

FOREWORD

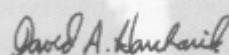
Efficient assessment of land cover and the ability to monitor change are fundamental to sustainable management of natural resources, environmental protection, food security and successful humanitarian programmes. Such information is also required by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in achieving its mandate of raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity, enhancing the lives of rural populations and contributing to sustainable growth of the world economy. However, in the past, policy-makers and planners have not had access to reliable and comparable land cover data, not only for lower-income countries but also at the regional and global levels.

FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have been collaborating in numerous initiatives for improving the reliability and compatibility of land cover data sets, and enabling access to the information for a large user community. A recent example of such collaboration is the Global Land Cover Network (GLCN), launched in 2004, with the support of the Government of Italy, the Government of the Netherlands and numerous institutes worldwide.

A critical factor in implementing such global activities is the availability of a common, harmonized land cover classification system that provides a reliable basis for interaction among the increasing number of national, regional and global land cover mapping and monitoring activities.

In the absence of a generally accepted or applicable system, FAO and UNEP have developed the Land Cover Classification System (LCCS), which enables comparison of land cover classes regardless of mapping scale, land cover type, data collection method or geographic location. Currently, LCCS is the only universally applicable classification system in operational use. LCCS' inherent flexibility, its applicability in all climatic zones and environmental conditions, and the built-in compatibility with other classification systems has given LCCS the potential to be accepted as the international standard. For these reasons, LCCS is currently in the approval process to become a standard of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

LCCS is already an important tool in global mapping, being used in initiatives such as the Global Land Cover 2000 project, and for the next global assessment, GLOBCOVER, which aims to produce a global land cover map for the year 2005. Developed initially through the practical experience of the Africover project, LCCS has been widely adopted at the national level throughout Africa, Asia, Near East and Latin America. The feedback from this large user community has resulted in the improved and updated version 2 of the software that accompanies this document.



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