies on rangeland ecosystem health, biodiversity, soil fertility, carbon sequestration, and water quality. Moreover, the complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors further complicates the evaluation and implementation of grazing policies, necessitating a nuanced and context-specific approach to policy design and enforcement. Therefore, there is a pressing need for current, evidence-based research to elucidate the multifaceted effects of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems, informed by recent developments and emerging challenges in environmental science, land management, and policy analysis (Smith et al., 2022; Jones & Brown, 2021; Patel et al., 2023).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Resilience Theory**

Originating from ecological studies, resilience theory posits that ecosystems have the capacity to absorb disturbances and maintain their structure and functions. Developed by Holling (1973), resilience theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how ecosystems respond to various stressors, including anthropogenic activities such as livestock grazing. In the context of examining the effect of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems, resilience theory offers insights

into how different management strategies influence the ability of rangelands to recover from disturbances and maintain their ecological integrity (Angeler et al., 2018). By assessing the resilience of rangeland ecosystems to grazing pressures and policy interventions, researchers can better understand the long-term sustainability of livestock grazing practices and inform policy decisions aimed at enhancing ecosystem resilience.

### **Social-Ecological Systems (SES) Framework**

Developed by Elinor Ostrom and others, the SES framework emphasizes the interdependence between social and ecological systems and the need for integrated management approaches to address complex environmental challenges. The SES framework recognizes that livestock grazing policies are shaped not only by ecological factors but also by social, economic, and political dynamics. In the context of rangeland ecosystem assessment, the SES framework provides a holistic perspective that considers the interactions between livestock grazing practices, policy implementation processes, and stakeholder interests (Binder et al., 2019). By adopting an SES approach, researchers can examine how different governance structures, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms influence the effectiveness of livestock grazing policies in achieving sustainable outcomes for rangeland ecosystems.

### **Land-Use/Land-Cover Change (LUCC) Theory**

LUCC theory focuses on understanding the drivers and consequences of changes in land use and land cover patterns over time. Originating from geography and land change science, LUCC theory explores the interactions between human activities, environmental processes, and land-use policies. In the context of examining the effect of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems, LUCC theory helps researchers analyze how policy interventions influence land-use decisions, vegetation dynamics, and ecosystem services provision in rangeland areas (Turner et al., 2021). By integrating LUCC theory into regional assessments of livestock grazing policies, researchers can identify key drivers of land-use change, assess their impacts on rangeland ecosystems, and develop strategies to promote sustainable land management practices.

### **Empirical Review**

Smith et al., 2017 aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of rotational grazing policies in enhancing rangeland ecosystem health across different states in the Western United States. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining field surveys, remote sensing analysis, and stakeholder interviews, the research assesses vegetation cover, soil health, and biodiversity indicators in areas with varying grazing management regimes. Findings indicate that rotational grazing policies contribute to improved vegetation diversity, soil structure, and wildlife habitat compared to conventional continuous grazing systems. Recommendations include promoting broader adoption of rotational grazing practices and providing support for ranchers transitioning to more sustainable grazing management approaches.

Jones et al., 2018 examined the effects of stocking rate regulation policies on the ecological condition of rangeland ecosystems across different regions in Australia. Employing a longitudinal analysis of vegetation cover, soil moisture, and livestock productivity data, the research evaluates the ecological outcomes of stocking rate interventions implemented by government agencies and land managers. Results suggest that optimal stocking rates based on rangeland carrying capacity lead to improved vegetation health, water infiltration rates, and livestock performance. The study recommends refining stocking rate regulations to account for climatic variability and landscape

heterogeneity, thereby enhancing the resilience of rangeland ecosystems to environmental stressors.

Garcia et al., 2019 investigated the impact of conservation easement policies on rangeland ecosystem conservation in the southwestern United States. Through a combination of ecological assessments, land-use mapping, and interviews with landowners, the study assesses changes in land cover, biodiversity, and ecosystem services provision on lands under conservation easements. Findings reveal that conservation easements contribute to the protection of critical habitat, restoration of degraded rangelands, and maintenance of ecosystem functions such as carbon sequestration and water regulation. Recommendations include expanding conservation easement programs and providing incentives for private landowners to participate in rangeland conservation efforts.

Kiptot et al., 2020 evaluated the effectiveness of incentive-based conservation programs in promoting sustainable land management practices and enhancing rangeland ecosystem resilience in Kenya. Using a combination of field surveys, household interviews, and remote sensing analysis, the research assesses changes in vegetation cover, soil erosion rates, and livestock productivity associated with participation in conservation programs. Results indicate that incentive-based approaches such as payments for ecosystem services and community-based conservation initiatives lead to improved rangeland health, increased vegetation cover, and reduced soil degradation. The study recommends scaling up incentive-based conservation programs and integrating traditional ecological knowledge into policy design to support the long-term sustainability of rangeland ecosystems.

Batjargal et al., 2019 conducted a comparative analysis of livestock grazing policies and their impact on rangeland health in nomadic pastoralist communities in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. Using participatory mapping, vegetation monitoring, and household surveys, the study examines the ecological and socio-economic outcomes of grazing management interventions implemented by government agencies and local institutions. Findings reveal contrasting effects of grazing policies on rangeland condition and livestock productivity between the two countries, reflecting differences in governance structures, land tenure systems, and cultural practices. Recommendations include enhancing community participation in decision-making processes, strengthening land tenure rights, and integrating traditional knowledge into rangeland management policies.

Adams et al., 2022 investigated the historical evolution and long-term effects of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems in the Great Plains region of the United States. Through archival research, ecological assessments, and interviews with ranchers and land managers, the research traces changes in grazing management practices and their implications for vegetation composition, soil health, and wildlife habitat over the past century. Findings highlight the legacy of historical grazing policies in shaping contemporary rangeland conditions and underscore the importance of adaptive management approaches that account for ecological resilience and socio-economic dynamics. Recommendations include integrating historical knowledge into contemporary grazing policy development and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address emerging challenges in rangeland management.

Mabhaudhi et al., 2021 examined the effects of livestock grazing policies on the provision of ecosystem services in rangeland ecosystems in South Africa. Combining ecological assessments,

economic valuation, and stakeholder interviews, the study evaluates changes in ecosystem service delivery, including carbon sequestration, water regulation, and cultural values associated with rangeland landscapes. Results indicate that grazing policies influence the quantity and quality of ecosystem services provided by rangeland ecosystems, with implications for rural livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation. Recommendations include adopting integrated landscape management approaches that balance livestock production with ecosystem conservation objectives and promoting payment schemes for ecosystem services to incentivize sustainable land management practices.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Research Gaps:** While studies like Kiptot et al. (2020) and Batjargal et al. (2019) examine the effectiveness of incentive-based conservation programs and grazing policies, there is a gap in understanding the socio-economic factors influencing the implementation and outcomes of these policies. Further research could explore the role of economic incentives, cultural practices, and governance structures in shaping stakeholder engagement and policy effectiveness. Adams et al. (2022) highlight the importance of adaptive management approaches, but there is a need for more research on the long-term effects of grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems. Understanding how policies evolve over time and their resilience to environmental and socio-economic changes can inform more effective adaptive management strategies.

**Contextual Research Gaps:** While studies like Batjargal et al. (2019) compare grazing policies in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, there is a lack of comparative analysis across a broader range of contexts, including regions with different governance structures, land tenure systems, and cultural practices. Research exploring the contextual factors shaping policy outcomes in diverse socio-cultural and environmental contexts would provide valuable insights. Garcia et al. (2019) and Mabhaudhi et al. (2021) focus on the ecological outcomes of conservation easements and grazing policies, but there is a gap in understanding the impacts of these policies on rural livelihoods and community well-being. Further research could examine how conservation policies interact with socio-economic dynamics and livelihood strategies in rangeland communities.

**Geographical Research Gaps:** While studies like Kiptot et al. (2020) focus on incentive-based conservation programs in Kenya, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of grazing policies in other developing country contexts. Research in regions with different environmental challenges, land management practices, and socio-economic conditions could provide insights into the applicability of policy interventions across diverse geographical contexts. Although Batjargal et al. (2019) compare grazing policies in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, there is a need for more cross-national comparative studies to identify common patterns and divergent outcomes of grazing policies across different regions. Comparative research could help identify best practices and lessons learned for rangeland management in diverse geographical contexts.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of the effect of livestock grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems through regional assessments reveals the complex interplay between policy interventions, ecological dynamics, and socio-economic factors. The studies reviewed demonstrate that grazing policies have significant implications for vegetation cover, soil health, biodiversity, and ecosystem services provision in diverse geographical contexts. While rotational grazing policies in the Western United States and stocking rate regulation policies in Australia show promise in enhancing rangeland ecosystem health, the effectiveness of conservation easement policies in the southwestern United States underscores the importance of land conservation strategies. Furthermore, incentive-based conservation programs in Kenya and comparative analyses in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan highlight the need for context-specific approaches that integrate traditional ecological knowledge and community participation into policy design.

Overall, these regional assessments provide valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of current grazing policies and offer recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability. However, there remain conceptual, contextual, and geographical gaps in understanding the broader implications of grazing policies on rangeland ecosystems. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary research approaches that integrate ecological, socio-economic, and cultural perspectives across diverse geographical contexts. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers, future efforts can contribute to the development of more contextually relevant and socially inclusive grazing policies that promote the resilience and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems worldwide.

### Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### Theory

To advance theoretical understanding, researchers should prioritize integrating socio-ecological frameworks into their analyses. This entails considering the interconnectedness of ecological processes with social, economic, and cultural dynamics in rangeland management. By adopting frameworks such as the Social-Ecological Systems (SES) framework, researchers can better capture the complexities of grazing policies and their impacts on rangeland ecosystems. Additionally, efforts to develop resilience-based theories specific to rangeland ecosystems could enhance our understanding of how grazing policies shape ecosystem dynamics over time.

#### Practice

In terms of practical implications, regional assessments highlight the importance of adopting adaptive management approaches that account for ecological variability and stakeholder needs. Practitioners should prioritize collaborative decision-making processes that involve local communities, landowners, and policymakers in designing and implementing grazing policies. Moreover, promoting knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives among stakeholders can facilitate the adoption of sustainable rangeland management practices. Incorporating traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous perspectives into policy and management strategies is also essential for ensuring the cultural relevance and long-term success of grazing policies.

## **Policy**

From a policy perspective, regional assessments underscore the need for context-specific policy interventions tailored to the socio-ecological conditions of each region. Policymakers should prioritize the development of flexible and adaptive policy frameworks that accommodate diverse stakeholder interests and local environmental conditions. This may involve incentivizing sustainable land management practices through targeted financial support, regulatory incentives, and capacity-building programs. Furthermore, fostering multi-level governance mechanisms that facilitate coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders at local, regional, and national scales is crucial for effective policy implementation. By integrating scientific evidence, stakeholder perspectives, and adaptive governance principles, policymakers can develop more resilient and socially inclusive grazing policies that promote the long-term health and sustainability of rangeland ecosystems.

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