KEY MESSAGES

THE BIG PICTURE: LAND UNDER PRESSURE

The current pressures on land are huge and expected to continue growing: there is rapidly escalating competition between the demand for land functions that provide food, water, and energy, and those services that support and regulate all life cycles on Earth.

A significant proportion of managed and natural ecosystems are degrading: over the last two decades, approximately 20 per cent of the Earth's vegetated surface shows persistent declining trends in productivity, mainly as a result of land/water use and management practices.

Biodiversity loss and climate change further jeopardize the health and productivity of land: higher carbon emissions and temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, soil erosion, species loss and increased water scarcity will likely alter the suitability of vast regions for food production and human habitation.

Land degradation decreases resilience to environmental stresses: increased vulnerability, especially of the poor, women and children, can intensify competition for scarce natural resources and result in migration, instability, and conflict.

Over 1.3 billion people are trapped on degrading agricultural land: farmers on marginal land, especially in the drylands, have limited options for alternative livelihoods and are often excluded from wider infrastructure and economic development.

The scale of rural transformation in recent decades has been unprecedented: millions of people have abandoned their ancestral lands and migrated to urban areas, often impoverishing cultural identity, abandoning traditional knowledge, and permanently altering landscapes.

AN EMERGING CONSENSUS: A BROKEN SYSTEM

Our inefficient food system is threatening human health and environmental sustainability: along with other degrading and polluting land uses focused on short-term returns, the current patterns of food production, distribution, and consumption largely fail to tackle these global challenges.

The widening gulf between production and consumption, and ensuing levels of food loss/waste, further accelerate the rate of land use change, land degradation and deforestation: in poor countries, food loss is primarily due to the lack of storage and transport while in wealthy nations, food waste is a result of profligacy and inefficiencies towards the end of the food supply chain.

The current agribusiness model benefits the few at the expense of the many: small-scale farmers, the essence of rural livelihoods and backbone of food production for millennia, are under immense stress from land degradation, insecure tenure, and a globalized food system that favors concentrated, large-scale, and highly mechanized farms.

Large-scale land acquisitions have increased dramatically in the last two decades: domestic elites and food-importing countries grab large tracts of arable land, usually with water rights and access to transport infrastructure, as a hedge against future price volatility and food insecurity.

It is the sum total of our individual decisions that is fueling a global land crisis: whether we act as consumers, producers, corporations, or governments, a business-as-usual approach will be insufficient to address the magnitude of this challenge.

A MORE SECURE FUTURE: RESPECT FOR LIMITS

Land is finite in quantity, however: the evidence presented in this *Outlook* suggests that, with changes in consumer and corporate behavior, and the adoption of more efficient planning and sustainable practices, we will have sufficient land available in the long-term to meet both the demand for essentials and the need for a wider array of goods and services.

We need to think in terms of respect for limits, not limits to growth: we can take immediate action without compromising the quality of life today or our aspirations for the future; informed and responsible decision-making, along with simple changes in our everyday lives, can help promote economic growth and at the same time reverse the current trends in land degradation.

To advance a new global land agenda, rights and rewards need to be underpinned by responsibility: increased security of tenure, gender equity, and appropriate incentives and rewards are essential enabling factors to help producers adopt and scale up more responsible land management practices.

Our ability to manage trade-offs at a landscape scale will ultimately decide the future of land resources: integration of conservation, land and water management, and restoration, the core pathway to achieve the target on Land Degradation Neutrality, is also acknowledged as an important accelerator for achieving most of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Smart land use planning is about doing the right thing in the right place at the right scale: a multifunctional landscape approach advocates for more rational land use allocations that lead to greater resource use efficiency and the reduction of waste; it is based on the principles of participation, negotiation, and cooperation.

Bold decisions and investments made today will determine the quality of Life on Land tomorrow: the numerous approaches, technologies, and practices highlighted in this *Outlook* serve as a timely reminder of proven, cost-effective pathways that will shape a prosperous and more secure future based on rights, rewards, and respect for our precious land resources.