

## **External review of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM)**

**Review period: 1 May – 26 June 2017**

### **Response by co-chairs of the assessment on behalf of the full SPM team**

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The final summary for policymakers (SPM) of the Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment (LDRA) has now been approved, with further constructive feedback from the Governments, at the sixth session of IPBES Plenary (IPBES-6) in Medellin, Colombia (March 2018). The final product (available at <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/ldr>) has significantly evolved in structure and flow of content from the first order draft to its final approved version. It would be virtually impossible to connect the first draft of the SPM to the final body of text in a meaningful way. As such, the co-chairs of the SPM have drafted this letter on behalf of the full SPM team, as a summary synthesis of our responses to the first round of external review on SPM.

During its first external review, the summary for policymakers received a total of 1564 individual comments from 69 external reviewers, including Governments, scientific bodies, and individual experts. Having studied in depth all of the comments provided, it became evident that in order to reflect and encompass the extensive feedback, the SPM drafting team would need to substantially restructure and re-orient the subsequent draft of the document, which is the official IPBES-6 working document (IPBES/6/3) that went forward for negotiation and approval by the governments in March 2018.

The first order draft of the SPM was structured, as is practice in IPBES, in two sections. The first section consists of Key Messages, and is designed to be brief and easily read, thus no referencing pointers. The Second session expands on the same Key Messages, but provides a deeper background and pointers to the main report sections where the detailed assessment is contained. The Key messages of the first draft of the SPM were organised into four headings: (A) made the case for why land degradation had important consequences for human quality of life; (B) touched on the key immediate causes of land degradation, their impacts and responses; (C) dealt with the ultimate, underlying causes; and (D) collated the interactions between land degradation and the main international treaties which affected it or were affected by it. Special attention was given to the cross-cutting nature of land degradation and the need to address the problem with a coherent policy approach across the various Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the various Sustainable Development Goals.

In the second draft presented to Plenary at IPBES-6 (IPBES/6/3), same two-level structure of Key Messages and Background was maintained, but the number of Key message sections was reduced to three: (A) with 5 messages, which outlined the extent, scope and and importance of the land degradation issue; (B) with 6 messages which explained the causes of land degradation, both immediate and ultimate; and (C) with 6 messages explaining what could be done to halt, slow and reverse land degradation. Background Section then expanded on these themes under the same A, B and C headings, but the paragraphs in each do not bear a one-to-one relationship to the numbered messages in Key Message Section in the front. The combination of the restructuring of the section to provide a better narrative arc, and the lack of one-to-one correspondence, is what makes a comment-by-comment response to the external reviewers impossible. We are nevertheless deeply grateful for their input, which led directly to the restructurings discussed above and the coherent final draft that was extensively

discussed during the sixth session of IPBES Plenary in Medellin, Colombia, and finally approved by all IPBES Members.

With that in mind, we would like to address the issue of ‘baselines’ on which we received a number of comments. The comments on baseline are a shorthand for a cluster of related issues, for which we use the general term of ‘Reference State’, since it includes states which are real and hypothetical; in the distant or recent past and in the future (targets). The topic is quite exhaustively covered in Chapter 2 of the main report from a conceptual point of view (see Section 2.2.1.1. and Box 2.1), and again from a more technical/operation point of view in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.1.4), and in summary form in Chapter 1 (see Box 1.1), since this chapter sets definitions for use throughout the report. The topic is sufficiently complex and technical that the inclusion of this level of detail in the SPM is inappropriate; however, the idea is captured in the Background section in paragraph 15, and the pointers to the supporting material in chapters can be found therein.

Multiple comments were received regarding the first draft treatment of the following specific issues, and we addressed them as follows in subsequent drafts. The below comments do not represent an exhaustive list of all the comments received or of all changes made in the final document. Rather, we list them below as these comments were recurring and were made by multiple external reviewers.

- The overall length of the SPM was shortened to fit the needs of the policymakers;
- All language corrected to being policy-relevant instead of policy prescriptive;
- Different types of valuation of terrestrial ecosystems (in addition to including economic values) were included in the final draft. However, kindly refer to the text in the Foreword of the SPM on the explanation of the descriptive terminology used and under which circumstances (i.e., specific case of usage of nature’s contribution to people vs. ecosystem services);
- The messages were structured to include potential solutions to the various land degradation issues (i.e. rehabilitation and restoration options, and their benefits) rather than focussing entirely on the negative aspects of land degradation process. A table of restoration practices (with pointers to relevant chapters) was also included to aid guide action on the ground;
- The indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) component is featured more prominently in the final draft of the SPM;
- Better connections were made with relevant international and intergovernmental bodies and frameworks working on land-related issues;
- A table on knowledge gaps was included.

Overall, we consider that the main comments received from external reviewers were fully taken into account in the final revised draft of the SPM and that the resulting document from final discussions and negotiations at the sixth session of IPBES Plenary (IPBES-6) received full support and endorsement from the IPBES Members.

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