Information Note
How to develop a Policy Brief to bring land degradation research to the attention of policymakers

Creating awareness and bringing soil and land degradation issues on to national political agenda is crucial to achieve a sustainable impact. Policy makers need to understand the importance of addressing land degradation and how they can take action to prevent it. A policy brief presents shortly a research project's results and implications to political decision-makers. This information note briefly presents a step by step process showing how to develop a policy brief. It provides a useful tool to help to move research results into beneficial political practice.

Preparatory steps

I. Before starting to develop a policy brief you need to consider **national barriers** that can hinder land and soil issues from becoming policy:
- political and institutional
- capacity and resourcing
- social and cultural
- legal and regulatory

These barriers are country specific, overlapping, and often occur simultaneously. Examples of common challenges are the following

	Political Will – Who will take responsibility?
Barriers	Political and institutional; Capacity and resourcing; Legal and regulatory
	➢ Land and soils cross-cut the remit of multiple ministries and departments ➢ Difficult to avoid conflicts and contradictions ➢ Requires leadership but also strong interplay and coordination with all relevant groups to balance stakeholders needs ➢ Media and private sector can be useful allies, but also act like barriers, if mainstream of soils and land issues into policy challenges established political-economic interests

	Knowledge, tools, data and information deficits
Barriers	Capacity and resourcing; Social and cultural
	➢ Mismatches between supply and demand – What information do policymakers have and what do they need? ➢ Lack of collaboration and sharing of knowledge and information across government departments and between countries ➢ Scale of knowledge and data not always appropriate for policymakers ➢ Social networking issues – reliance on personal contacts to channel knowledge and data on land and soils into policy

II. After considering possible barriers you need to specify the particular policy audience you want to reach:
- Who is it?
- What do they know about the topic?
- How open are they to engage?

It is often useful to establish contacts before starting your research. By doing so you can integrate policymakers' information needs into your research and **raise their interest** in results.

III. Be very clear about the **focus and purpose** of your policy brief.
- Define purpose
- Focus on **one single topic** not a whole project
- Identify main arguments that support your aim
- Extract essential information (approx. 3 key points)

Structuring your policy brief

The structure is essential for catching your audience's attention and to give the readers an understandable, informative, and convincing experience while reading. In general, a policy brief should cover between **2** and **4 pages** maximum. Within that space it should attempt to convince policy makers as to why they should care, the urgency of action to be taken and the benefits and costs of different options. Make clear also what they will lose through inaction.

Layout

An ideal layout leads the reader through the policy brief by highlighting the most important parts and enables the reader to understand the point of the policy brief by only skimming the document.
- Titles provide a reference point while subtitles can break up text and should entice readers
- Use verbs that make titles and subtitles more active, or ask questions (just make sure that you answer them!)
- Draw attention to specific aspects to the main discussion using:
  - <u>Callouts</u>: Sentences or sentence fragments in larger/bold fonts, boxed or placed in margins
  - <u>Side bars</u>: Short, descriptive, stimulating, action focused
  - <u>Bullet lists</u>: 3 or 5 points that present complete thoughts not just one or two words

Sources

1. MOOC: Land Matters! – Module 1A by Lindsay Stringer (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3A0iOGVbclo)
2. MOOC: Land Matters! – Module 1B by Lindsay Stringer (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dL0SnJ5qXT0)

The Structure of a Policy Brief

1. Executive Summary	➤ Give an overview ➤ Not more than 250 words ➤ Usually the last thing written ➤ Appears at the top of the first page ➤ Treat it as your headlines – distil the *essence* of the project
2. Introduction	➤ Show that the topic is urgent and significant ➤ Describe the aim ➤ Overview of findings and conclusion, without detailing them ➤ Reader should keep on reading; make use of the *previously identified interests*
3. Methods and Results	➤ Set out how the work was conducted and by whom (briefly) ➤ Provide relevant background (not detailed) to describe the issue and context ➤ Briefly note methods and analyses in a non-technical way ➤ Move from general to specific, summarizing the facts ➤ *Charts, photos and graphics* are useful and can simplify understanding better than tables ➤ Use figure captions to explain content so they are understandable on standalone reading
4. Conclusion	➤ Aim for concrete conclusions showing how they emerge from the results ➤ Make strong assertions but substantiate them ➤ Ensure ideas are balanced and defensible
5. Implications and Options	➤ Implications: what *could* happen...*"If x continues then y is likely to happen."* ➤ Note any uncertainties ➤ Implications are less direct than recommendations and useful when advice is not requested ➤ Persuasive *without being policy prescriptive* ➤ Policy makers are interested in *impacts on people*, not science ➤ Options or recommendations are what *should* happen ➤ Both flow from the conclusion and must be supported by evidence ➤ Describe clearly what should happen next as precise steps ➤ Ensure suggestions are relevant, credible and feasible, including costs where possible

Test your policy brief!

➤ **Test it on your colleagues, family or friends, asking them how it could be more user friendly**

➤ **Is it full of buzzwords and jargon or is it for anyone understandable?**

➤ **Have you blinded them with statistics?**