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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Knowledge, tools, data and information deficits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capacity and resourcing; Social and cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Land and soils cross-cut the remit of multiple ministries and departments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Difficult to avoid conflicts and contradictions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Requires leadership but also strong interplay and coordination with all relevant groups to balance stakeholders needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ 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</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:
  - **Callouts**: Sentences or sentence fragments in larger/bold fonts, boxed or placed in margins
  - **Side bars**: Short, descriptive, stimulating, action focused
  - **Bullet lists**: 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)