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#### Linking scientific knowledge with decision-making

#### Work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2016–2017

## Information on the collaboration between the Science-Policy Interface and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

The Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 23/COP.11, established the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and requested the secretariat, in paragraph 16, to report to the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) at its twelfth session on the implementation of that decision.

Pursuant to the SPI mandate to interact with existing scientific mechanisms, the establishment of a collaboration with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil (ITPS) of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) has been integrated into the SPI work programme 2014–2015 as objective 4.

Document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/6 reports on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the SPI work programme 2014–2015. This complementary information document provides a detailed report on the implementation of objective 4 of the SPI work programme 2014–2015 regarding the collaboration with the ITPS. Information is provided on the (a) background and the (b) collaboration activities and outcomes of the cooperation between the SPI and the ITPS.

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## I. Background

1. By decision 23/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided to establish a Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to facilitate a two-way science-policy dialogue and ensure delivery of policy-relevant information, knowledge and advice on desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). The mandate of the SPI, defined in paragraph 3 of the same decision, asks the SPI, inter alia, to "interact with existing multiple scientific mechanisms, in particular the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil (ITPS) and other new and existing scientific networks and platforms". The establishment of a collaboration with the ITPS has thus been integrated into the SPI work programme 2014-2015 as objective 4: "Cooperate with the ITPS process in areas which are of relevance to the UNCCD and its Parties".

2. The rationale for developing a collaboration mechanism between the SPI and the ITPS is based on the recognition that the subject matters of the UNCCD and the ITPS (land and soil respectively) overlap but are not identical; while soil constitutes one of the most essential natural resources of our planet, land comprises a multifunctional ecological system, whose natural capital, soil and biodiversity – interacting with water and atmosphere – generate the flow of ecosystem services that support human well-being by securing the life and livelihoods of individuals and communities.

3. The land degradation neutrality (LDN) concept was initially proposed by the UNCCD in advance of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 (Rio+20). The LDN concept aimed to secure the current amount of the global productive land. Achieving LDN through sustainable land-based practices will ensure the productivity of land by maintaining healthy soils and other natural capital. Soils are therefore of major interest to the UNCCD. Maintaining and enhancing the global soil resource base is fundamental to achieving LDN, food security and sustainable development for the benefit of human well-being.

4. Soils and drylands are pivotal to global environmental issues, especially in the context of the three Rio Conventions. The challenge of managing trade-offs within the complex human-environment system – to identify optimal compromises – requires inter- and multidisciplinary approaches addressing all land resources, including biodiversity, soil and water, as well as socio-economic concerns.

5. An effective collaboration between the SPI and the ITPS would (a) ensure a regular exchange of information between both science advisory bodies, (b) avoid duplications in efforts, and (c) support synergies in action, which are mutually-beneficial for both bodies.

6. The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) was officially launched in December 2012 at the 145th Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) when country members "approved the Terms of Reference of the GSP and recommended the implementation of the initiative". Partners by default to the GSP are the FAO member countries that determine priorities for the FAO. But the GSP is also open to a wide range of partners from all manner of regional and national institutions/organizations relative to soils (governmental organizations, universities, civil institutions, research centres, soil science societies, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private companies, farmer associations, donors, etc.).

7. The mandate of the GSP is "to improve governance of the limited soil resources of the planet in order to guarantee healthy and productive soils for a food secure world, as well as support other essential ecosystem services, in accordance with the sovereign right of each State over its natural resources". The "Plenary Assembly" of the GSP meets once a

year and is in charge of reviewing and prioritizing GSP actions. Decisions are taken by consensus by GSP partners.

8. The first Plenary Assembly took place in Rome in June 2013 and adopted the composition of the first ITPS which is mandated to “provide scientific and technical advice on global soil issues to the GSP”. The 27 members of the ITPS were selected in accordance with the following regional mandatory distribution: five from Africa, five from Asia, five from Europe, five from Latin America and the Caribbean, three from Near East, two from North America and two from South West Pacific. The ITPS meets at least six weeks before the Plenary Assembly. The first session occurred in July 2013, immediately following adoption of the composition by the Plenary Assembly. The second and third sessions of the ITPS took place in April 2014 and June 2015 respectively.

9. The ITPS has the following functions:<sup>1</sup>

(a) Provide scientific and technical advice on global soil issues primarily to the GSP and in relation to specific requests submitted by global or regional institutions;

(b) Advocate for the inclusion of sustainable soil management into different development agendas;

(c) Review and follow up on the situation and issues related to soils in the contexts of food security, use and management of natural resources, ecosystem services provision, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and other relevant areas;

(d) Review and endorse from a technical viewpoint the GSP Plans of Action; and

(e) Follow up on the implementation of these Plans of Action with due attention to their impact and contributions to different global policies and initiatives related to sustainable development, Millennium Development Goals, food security, climate change adaptation and other subject matters.

(f) In exceptional cases, when complex technical matters arise, the ITPS may also request the Plenary Assembly and the secretariat to form technical committees aiming to gather specific advice.

10. Following the launch of the GSP, the Global Soil Week (GSW) was organized as an initiative of the Global Soil Forum (GSF) and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam in collaboration with several partners including the UNCCD and FAO. The GSW was established as a major event to serve as a multi-stakeholder platform to promote sustainable development in the areas of sustainable soil management and responsible land governance. Policy-makers, scientists from various disciplines and other civil society stakeholders interact at the GSW to identify strategies to ensure the sustainable management of soils and land. The first GSW took place in Berlin on November 2012 with two objectives: (i) establishing the GSW as a transdisciplinary process for knowledge transfer; and (ii) raising public awareness on the importance of soils in order to influence land and soil policies for sustainable development. The second GSW was convened in Berlin in October 2013. The discussions were organized around key areas of response to global soil loss: transforming global material and nutrient cycles; upscaling sustainable land management (SLM) and soil engineering at the landscape level; integrating land and soils in the sustainable development goals (SDGs) debate; and responsible land governance. The third GSW took place in Berlin from 19 to 23 April 2015. It brought together 600 scientists,

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<sup>1</sup> FAO (2013): Rules of Procedure of the Global Soil Partnership:  
[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/GSP/docs/report/Rules\\_of\\_Procedure\\_GSP.PDF](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/docs/report/Rules_of_Procedure_GSP.PDF).

policy makers and practitioners from 80 countries to discuss the importance of land and soil to achieving the SDGs in the context of the United Nations International Year of Soils.

## II. Collaboration activities and outcomes

11. The SPI began discussing options for a collaboration between the SPI and the ITPS in June 2014 at its inaugural meeting in Bonn. Discussions with the chair of ITPS, Dr. Luca Montanarella, were initiated immediately following the meeting. An initial message (see Annex I) was sent from UNCCD-SPI to the second Plenary Assembly of the GSP (21–24 July, 2014). In response to this communication, the GSP recognized in ‘Work of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel of Soils (ITPS)’ (GSPPA: II/2014/4) the need to “interface with other key organs with interest in soils” but also highlighted that “while the GSP has been aiming to connect [to] the UNCCD at all levels, it was noted that effective mechanisms for collaboration are yet to be formally established. A close collaboration with the newly established UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) should be actively pursued and supported by both concerned secretariats (GSP and UNCCD)”. Several letters were then exchanged between the secretariat of the UNCCD and FAO concerning the form a future collaboration mechanism between both bodies would take and concluding that it would be beneficial for the SPI and the ITPS to take advantage of the third GSW to be held in Berlin. In collaboration with IASS, a four-hour session dedicated to the first joint ITPS-SPI meeting was proposed under the general theme “Land degradation neutrality and its contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation”. All members of the SPI and ITPS were invited by IASS to attend the GSW and this session. The four-hour session took place on the first day of the GSW (19 April 2015) and was open to all conference participants.

12. During the joint session, members of the SPI and ITPS exchanged views on the structure, mandates and work programmes of their respective bodies in order to identify potential components of a collaboration mechanism under their specific mandates. ITPS and SPI members thus agreed to establish a collaboration mechanism in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to maximize synergies. The IASS sponsored the first joint meeting of the SPI and the ITPS at the GSW in Berlin and offered to provide a platform for facilitating future joint ITPS-SPI meetings in conjunction with the GSW.

13. The session led to the identification of three major topics/entry points that will serve as an agreed basis for the collaboration mechanism between the SPI and the ITPS:

(a) The SDGs, if adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations, particularly the proposed SDG 15.3 related to land degradation: “By 2020, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world”. The SPI and the ITPS acknowledge that LDN can be achieved through sustainable land-based practices that avoid degrading land use and restore the productivity of degraded lands;

(b) The need for indicators addressing soil and land issues in order to implement the three “Rio conventions” (namely the UNCCD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)). It is recognized that land and soil issues are also key elements of the proposed SDGs, which will require substantiation in terms of indicators;

(c) Soil organic carbon, which is relevant at both global and local level, underpins various ecosystem services (e.g., global climate regulation), and is an important component of others (e.g., biological productivity). Most importantly, it provides a basis for interacting with large and diverse land users and decision-making communities which must be considered in the context of knowledge exchange and the implementation of activities.

14. Also significant is that both the ITPS and the SPI recognize the need for a strong regional approach to ensure the effective implementation of their activities on the three selected entry points and an effective collaboration between the SPI and the ITPS. Annex II provides the full session report.

15. The third Plenary Assembly of the GSP endorsed the three aforementioned topics/entry points in June 2015 (see document GSPPA: III/2015/2 Add.2).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/GSP/docs/PA\\_III/English/GSPPA\\_III\\_2015\\_2\\_add2.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/docs/PA_III/English/GSPPA_III_2015_2_add2.pdf)>.

## Annex I

### **Message from the Science-Policy Interface of the UNCCD to the Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly (21-24-07-2014, Food and Agriculture Organization /Rome)**

Dear participants of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) Plenary Meeting,

In 2007, by its decision 3/COP.8, the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UNCCD adopted a 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy). The third operational objective of this plan is for the Convention to become a global authority on scientific and technical knowledge pertaining to desertification/land degradation and mitigation of the effects of drought.

At its eleventh meeting in Windhoek, Namibia in September 2013, the COP decided to establish a Science-Policy Interface (SPI) (decision 23/COP.11) to facilitate a two-way science-policy dialogue and ensure delivery of policy-relevant information, knowledge and advice on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD), support the cooperation of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) with ongoing science-policy initiatives relevant to the UNCCD and its Parties, and develop partnerships with relevant stakeholders to allow preparedness and synergies in action to address DLDD and thus support human well-being and sustainable development and help achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN).

The membership of the newly-established SPI of the UNCCD comprises (a) the five members of the Bureau of the CST; (b) five scientists, one nominated by each of the Regional Implementation Annex regions; (c) ten scientists selected through an open call by the Bureau of the CST, taking regional and disciplinary balance into account; and (d) three observers: one from a civil society organization (CSO), one from an international organization and one from a relevant United Nations Organization.

By decision 23/COP.11, the SPI is co-chaired by the Chair of the Bureau of the CST and a scientist chosen by the members of the SPI. At its inaugural three-day meeting from 24–26 June 2014 on the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany, the 23 members of the SPI of the UNCCD, under its co-chairs, Prof. Uriel Safriel and Dr. Mariam Akhtar-Schuster, adopted its work programme for 2014 and 2015, formulating the objectives, relative deliverables and a timeline for implementation.

The decision taken by the COP of the UNCCD in Windhoek in September 2013 specifically mandates the SPI to interact with existing scientific mechanisms, particularly the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil (ITPS). Therefore, one objective of the work programme of the SPI of the UNCCD is to develop a collaboration mechanism with the ITPS.

The rationale for developing such a collaboration mechanism between the SPI and the ITPS is in the recognition that the subject matters of the UNCCD and the ITPS, (land and soil respectively) overlap but are not identical; while soil constitutes one of the most essential natural resources of our planet, land comprises a multifunctional ecological system, whose natural capital, soil and biodiversity – interacting with water and atmosphere – generate the flow of ecosystem services that support human well-being, by securing the life and livelihoods of individuals and communities.

Maintaining and enhancing the global soil resource base is fundamental to achieving LDN, food security and sustainable development for the benefit of human well-being. Soils and drylands are pivotal to global environmental issues, especially in the context of the three Rio Conventions. The challenge of managing trade-offs within the complex human-environment system – to identify optimal compromises – requires inter- and multidisciplinary approaches addressing all land resources, including biodiversity, soil and water, as well as socio-economic concerns.

In view of the potential complementarity of a partnership between the SPI of the UNCCD and the ITPS, the SPI is calling to establish a close and effective collaboration between the SPI and the ITPS through regular exchanges and an official mechanism, to be determined and approved. A dedicated team has been set up within the SPI to work with the ITPS to develop a collaboration mechanism between the SPI and the ITPS. Members include the following co-chairs, Prof. Annette Cowie (Australia), Prof. German Kust (Russia), Prof. Hamid Čustović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Prof. Oleg Guchgeldiyev (Turkmenistan) and Prof. Vanina Pietragalla (Argentina), with the team led by Dr. Martial Bernoux (France).

This message has been delivered on behalf of the co-chairs of the SPI in association with the team of the SPI working on a collaboration mechanism between the SPI and the ITPS.

## Annex II

### **Report of the first joint Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil – Science-Policy Interface meeting organized at the occasion of the third Global Soil Week held from 20 to 24 April 2015 in Berlin, Germany<sup>3</sup>**

1. The secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) organized with the support of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), a joint session, titled “*Joint ITPS-SPI meeting at the occasion of the Global Soil Week 2015: land degradation neutrality and its contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation*”. The four hours session took place on the first day of the Global Soil Week (GSW) 2015 on “Soil, the substance of transformation”, and was open to all participants of the conference (Annex 1 program of session 1.6). The program was developed in close exchange in advance of the conference, jointly by Dr Luca Montanarella, Chair of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) of the GSP, Dr Mariam Akhtar-Schuster and Prof. Uriel Safriel, the co-chairs of the Science Policy Interface of the UNCCD, and Dr Martial Bernoux, leader of the SPI team in charge of objective 4 of the SPI working program 2014–2015.<sup>4</sup>

2. About 50 participants of the GSW attended the meeting, including the members of the SPI and the ITPS. Members of the UNCCD and GSP secretariats also attended the meeting. About twenty other participants from different stakeholder communities were also present at this open session.

3. The session was chaired by Dr Jes Weigelt, Global Soil Forum Coordinator and Co-lead Sustainability Governance Programme at the IASS, and was organized around seven presentations given by the ITPS chair, the SPI co-chairs and members of both panels. The discussion at this session was facilitated by Dr Jes Weigelt. During the discussion, SPI and ITPS members exchanged views regarding the structure, mandates and work programme of their respective bodies in order to identify potential items of a collaboration mechanism under their specific mandates. Questions raised by the other participants were attended to both by the SPI and the ITPS members. Final conclusions emerging from this session were made by Dr Victor Castillo from the UNCCD secretariat, from Dr Ronald Vargas from the GSP secretariat, Ms Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, and Dr Moujahed Achouri, Director of the Land and Water Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO), which is hosting the GSP secretariat.

4. ITPS and SPI members agreed to establish a collaboration mechanism in order to avoid duplication of effort and to maximize synergies. The IASS, as the hosting institution of the first joint meeting, offered to provide a platform for facilitating also future joint ITPS-SPI meetings in conjunction with the Global Soil Week.

5. The session led to identify three major topics/entry-points that can serve as a basis to implement an effective communication and collaboration between the SPI and the ITPS:

<sup>3</sup> The present report is published as received without formal editing.

<sup>4</sup> Objective 4 of the SPI working program 2014–2015 is entitled “Cooperating with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) process in areas which are of relevance to the UNCCD and its Parties”.

(a) The next Sustainable Development Goals if adopted next September by UN, and particularly the proposed SDG number 15.3 related to land degradation “By 2020, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world”. Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) can be achieved through sustainable land-based practices that avoid degrading land use and restore the productivity of degraded lands;

(b) The need for indicators addressing soil and land issues for serving the implementation of the three “Rio conventions” (namely UNCCD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – UNFCCC – and the Convention on Biological Diversity – CBD); It is recognized that land and soils issues are also key elements of the proposed SDGs which will requires substantiation in terms of indicators;

(c) Soil organic carbon, which is relevant both at global and local scales; soil organic carbon underpins various ecosystem services (global climate regulation, but also biological productivity and other local ecosystem services). More important, it provides a basis for interacting with the large and diverse land user and decision-making communities that need to be considered in order to enhance awareness raising and implementation activities.

6. Another important aspect is that both the ITPS and the SPI recognize that a strong regional approach, that is of major importance for both SPI and ITPS activities, is essential for effectively attending the three selected entry points for an effective collaboration between the SPI and the ITPS.

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