FACT SHEET

The Summary for Policymakers of the IPBES thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration[1]

1. What is IPBES?

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an independent, intergovernmental body established in 2012, under the auspices of UNEP, FAO, UNESCO and UNDP. Its main mandate is to synthesize the state-of-the-art knowledge on biodiversity, ecosystems and their contributions to people, as well as the tools and methods to protect and sustainably use these vital natural assets.

IPBES has four working areas:

- **Assessments**: IPBES prepares global and regional reports on the state of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as on specific biodiversity topics
- **Policy Tools and Methodologies**: IPBES identifies tools and methodologies to use the results of assessments in policymaking.
- **Capacity Building**: IPBES identifies capacities and competencies required to work with IPBES, and to use its products.
- **Knowledge Generation**: IPBES identifies knowledge gaps and fosters closing them; IPBES itself does not conduct research.

2. What are the thematic assessments of IPBES?[2]

The first IPBES work program for the period 2014-2018 aims to cover cross-cutting topics, including global and regional assessments as well as methodological and communicational issues. One of its goals (objective 3) is to address thematic topics. To reach this objective IPBES is in the process of conducting four thematic assessments:

- **Deliverable 3(a):** Pollinators, pollination and food production (completed)
- **Deliverable 3(b)(i):** Land degradation and restoration (completed)
- **Deliverable 3(b)(ii):** Invasive alien species and their control
- **Deliverable 3(b)(iii):** Sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity and strengthening capacities and tools

Those assessments serve explicitly to support the formulation and implementation of the Platform's mandate to identify policy-relevant tools for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

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[1] IPBES (2018): Summary for policymakers of the thematic assessment report on land degradation and restoration of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. R. Scholes, L. Montanarella, A. Brainich, N. Barger, B. ten Brink, M. Cantele, B. Erasmus, J. Fisher, T. Gardner, T. G. Holland, F. Kohler, J. S. Kotiaho, G. Von Maltitz, G. Nangendo, R. Pandit, J. Parrotta, M. D. Potts, S. Prince, M. Sankaran and L. Willemen (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. [ ] pages.

[2] https://www.ipbes.net/thematic-assessments

3. What is the land degradation assessment?

The land degradation assessment is the world's first comprehensive evidence-based assessment report on land degradation. It covers the global status of and trends in land degradation, the effect of degradation on biodiversity values, ecosystem services and human well-being as well as the state of knowledge of ecosystem restoration. The aim is to compile the best-available evidence for decision makers to make informed decisions to halt and reverse land degradation.

The assessment was prepared by more than 100 leading international experts from 45 countries and draws on more than 3,000 scientific papers, government reports, indigenous and local knowledge & other sources. Furthermore, over 7,300 comments from more than 200 external reviewers, including governments, improved the assessment.

The land degradation assessment comprises two documents: a technical report (which will be published in late 2018) and a Summary for Policy Makers (SPM)[3].

After three years of research, the IPBES Member States negotiated and approved the Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) at the Platform's sixth plenary meeting (IPBES-6) in March 2018 in Medellin, Colombia.

4. What are the thematic priorities and target audiences of the land degradation assessment?

Thematic priorities:

- Identify the **threats** to land-based ecosystems by offering evidence from around the world
  - ➔ *Land degradation is a major problem on every continent except Antarctica*
- Evaluating the **consequences** of land degradation and its effects on quality of life
  - ➔ *At least 3.2 billion people are impacted by land degradation worldwide*
- Proposing a range of best-available **solutions**
  - ➔ *Sustainable land management and better informed consumers*
- Examine implications of land degradation for reaching key **global goals** and commitments
  - ➔ *E.g. SDGs, Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), Aichi Targets, the Bonn Challenge or the Paris Agreement*

Target audiences:

The report aims to support decision makers in governments, businesses and organizations to make better-informed choices about how to halt and reverse land degradation. It especially seeks to support the work of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), but also to provide information to land managers, purchasers of goods and individual households[4].

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[3] https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/ipbes-6-15-add-5_spm_ldr_advance.pdf
[4] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ldr_primer_en.pdf

5. How is land degradation defined?

The assessment defines "land degradation" as the many human-caused processes that drive the decline or loss in biodiversity, ecosystem functions or services in any terrestrial ecosystems.

The following figure shows the trade-offs among ecosystem services and biodiversity with land use intensification, using food production as an example. As food production increases, there is a decrease in other ecosystem services and biodiversity (illustrated by reduced bars) as compared to the undegraded state. In extreme cases, land has been degraded to the point of abandonment (right panel), thus providing less of all ecosystems services. This pattern generally applies to all ecosystems and land-use types. Deciding whether trade-offs among land-use types are negative or beneficial depends on values and priorities, and is therefore part of the socio-political decision-making process[5].

Figure[6]: Human transformation of natural ecosystems and trade-offs among ecosystem services and biodiversity

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[5] Box SPM.1 and Figure SPM.3 in IPBES (2018).
[6] Figure SPM.3 in IPBES (2018). Adapted from: Van der Esch, S., ten Brink, B., Stehfest, E., Bakkenes, M., Sewell, A., Bouwman, A., Meijer, J., Westhoek, H., and van den Berg, M. (2017). *Exploring future changes in land use and land condition and the impacts on food, water, climate change and biodiversity: Scenarios for the UNCCD Global Land Outlook.* The Hague: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

6. Structure and key messages of the Summary for Policy-Makers

Based on the report of land degradation, the SPM summarizes the most important information from the technical report into 16 key messages, grouped into three sections:

A: Land degradation is a pervasive, systemic phenomenon
B: Without urgent action land degradation will worsen
C: Change is needed now

The following tables cover the SPM's key messages as well as their degree of confidence[7].

A.	Land degradation is a pervasive, systemic phenomenon	Degree of confidence
A1.	Currently, degradation of the Earth's land surface through human activities is negatively impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people[a], pushing the planet towards a sixth mass species extinction[b], and costing more than 10 per cent of the annual global gross product in loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services[c].	[ac]well established [b]established but incomplete
A2.	Investing in avoiding land degradation and the restoration of degraded land makes sound economic sense[a]; the benefits generally by far exceed the cost[b].	[a]Well established [b]Established but incomplete
A3.	Timely action to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation can increase food and water security, can contribute substantially to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change[a] and could contribute to the avoidance of conflict and migration[b].	[a]Well established [b]Established but incomplete
A4.	Avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation is essential for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals contained in Agenda 2030	Well established

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[7] The IPBES assessments use four "confidence terms" in order to categorize the experts' level of confidence in their findings consistently: "well established" (robust evidence and high level of agreement), "unresolved" (robust evidence but low level of agreement), "established but incomplete" (low quantity and quality evidence but general level of agreement), and "inconclusive" (low quantity and quality of evidence and low level of agreement).

B.	**Without urgent action land degradation will worsen**	Degree of confidence
B1.	Widespread lack of awareness of land degradation as a problem is a major barrier to action.	Established but incomplete
B2.	High consumption lifestyles in more developed economies, combined with rising consumption in developing and emerging economies, are the dominant factors driving land degradation globally.	Well established
B3.	The full impact of consumption choices on land degradation worldwide is not often visible due to the distances that can separate many consumers and producers.	Established but incomplete
B4.	Institutional, policy and governance responses to address land degradation are often reactive and fragmented, and fail to address the ultimate causes of degradation.	Established but incomplete
B5.	Land degradation is a major contributor to climate change, while climate change can exacerbate the impacts of land degradation and reduce the viability of some options for avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation.	Well established
B6.	Rapid expansion and unsustainable management of croplands and grazing lands is the most extensive global direct driver of land degradation.	Well established

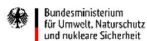| C.	**Change is needed now**	Degree of confidence
C1.	Existing multilateral environmental agreements provide a platform of unprecedented scope and ambition for action to avoid and reduce land degradation and promote restoration.	/
C2.	More relevant, credible and accessible information is needed to allow decision makers, land managers, and purchasers of goods to improve the long-term stewardship of land and sustainability of natural resource use.	Well established
C3.	Coordinated policy agendas that simultaneously encourage more sustainable production and consumption practices of land-based commodities are required to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation.	Well established
C4.	Eliminating perverse incentives that promote degradation and devising positive incentives that reward the adoption of sustainable land management practices are required to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation.	Established but incomplete

| C5. | Landscape-wide approaches that integrate the development of agricultural, forest, energy, water and infrastructure agendas, all informed by the best available knowledge and experience, are required to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation. | Well established |
| C6. | Responses to reduce environmental impacts of urbanization not only address the problems associated with urban land degradation, but can also significantly improve quality of life while simultaneously contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation. | Well established |

7. Further reading

- Summary for Policymakers of the IPBES thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration (advance version) https://www.ipbes.net/system/tdf/downloads/ipbes-6-15-add-5_spm_ldr_advance.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=23015
- IPBES website: http://www.ipbes.net/
- IPBES on the ValuES website: http://www.aboutvalues.net/ipbes/