Fifth Meeting of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI)

Date: 27-28 April 2017

Venue: UN Campus – Langer Eugen
Meeting Room: 2112
Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1
53113 Bonn, Germany

Working language: English

Working hours: Thursday 9:30 – 13:00, 14:30 – 18:00
Friday: 9.00 – 13.00, 14.30 – 17.30

I. Opening remarks

1. In his opening remarks, Pradeep Monga, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), highlighted the importance of the work done by the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to underpin policy oriented recommendations with a solid scientific basis, drawing special attention for the SPI to carry out further research on strategies to land rehabilitation and restoration so as to curb migration from North Africa to Europe by helping the people develop alternative livelihood opportunities e.g. through sustainable agriculture and land restoration and rehabilitation measures in preparation for the thirteenth session of the CST (CST 13).

II. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.

2. The SPI co-chairs welcomed all participants (see annex I) and presented the objectives, agenda (see annex II) and organization of work of the meeting. Some SPI members suggested issues for discussion under “Other matters”. The agenda was adopted as amended.

III. Adoption of the last SPI meeting report

Last SPI meeting report was adopted with no amendments.

IV. 2016-2017 SPI work programme: status and way forward
a. **Objective 1: Provide scientific guidance to the operationalization of the voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) target**

3. The LDN scientific conceptual framework was presented by the SPI team leaders who stated that the framework had received strong response so far as it connects to practical issues. There was the need to link LDN target setting with the framework which called for setting national voluntary guidelines for LDN target. It was stated by some SPI members that the translation of the framework to national languages was very important but quite challenging. It was also stated that there was the need to develop a paper on how to put the conceptual framework into practice. The team leader of objective 1 pointed out that, because the team of the GM participated from the scoping meetings of the LDN scientific conceptual framework, there was an iterative consultation among the authors and GM, which meant the practical realities noted during target setting were shared with and fully considered by those developing the framework.

4. The full report and a policy brief have been launched and there are several on-going publications in several scientific journals and the annex in the GLO that is expected to have the print-ready version by June.

b. **Objective 2: Highlight the science-based synergistic potential of sustainable land management (SLM) practices to address DLDD, climate change mitigation and adaptation.**

5. A representative of the Basque Centre for Climate Change (B3C) with the support of the SPI team co-leaders of objective 2, held a presentation on the progress on the report: Sustainable Land Management contribution to successful land-based climate change adaptation and mitigation, before its finalization.

6. The report is divided into three chapters: i) Foster and facilitate the adoption of SLM practices which address DLDD while mitigating climate change; ii) foster and facilitate the adoption of SLM practices which address DLDD while enhancing climate change adaptation; iii) critically evaluate the conclusions of 2a and 2b to ensure the clear understanding of synergies and trade-offs between climate change mitigation and adaptation, and SLM practices which reduce land degradation.

7. In the last SPI meeting an update on the development of ToR for the commissioning of the technical report for this objective was provided.

8. Applications to develop the report were accepted until 16 September 2016; in total, were received. Evaluation criteria were developed by the SPI in order to select between the 3
consortia. Based on these criteria a decision was made, benefiting the Consortium led by the Basque Centre for Climate Change.

9. A two day scoping meeting took place in December 2016. It involved the SPI team leaders, the SPI co-chair, and the UNCCD secretariat to further decide on the content of the report and draft the outline of the document together in collaboration with the Basque Centre for Climate Change.

10. This Consortium provided a first draft by early March 2017, which was reviewed by the team leaders and the secretariat. A second draft was prepared which also included an executive summary that was reviewed by team leaders and secretariat. A summary of the report was then presented at the GSOC17 organized in Rome 21-23 March 2017. The outcomes of GSOC17 also provided relevant additional input information for the document. The document was then sent out for review to all SPI members and to the 6 external reviewers selected by the co-chairs on the basis of ensuring scientific excellence as both geographical and gender balance.

11. A presentation made by two SPI members summarized the results coming from the internal and external review of the report, which in general was well accepted with substantive suggestions which were considered along with the formal review results.

12. The secretariat recalled that the scope of the report is clearly guided by the approved SPI work-programme 2016-17, which is to set the basis to make recommendations on the potential of land as part of the solution for climate change. It also mentioned that the secretariat planned to produce a print-version of the report as well as the development of a policy brief before COP13.

c. **Objective 3: Encourage the development and implementation of specific rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands.**

13. There has been collaboration with the UNEP International Resource Panel (IRP) on preparing a report on land restoration. SPI started discussions with the IRP as early as October 2015.

14. Due to external reasons, there have been delays in terms of further promoting the collaboration, but things became more solid at the beginning of 2017, when the IRP secretariat invited the SPI to participate in a working group meeting on Land Restoration, Ecosystem Resilience and their Contributions to Poverty Eradication (10-11 March, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).
15. As the process for collaboration looks promising, the SPI may address this objective in its new work programme as a collaborative activity with the IRP. Resources should however be there for future collaboration on the theme.

   a. **Coordination activity 1: Follow up and contribute to the land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA) conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).**

16. The Executive Secretary of the IPBES delivered a presentation on the current status on the land degradation and restoration IPBES assessment.

17. With regards to COP11 decision on the interaction of SPI with existing scientific mechanisms, SPI supported IPBES by reviewing the scoping document and by proposing to the CST Bureau potential experts to be nominated to undertake the IPBES assessment. Three of the experts have been nominated by UNCCD are currently serving as coordinating lead authors (2) and a lead author (1). The SPI was given the opportunity to participate in the review of the first draft of the chapters of the LDRA. This review was completed with the contributions of a number of SPI members aggregated into one document which was submitted. The SPI was also invited to review the second order draft of the chapters and the first order draft of the Summary for Policymakers that will start on 1st of May 2017.

18. Collaboration between IPBES and SPI should be continued in SPI work programme 2018-2019. The COP may wish to request the SPI to consider the outcome of the IPBES land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA), after its approval by IPBES-6 (March 2018), and analyse the relevance of the key messages of the LDRA for the development of UNCCD-relevant actions for consideration by UNCCD COP 14.

   d. **Coordination activity 2: Contribute to the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO).**

19. A representative of the secretariat expressed deep appreciation on the contribution of the SPI to the scoping and the technical review process of the first edition of the GLO. It was also mentioned that one SPI member authored one of the working papers of the GLO.

20. The secretariat informed the SPI that an expert meeting on the development of a land governance index will take place by end of June 2017 and invites the SPI to be represented at this meeting.

21. Team leader of coordination activity 2 stated that the role of the SPI on the further preparation of the second edition of the GLO should be extended to the provision of scientific guidance, in terms of selecting external reviewers especially for crucial chapters.
e. Coordination activity 3: Follow up on current collaboration with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) – GSSOC2017

22. The Chair of the ITPS delivered a presentation on the activities of the ITPS and the potential lines of collaboration with SPI. He expressed his appreciation to SPI and stated that ITPS really needed the role of SPI behind the interface of policy making process. He referred to the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, expressing that there is a need to get practical examples on how national governments can specifically address the guidelines in a more practical level. It was noted that, in line with this thinking, the these Voluntary Guidelines are directly referenced in LDN scientific conceptual framework. The ITPS Chair welcomed the interest expressed by the SPI in actively providing inputs on the second edition of Status of the World’s Soil Resources to be issued by 2020.

23. A summary of the outcomes of the Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon (GSSOC17) was presented by an SPI member who stated that it was a very rewarding experience with experts from FAO, SPI, UNCCD, WMO, ITPS, IPCC; and that, the common goal fits the objectives of SPI. It was felt that the outcomes on SOC management are of high interest for UNCCD. It was also claimed that while the SPI provides expertise on land management on a broader aspect it could benefit from the collaboration with the ITPS because of its high expertise in soil science.

f. Coordination activity 4: Initiate and coordinate interactions between the UNCCD and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

24. The SPI co-chair presented the activities undertaken by the SPI on the collaboration with the IPCC.

25. Upon the request of the UNCCD secretariat, the SPI provided consolidated inputs to a questionnaire prepared by the steering committee of the IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, SLM, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems (SRCCL). These inputs were later discussed with the members of the steering committee through a teleconference held on 13 January 2017 and attended by SPI members and the UNCCD secretariat.

26. The SPI actively participated by invitation in the following meetings related to the preparation of the SRCCL: (i) the IPCC-FAO expert meeting on climate change, land use and food security from 23–25 January 2017 in Rome, Italy; (ii) the scoping meeting of the SRCCL held from 13–16 February 2017 in Dublin, Ireland and (iii) the 45th Session (Guadalajara, Mexico, 28–31 March 2017), representing the UNCCD.
27. The scoping meeting of the UNCCD resulted in a draft scoping paper, setting out the objectives and an annotated outline of the special report as well as the process and timeline for its preparation. The paper resulted from discussions that took place in a very constructive, science-based atmosphere with substantial contributions from representatives of the UNCCD secretariat and the SPI.

28. The document prepared at the Scoping Meeting in Dublin (IPCC-XLV/Doc.7) was considered by the IPCC plenary to be a useful and good basis for negotiations at its 45th session. Negotiations at the 45th IPCC Session led to minor revisions before its adoption on 30 March 2017 (see IPCC-XLV/CRP.3). The special report will be developed under the joint scientific leadership of Working Groups I, II and III and supported by the Technical Support Unit of Working Group III.

29. It was stated that the SPI members who wished to take part in writing and reviewing of the IPCC report should contact their government to be nominated. It was highlighted that the issue of desertification should be considered in the report, and experts should take into account the political context of UNCCD. The term of SLM was very well integrated in the negotiations and finally adopted on the IPCC meeting in Guadalajara, Mexico.

30. UNCCD was assigned to nominate experts and strongly encouraged to nominate experts on the national level. There were needs to for regional and gender balance in the selection of experts. SPI members were also invited to recommend external experts.

31. The following three step procedure was applied: by 5th May 2017, the SPI members would inform the SPI Co-chairs about their interest to be nominated, and the level of involvement (CLA, LA, RE). The SPI would also be encouraged to propose names of independent experts who are interested in being nominated by the UNCCD as authors or reviewers of the SRCCCL. The CST Bureau would receive the list of expressions of interests of SPI members and independent experts. The candidates will be assessed by the following criteria: i) scientific excellence related to UNCCD-relevant work, ii) proven writing abilities, iii) regional balance and iv) gender balance. By 11th May and based on this assessment, the CST Bureau will provide the UNCCD secretariat with a list of experts and their respective functions to be nominated to the IPCC.

V. Assessment of the Science-Policy Interface

32. The secretariat, under the supervision of the CST Bureau, commissioned an independent external assessment that analysed the performance of the SPI in 2016-2017 and considered its overall achievements. The assessment is expected to provide evidence-based information and elements that will assist Parties in their consideration of the future functioning of the SPI. It is conducted by a team of independent experts that was selected through a competitive process. The work started at the beginning of 2017 and involved the
study of relevant documentation and interviews of key stakeholders, including the SPI members.

33. The team leader presented the preliminary results of the assessment to the SPI in order to discuss and receive their feedbacks.

34. The external assessment started by a specification of more exact parameters to measure the extent of SPI achievements, which was done in the form of an initial “theory of change” for the SPI. It aimed to provide a pragmatic interpretation of the objectives and the expected outcomes of the SPI. The achievements of the SPI were measured against the following criteria: (i) has the awareness of scientific aspects of key DLDD matters been raised through SPI products? (ii) has the SPI used decision-making relevant formats to facilitate access of Parties to latest DLDD and SLM scientific findings? The independent assessment team came to the following four conclusions: (i) latest scientific results are tapped into by the SPI; (ii) relevant scientific findings are synthesized by the SPI experts; (iii) other scientific advisory bodies are aware of UNCCD perspectives through the SPI products or through inputs by the SPI; and (iv) the expertise of the scientific community has been mobilized by the SPI during the implementation of its work programme 2016–2017.

35. A global online survey was carried out and 111 responses were obtained from representatives of Parties, international institutions and organizations, NGOs and other stakeholders. The results showed that 85% of the respondents were aware of SPI, and 80% of them were of the opinion that the documents produced by the SPI are informative and their content is easy to understand. Nearly as many considered that the SPI work had improved their awareness of the topics that it has covered and/or related scientific aspects.

36. The performance review showed that the SPI has taken action to address all of its work programme objectives and coordination activities, while some activities have received greater attention than others.

37. In terms of inputs to other scientific processes and mobilization of the scientific community, the external assessment found that the SPI has succeeded in establishing links with other science-policy bodies with different degrees of success to-date. It rated this success for the IPBES as low, for ITPS as fair and for IPCC as good.

38. The independent expert showed the difference existing in terms of mandate and resources available between the SPI and other existing scientific advisory panels/platforms such as the IPCC and the IPBES.

39. SPI outputs and outcomes were measured by the number of documents produced with the most visible document being the conceptual framework of LDN. The science policy brief that was published in three languages had been highly downloaded, but it was difficult to see the real impact by looking at the number of downloads. It was stated that the evaluation omitted other areas where SPI had been mentioned.
40. An SPI member highlighted that one of the approaches to access SPI would be to measure the impact of activities to specific decisions from COP. However it was recognized that it would be difficult to assess the impact of the SPI on the previous CST biennium.

41. SPI members suggested including the following points into the assessment: i) number of people working with the SPI, ii) number of documents produced by SPI, iii) SPI budget, iv) the contribution of the SPI to the organization of the former UNCCD scientific conferences and the translations of their outcomes into policy-relevant decisions, v) UNCCD communication materials that did not have scientific background but because of the work of the SPI can now be linked to science.

42. Overall, the SPI was quite successful in mobilizing the scientific community and bringing science in UNCCD.

43. It was mentioned that the renewal of SPI members should avoid abrupt discontinuities in the SPI composition that might lead to loss of institutional memory and disruption to its work programme. This is supported by experience from other science policy interfaces mechanisms.

44. The full document with all recommendations will be delivered at the end of May 2017.


45. Parties and other UNCCD stakeholders were invited to submit views on potential thematic issues to be addressed by the SPI in the next biennium through a call launched at the beginning of December 2016 for about 2 months. Thirty proposals were received.

46. The CST Bureau with the support of the secretariat reviewed the inputs received and identified three priority areas for inclusion in the draft SPI work program 2018-2019, based on the following set of criteria agreed by the CST Bureau:

   i)  *Refined methodological guidance for implementing Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets;* Parties proposed the development of further methodological guidance to achieve successful operationalization and implementation of LDN as an outgrowth of the scientific conceptual framework for LDN.

   ii) *Drought responses* Parties proposed the identification of land-based drought resilient strategies in terms of vulnerability reduction, adaptation and the setting of scenarios of land degradation and restoration.

   iii) *Costs of land degradation and benefits of SLM;* Parties proposed the development of policy recommendations for economic evaluation mechanisms that enable the determination of the costs of land degradation and the monetary benefits of SLM in order to assess the need of investments to combat and reverse land degradation processes.

47. In terms of the coordination activities, the following are being proposed:
i) Follow-up and contribution to the land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA) conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services (IPBES), and analyse the relevance of the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity to be approved at IPBES-7 in 2019 for the UNCCD.

ii) Follow-up and contribute to the IPCC special report (SRCCL) on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems.

iii) Follow-up on current collaboration with and explore future means and topics of collaborations with the Intergovernmental Technical Panels on Soils (ITPS).

iv) Collaboration with the UNEP-International Resources Panel (IRP) on preparing a report on Land Restoration, Ecosystem Resilience and their Contribution to Poverty Eradication.


48. The GM explained briefly its work so far regarding LDN transformative projects and their need for scientific support to provide quality data to implement these transformative projects, as a potential area or work to be considered.

49. An SPI member proposed one more collaboration activity related to the Global Land Indicators Initiative. This initiative has already accepted the three indicators of LDN proposed by the UNCCD, and informally the SPI has already started to collaborate with this initiative. The SPI may want to consider this opportunity of collaboration.

50. SPI members committed to provide comments and suggestions to the draft work program and presented a consolidated draft version by 4th May 2017.

VII. Report of the SPI to CST 13

51. The secretariat presented the items of the agenda of CST13 and the list of related background documents that need to be prepared by the SPI. The deadline for submission of COP13 documents is 31st May 2017. It was agreed that the SPI should provide the secretariat with final drafts a few days ahead of this deadline.

52. The draft decisions list was also presented, and it considers all expected proposals and recommendations emerging from the CST session documents.

VIII. Promoting the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices and the UNCCD knowledge hub

53. The secretariat informed the SPI on the on-going development of UNCCD Knowledge Hub which provides access to information from multiple sources, including: the roster of independent experts, the UNCCD e-Library, SLM best practices from WOCAT, relevant
knowledge sharing systems from around the world, and information to support LDN target setting and implementation. It was highlighted that the Knowledge Hub can assist in LDN implementation by providing countries with the necessary information to set baselines and monitor LDN.

54. The Knowledge Hub can support the SPI by i) making scientific knowledge available and accessible [to/for] stakeholders/ policy makers, ii) providing links between LDN Conceptual Framework and LDN TSP building blocks, iii) making knowledge from the Global Land Outlook accessible for stakeholders, iv) scaling up SLM Best Practices and v) increasing visibility for SPI and SPI products.

IX. Other matters

55. The secretariat informed that as a follow up of the expert workshop on “the use of an indicator(s) to monitor and report on the status and trends in land degradation and restoration for the SDGs, Rio Conventions and other relevant processes” held in Washington D.C. in February 2016, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization from Australia was commissioned to prepare a good practice guidance on SDG indicator 15.3.1.

56. The secretariat invited interested SPI members to contribute to the review of the first draft of the guide and provide their comments by end of May 2017.

57. The secretariat also informed the SPI that UNCCD jointly with FAO will be organizing a Latin-American and Caribbean Regional Drought Conference to be held at the end of August 2017 in Bolivia.

X. Next meeting

58. The secretariat informed that next meeting of the CST Bureau is planned to take place on 5 September 2017 in Ordos, China before the start of the CST 13 session.
Annex I

5th Meeting of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI)

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Friday 28 April: 8:30 – 13:00, 14:30 – 17:30

- DRAFT ANNOTATED AGENDA -

I. Opening remarks

II. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

III. Adoption of the last SPI meeting report

IV. SPI work programme 2016-2017: status and way forward

Coordination activities
a. **Coordination activity 1:** Follow up and contribute to the land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA) conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

b. **Coordination activity 2:** Contribution to the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO)

c. **Coordination activity 3:** Follow up on current collaboration with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS)—GSSOC2017

d. **Coordination activity 4:** Interactions between the UNCCD and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for the preparation of the IPCC special report on Climate Change and Land (SR2)

**Objectives**

e. **Objective 1:** The scientific conceptual framework for Land Degradation Neutrality

f. **Objective 2:** Sustainable land management for addressing desertification/land degradation and drought, climate change mitigation and adaptation

g. **Objective 3:** Rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands.

**V. Assessment of the Science-Policy Interface**

*Richard Escadafal, lead of the team of evaluators, will present the preliminary results from the assessment for an interactive discussion with the SPI*

**VI. SPI work programme 2018-2019**

*The SPI co-Chairs will lead a discussion on the preparation of the SPI work programme 2018-2019 to be presented at the CST 13, based on the compilation or received proposals*

**VII. Report of the SPI to CST 13**

*In accordance with decision 21/COP.12, the SPI will have to prepare:*

a) *a synthesis report, including policy-oriented recommendations, for each objective included in its work programme for 2016–2017;*
b)  *a report on the coordination activities conducted during the biennium 2016 – 2017.*

c)  *Draft decisions*

VIII.  Promoting the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub

IX.  Other matters
## Thursday 27th April

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