

INTRODUCTION

An outlook is a vantage point, a platform, a perspective; it broadens our vistas and allows us to examine our prospects, both present and future. It is within this broader frame of thinking that the *Global Land Outlook* (GLO) aims to present a unique perspective on one of the Earth's most precious assets: land.

Land, literally the ground beneath our feet, is a finite resource composed of soil, water, minerals, plants, and animals. It is an essential part of our life support system and the key building block of our societies and economies. As we grapple with the current state of land resources – a sober reminder of past misuse and mismanagement – the first edition of the GLO presents both grounds for concern and opportunities for action.

The health and resilience of our land resources are largely determined by management practices, governance systems, and environmental changes. The transformation of our natural ecosystems, the inefficient use of water resources, and the excessive use and misuse of agrochemicals¹ contributes to land degradation at the local level as well as increased greenhouse gas emissions, reduced biodiversity, and changes in rainfall on regional and global scales.² Land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change are now recognized as intertwined threats to multiple dimensions of human security and contribute to a downward spiral in the productivity and availability of land resources.³

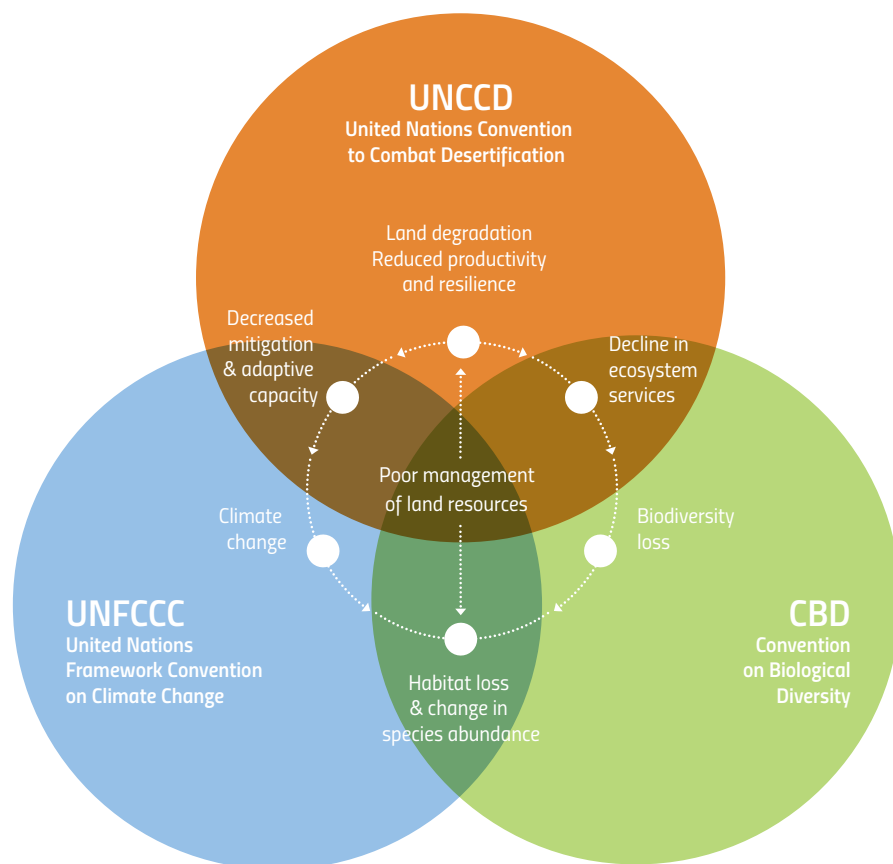
The GLO provides a brief overview of how land is used today and assesses likely scenarios for how we can sustainably meet the demand for land-based goods and services into the future. It focuses on broader policy and practice, the cardinal issues long requiring attention, as well as the emerging concerns that need to be considered in the global public policy agenda. The GLO is a strategic, forward-looking discussion and analysis that draws upon well-documented scientific research and empirical evidence. A comprehensive global assessment of land degradation and restoration is being undertaken by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

The premise is that land, and its associated resources, comprise a stock of natural capital. The increasing demand for land-based goods and services, and the manner in which they are today produced is adversely impacting the health and future productivity of the planet. The misuse and

over-exploitation of land resources are threatening human security on multiple fronts: diminishing food and water security as well as reduced soil health and ecosystem resilience make us more vulnerable to extreme weather events and the impacts of climate change, and even threaten stability and security within and between nations.

The GLO presents an overview of the status of land and a clear set of responses to optimize land use, management, and planning, and thereby create synergies among sectors in the provision of land-based goods and services. This integrated approach is the basis of the conceptual framework for land degradation neutrality (see Annex One), a target which is seen as the driving vehicle for the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and an important part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Figure 1: Intertwined threats and the objectives of the Rio conventions



The GLO not only puts forth practical pathways to a more sustainable and desirable future but also highlights likely scenarios, recognizing that decisions and investments made today will influence land use and management tomorrow. Many already point to the urgent need to reassess the values and attitudes that determine how we currently use and manage our land resources. We are confident that this Outlook will help advance a new a new vision and agenda for action to ensure a more secure future.

This first edition of the GLO is a response to the mandate given to the UNCCD secretariat: namely, to continually seek innovative approaches and products that increase awareness of desertification, land degradation, and drought while advocating for proven and cost-effective solutions to advance numerous targets contained in the Sustainable Development Goals. It is expected that the GLO, as the UNCCD's flagship publication, will be issued periodically and take its place among other Outlooks.

One of the UNCCD's main aims is to help countries overcome the barriers to the adoption and scaling up of sustainable land management (SLM) policies and practices needed to reduce poverty, and increase food, water, and energy security for all.

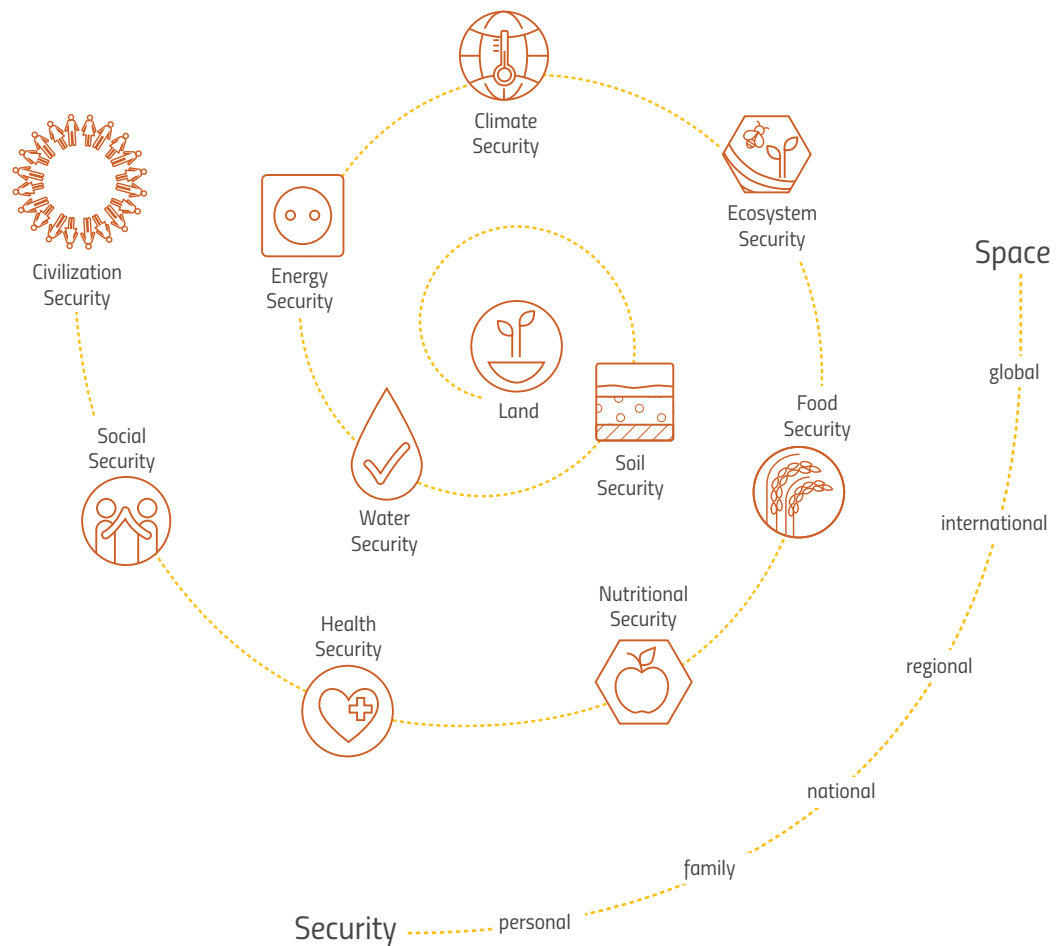
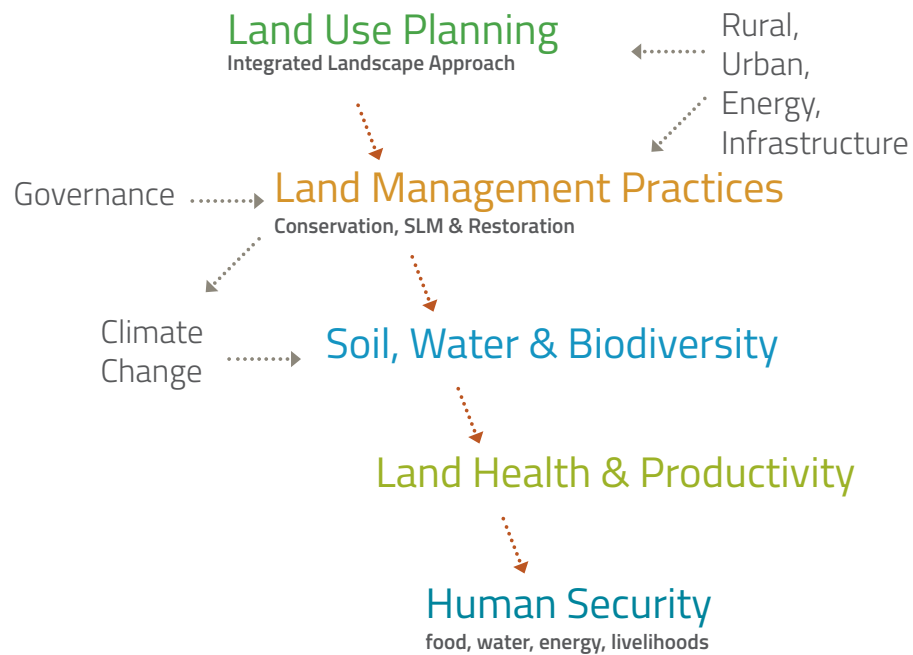


Figure 2: Dimensions of human security:
Adapted from⁴

Figure 3: Main themes of the *Global Land Outlook*



The GLO is presented in such a manner as to be accessible to civil society and decision-makers in both the private and public sectors. It is part of a broader effort to facilitate discussion on land use policy and practice by illustrating the fundamental importance of good land management. In doing so, the GLO argues that we all are decision-makers with the power to make change.

Part One looks at the big picture both in space and time, with a brief history of land use. It examines the drivers of degradation and land use change, and details the current pressures on land resources. It also looks at the impacts that land degradation can have on the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of our lives.

Part Two explores future scenarios or pathways, outlining a number of forecasts on the production and consumption of land-based goods and services. This is followed by thematic treatments of issues of global concern, highlighting current trends and future solutions.

Part Three presents an action agenda for a more secure future, examining proven and cost-effective options to scale up conservation, sustainable land management, and restoration practices to accelerate progress towards more equitable sustainable development.

While this first edition presents a constructive and optimistic Outlook, it deals with grim realities and daunting challenges. Let us start by taking a look at the big picture.

REFERENCES

- 1 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food to the Thirty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/34/48: January 24, 2017.
- 2 Sivakumar, M.V.K. 2007. Interactions between climate and desertification. *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology*. **142**: 143-155.
- 3 Barbut, M. and Alexander, S. 2015. Land degradation as a security threat amplifier: the new global frontier. In: Chabey, I., Frick, M. and Helgeson, J. (eds.) *Land Restoration: Reclaiming landscapes for a sustainable future*. Elsevier.
- 4 Lal, R. 2013. Food security in a changing climate. *Ecology and Hydrobiology*, **13**: 8-21.