

21 July 2015

English only

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Conference of the Parties

Twelfth session

Ankara, Turkey, 12–23 October 2015

The Global Land Outlook

Summary

In early 2015, the UNCCD secretariat, with voluntary contributions from the European Commission, the Governments of Switzerland and Korea and the United Nations Development Programme, initiated the process of developing a Global Land Outlook (GLO) to be considered as the UNCCD's new flagship publication. The first edition of the GLO is expected to be released in late 2016 or early 2017 in both print and digital format. This note describes the genesis and expectations of this publication and platform, and the process and activities undertaken to date.

ICCD/COP(12)/MISC.1
GE.15-12276(E)



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I. Background and genesis

1. The deterioration in both the quality and quantity of healthy and productive land is an immediate concern, especially in developing countries and those with a high proportion of fragile and vulnerable drylands. As a symbol and global champion of such concerns, the UNCCD recognizes that addressing them is one of the key sustainable development priorities for most of the 168 affected country Parties. In response, the UNCCD secretariat and its partners identified the need to create a communications publication and platform, entitled the Global Land Outlook (GLO), in order to facilitate insightful debate and discourse on a new and transformative vision for land management policy, planning and practice at global and national scales. The rationale for publishing and hosting the GLO is based on the following observations:

(a) Insufficient attention has been given to a comprehensive understanding of the changing nature and usage of land resources worldwide;

(b) There is increasing evidence that anthropogenic pressures are causing the deterioration of land quality at an unprecedented rate with serious social and economic consequences;

(c) The current and future pressures on land resources may result in sub-optimal outcomes in terms of food and water security, poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation;

(d) There are cost-effective pathways and actions to protect, restore and sustainably manage land resources in a manner that better optimizes environmental, economic and social benefits; and

(e) Such pathways and actions will require the appropriate policy and governance frameworks, increased investment and incentives, and technical and institutional capacities currently lacking in many countries.

2. The goal of the GLO is to communicate and raise awareness of scientifically-sound, policy-relevant information and trends among a variety of stakeholders, including national governments formulating their responses to commitments to better manage and restore land resources, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated targets, such as Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The GLO development and production costs are covered by voluntary contributions from the European Commission, the Governments of Switzerland and Korea, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

II. Process and activities to date

3. In early 2015, a coordinator was contracted to oversee the development and publication of the first edition of the GLO. With the support of the UNCCD secretariat, a core team was put together to produce a concept note and draft terms of reference for the GLO. A steering committee was subsequently formed, meeting for the first time on 7–8 July 2015 in Bonn, Germany. The members of this steering committee are affiliated with international and national organizations committed to a variety of issues directly related to sustainable land management (SLM) policy, planning and practice.

4. The GLO steering committee discussed the content and structure of the GLO in addition to ancillary work on scaling up and scaling out best practices and the development of a land management index. The provisional list of chapters for development is: 1) Introduction: A history of land use; 2) The main causes of land use change; 3) Future trends and scenarios; 4) Social and economic implications of land use; 5) Security and land; 6)

Special topics (multiple chapters possible); 7) A solutions agenda; 8) An action agenda; and 9) Conclusions and immediate actions.

5. With the generous support of the UNDP, it was agreed that a “working paper series” would be established to capture a range of land management issues and offer contributors an expanded space in which to discuss a strategic and transformative vision. It was also agreed that the GLO would not produce a technical assessment of the extent and degree of land degradation, nor would it duplicate the work of other initiatives focused on land management and restoration issues.

6. The UNCCD secretariat is preparing a preliminary report on the land-climate nexus, which is set for release in December 2015 at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) of the UNFCCC. The steering committee will meet on the margins of the COP 12 of the UNCCD, and again in early 2016 to assess progress to date and determine the final direction and key messages of the GLO. The scientific and technical content of the GLO will be validated by its partners and the Committee on Science and Technology’s (CST) Science and Policy Interface (SPI).

III. Expected outcomes

7. While the appropriate pathways and actions will depend upon the specific circumstances of each country and region, experiences and knowledge can be shared between countries. The GLO platform will demonstrate the central importance of land quality to human well-being, assess current trends in land conversion, degradation and loss, identify the driving factors of land use change, provide projections of future challenges and opportunities, and present options for land rehabilitation and restoration. The primary aim of the GLO is to promote the adoption of SLM in both policy and investment decisions.

8. As a communications and advocacy platform, the GLO will highlight key pathways of action, contextualized by case study material such as:

(a) Land use planning for multiple functions and benefits, including integrated land and water management policies and practices at the local and landscape level;

(b) Agricultural, livestock, forestry and other land use policies and practices designed to optimize social, economic and environmental returns; and

(c) Technical and institutional capacity building, including the role of research and development.

9. The GLO will also explore pathways for scaling up and scaling out best practices for SLM and restoration activities. The GLO will also feature a land management index to allow countries to benchmark their progress towards improved land management policy, planning and practice, and a target for LDN.

10. The first edition of the GLO will be published in late 2016 or early 2017 in both print and digital format. Issued every 3 to 4 years, the GLO is being proposed as the flagship publication of the UNCCD, akin to the CBD’s Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO) and the UNEP’s Global Environmental Outlook (GEO).
