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TERMS OF REFERENCE of the Science-Policy Interface

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A. Background

1. In accordance with decision 23/COP.11, paragraph 1, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided to establish a Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to facilitate a two-way science-policy dialogue and ensure the delivery of policy-relevant information, knowledge and advice on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD).

B. Mandate

2. In accordance with decision 23/COP.11, paragraph 3, the mandate of the SPI is to:
- a. establish the approach to deliver each task assigned to it by the Committee on Science and Technology (CST);
 - b. analyse, synthesize and translate relevant scientific findings and recommendations from DLDD-related scientific conferences, including upcoming UNCCD scientific conferences, the roster of independent experts, as well as from relevant stakeholders and networks into proposals to be considered by the CST for the consideration of the COP;
 - c. interact with existing multiple scientific mechanisms, in particular the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils and other new and existing scientific networks and platforms; and
 - d. assist the Bureau of the CST in organizing the UNCCD scientific conferences¹ and assessing their results.

¹ This was subsequently refined by decision 19/COP.12, paragraph 1, where it was decided that future scientific meetings on DLDD should be decoupled from official sessions of the CST; these scientific meetings can take the form of UNCCD-related scientific conferences, stand-alone expert meetings or expert meetings held in conjunction with existing international scientific conferences.



3. In decision 19/COP.12, paragraph 2, the COP decided that the SPI mandate, as contained in decision 23/COP.11, paragraph 3, should be extended to enable the SPI, under the leadership of the Bureau of the CST, to:
 - a. provide the CST with clear and well-defined thematic guidance on scientific knowledge requirements (e.g. thematic assessments, scientific studies and/or user guides) for implementing the UNCCD;
 - b. identify the most optimal way forward (e.g. commissioning an individual or group of experts, organizing expert meetings, encouraging the organization of regional meetings by regional scientific institutions or networks) to address these knowledge requirements;
 - c. draft terms of reference for the scientific work to be commissioned to external experts or institutes and ensure the quality of content according to the contract administered by the secretariat; and
 - d. select experts, including from scientific societies, science and knowledge organizations, and CSOs, and networks known for their expertise in DLDD.
4. The SPI will operate up to the end of the sixteenth session of the COP (2023), at which time a review of the SPI will be presented.

C. Composition

5. In accordance with decision 23/COP.11, paragraph 4, and its Corrigendum, as contained in document ICCD/COP(11)/23/Add.1/Corr.1, and amended in decision 19/COP.13, paragraphs 2-4, the membership of the SPI shall comprise: (1) the five members of the Bureau of the CST; (2) five independent scientists, one nominated by each region; (3) ten independent scientists selected by the Bureau of the CST through an open call taking into account regional and disciplinary balance; and (4) five observers with at least one each from a relevant civil society organization, a relevant international organization and a relevant United Nations organization.

D. Term of appointment

6. The term of appointment of SPI members and all SPI observers other than the CST Bureau members to the SPI is four years (two UNCCD biennia). The term of service for CST Bureau members is two years (one biennium) coincident with their service on the CST Bureau. As per decision 19/COP.13, paragraph 2 and 3, for the biennium 2018–2019, the membership of no more than eight current SPI members shall be exceptionally extended by two years so as to benefit from the advantages of a rotating membership renewal system.
7. If a member or observer of the SPI resigns, s/he will be replaced by an alternate using the same procedure of appointment.

E. Roles

8. The SPI shall be co-chaired by the Chair of the CST Bureau and a scientist elected by all the members of the SPI from among the 15 independent scientists mentioned in paragraph 5. Candidates for the independent scientist co-Chair must have already served on the SPI during the previous biennium.
9. In the case the scientist who is co-chairing the SPI resigns or is unable to perform or complete her/his assigned tasks and functions, the members of the SPI shall chose another member to replace her/him. Until a new chair is elected, the other co-Chair serves as the only acting Chair.
10. The co-Chairs of the SPI coordinate the work of the SPI, in consultation with the secretariat. They organize meetings of the SPI, with the support of the secretariat, and they moderate the discussions which take place in those meetings. They are central to the SPI Communication Strategy, serve as the primary point



of contact for the secretariat and facilitate a free exchange of views and information among SPI members and between the secretariat and members. They are expected to respond, in consultation with the secretariat, to any concerns raised with respect to the conduct of SPI members and observers (see SPI Code of Conduct) and potential conflicts of interest (see SPI Conflict of Interest Policy).

11. The Rapporteur of the SPI shall be appointed among those independent scientists who have served during previous biennium at the first meeting each new biennium, with the possibility of renewal if possible within the term of service. The Rapporteur, with assistance from the secretariat, produces the minutes of SPI meetings. The Rapporteur may also offer assistance to the co-Leads of an SPI work programme objective in the editing of a deliverable on an as-needed basis.

12. *All members and observers of the SPI* are expected to contribute substantively to the science-policy work of the SPI, which involves meeting the objectives outlined in the work programme of the SPI determined by the COP each biennium, and producing the deliverables proposed for each objective. Members and observers who have knowledge of and a relationship with the international panels and bodies listed in the work programme are also expected to help with coordination between the SPI and those panels/bodies, in order to promote networking, avoid duplication of activities and leverage policy-relevant scientific information and knowledge within the domains of such panels/bodies. Finally, all members of the SPI are expected to communicate on DLDD issues in a manner consistent with the SPI Communication Strategy, particularly with respect to what the SPI has produced. In a similar way, all members and observers of the SPI are expected to communicate on the SPI as an entity and how it works.

13. *Independent scientists.* In addition to contributing to the science-policy work of the SPI, those scientists on the SPI selected independently serve a vital role in communicating about the UNCCD scientific knowledge requirements, the SPI, its results, and associated policy implications within the scientific community of their respective domain of science. They are also expected to bring back to the SPI from these scientific domains whatever may be relevant to the current work programme of the SPI and other interests/needs of the UNCCD as communicated by the CST and the secretariat. The five SPI scientists who were nominated regionally are expected to pursue this form of exchange in a way that helps ensure the region's scientific community is engaged so that the regional perspective is captured and incorporated into the work of the SPI. All independent scientists are also expected to mobilize scientific and technical expertise to contribute to the implementation of the SPI work programme and participate in the peer review of SPI reports, as appropriate.

14. *CST Bureau members of the SPI.* In addition to contributing to the science-policy work of the SPI, CST Bureau SPI members serve a unique and vital role in identifying and communicating scientific knowledge requirements of policy-makers to the rest of the SPI and in ensuring:

- a. the policy-relevance of the outputs of the SPI;
- b. that the rest of the CST is regularly and fully apprised on SPI activities;
- c. that the rest of the SPI is regularly and fully apprised of relevant developments in the policy realm that should be considered in the work of the SPI;
- d. that region-specific science priorities are communicated, and;
- e. that each region's scientific community is aware of SPI activities and able to contribute as appropriate.

15. *Observers of the SPI from United Nations and other international organizations.* In addition to contributing to the science-policy work of the SPI, these observers serve a unique and vital role in:

- a. promoting networking and cooperation to avoid duplication of activities, and harness synergies;
- b. identifying scientific knowledge requirements of policy-makers and land managers, and the stakeholders they serve;



- c. ensuring that the SPI is regularly and fully apprised of relevant developments in the science-policy domain of the organization they represent;
- d. contributing to disseminate and encourage the uptake of the outputs of the SPI work;
- e. mobilizing scientific and technical expertise to contribute to the implementation of the SPI work programme and to participate in the peer review of SPI reports, as appropriate.

16. *Observers of the SPI from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).* In addition to contributing to the science-policy work of the SPI, these observers serve a unique and vital role in:

- a. identifying scientific knowledge requirements of CSOs, and through them, land users, with particular attention to the most vulnerable;
- b. ensuring that the SPI is regularly and fully apprised of developments that are relevant to the science-policy realm with respect to CSOs and that should be considered in the work of the SPI;
- c. contributing to disseminate and encourage the uptake of the outputs of the SPI work;
- d. mobilizing scientific and technical expertise to contribute to the implementation of the SPI work programme and to participate in the peer review of SPI reports, as appropriate.

17. *Co-leadership roles.* All SPI members and observers can serve as a co-Lead responsible for coordinating the work in response to objectives and coordination activities included in the SPI work programme for each biennium. All SPI members participate in one or more of the working groups tasked with meeting the SPI work programme objectives. Some also participate in coordination activities.

F. Role of the UNCCD secretariat

18. The UNCCD secretariat will provide administrative and secretariat support to the work of the SPI, including to its meetings as needed. Tasks include:

- a. inviting the members and observers to the meetings of the SPI, arranging the travel of the members and funded invitees and providing a daily subsistence allowance as required;
- b. preparing the provisional agenda of the meetings in consultation with the co-Chairs of the SPI and handling the related substantive documentation prepared by the SPI;
- c. assisting the Rapporteur in the preparation of the reports of each meeting;
- d. supporting the SPI in the final production and dissemination of products such as technical reports and science-policy briefs;
- e. contributing to, as appropriate, peer-reviewed scientific publications derived from the work of the SPI;
- f. maintaining, reviewing and continuously updating the SPI website/webpage;
- g. providing legal support as required;
- h. communicating with other entities through official channels as required;
- i. other tasks noted in these Terms of Reference and the SPI Communications Strategy.

G. Responsibilities

19. Members and observers for the SPI have the responsibility to:

- a. Uphold and implement the principles and procedures of the SPI as described in these Terms of Reference;
- b. Contribute directly to delivering the work programme of the SPI as agreed by the UNCCD COP for each biennium through the provision of timely, clear and well-defined thematic guidance developed from:
 - i. scientific assessment (e.g., systematic review, analysis, synthesis and communication of vital scientific knowledge and evidence);



- ii. translation of science into accessible knowledge and policy-relevant recommendations;
 - iii. production of technical reports, and deriving from those, science-policy briefs as well as manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed literature;
 - iv. contribution to and cooperation with other international scientific panels and bodies dealing with DLDD issues in order to develop synergies and avoid duplication of efforts;
 - v. peer-review of scientific and technical results produced by other international scientific panels and bodies as well as UNCCD science-based communications (in adherence to the procedures developed by those bodies).
- c. Advise the SPI and its co-Chairs on technical matters;
 - d. Maintain the reputation of the SPI and support its products;
 - e. Maintain the highest standards of scientific and technical excellence;
 - f. Maintain the highest standards of professionalism and collegiality;
 - g. Encourage scientific exchange with scientists from their regions and/or domains on SPI activities.

H. Procedures

20. The official working language of the SPI is English only.
21. The mode (i.e. physical meeting or teleconference), dates and duration of the SPI meetings are defined by the co-Chairs of the SPI in consultation with the UNCCD secretariat in line with the available budgetary resources. However, no more than two physical meetings should be held per year and shall take place in Bonn unless a Party/institution makes an offer to host the meeting and bear the associated costs. Physical meetings of the SPI shall also take advantage of the meetings of the Bureau of the CST or any other suitable occasion linked to the schedule of other UNCCD-related meetings or conferences.
22. Travel costs and the daily subsistence allowances (DSAs) will be covered for all members in accordance with United Nations rules and regulations.
23. Institutional partners or individual experts might be invited to participate in the meetings/discussions of the SPI on an ad hoc basis and based on a proposal from the co-Chairs.
24. For each biennium, the SPI will submit through the secretariat a proposal for its work programme for consideration at each regular CST session, with a focus on one or two broad, globally relevant priority topics related to DLDD, and submission to the COP for its approval/endorsement.
25. The SPI will report to the COP at each session on progress made and the status of implementation of its tasks and obligations, including precise and workable recommendations, with a view to seeking guidance for its next steps and activities.
26. The SPI will communicate updates about its activities and progress to country Parties, with the support of the UNCCD secretariat and following the guidance provided by the SPI Communications Strategy. The five CST Bureau members on the SPI will be the primary point of contact between the SPI and the national focal points (NFPs) and the science and technology correspondents (STCs) of Parties in their respective regions. The CST Bureau members will also work with the UNCCD regional coordination unit of their respective regions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this communication. Regular, timely and clear communication with the region is essential, and must be in a form that is accessible to policy makers, facilitate understanding and action.
27. The UNCCD secretariat will be the sole owner and possess all rights, titles and interest in all proprietary intellectual property, including copyrights for methodologies and products developed and



delivered by the SPI and its members. The secretariat will duly acknowledge and/or share, as appropriate, any copyright with SPI members that have contributed to a particular output. No special permission from the copyright holder is required for the reproduction, distribution and/or co-sharing of the said methodologies and products, provided that the source is acknowledged and that no alterations are made to the original work. Once the secretariat authorizes the reproduction, distribution and/or co-sharing of the methodologies and products, they will be in the public domain subject to proper acknowledgement of the source and any limitation stipulated by the secretariat as appropriate.

I. Governance

28. The SPI will operate in accordance with COP decisions pertaining to its activities.
29. Decisions of the SPI shall be made by consensus. The co-Chairs will moderate discussions among the SPI members and help them achieve consensus. In those cases where no consensus is reached, the co-Chairs are empowered to make the decision. Prior to making the decision, they will poll the SPI members and observers present to get a sense of all views. They may also consult with the UNCCD secretariat for their perspective. Any other matter not foreseen in this paragraph will be decided in accordance with the standard practice of the United Nations.
30. The two co-Chairs of the SPI have the same power and will jointly ensure the compliance of all SPI members with the Terms of Reference, Communication Strategy, Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy of the SPI. The two co-Chairs remain, through the Bureau of the CST, under the authority of the COP.
31. Guidance for SPI communications is documented in the SPI Communications Strategy. Of particular note is that only the co-Chairs of the SPI are permitted to sign and send letters and other official communications from the SPI to other entities.
32. All disputes arising out of or in connection with the work of SPI members will be settled in line with the Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest Policy and Communications Strategy of the SPI. Compliance with these terms and policies and their implementation procedures is mandatory. An individual is not allowed participate in the work of the SPI if s/he has not complied with these policies and procedures.
33. Should a member or observer of the SPI not comply with these Terms of Reference and/or the associated Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest and Communications Strategy of the SPI, the co-Chairs of the SPI will inform the UNCCD secretariat which will take appropriate measures, as relevant, in consultation with the CST Bureau. If deemed necessary, s/he will be replaced by an alternate.
34. Members as well as observers of the SPI shall attend each meeting physically or electronically. If, due to circumstances beyond their control, a member is unable to attend a meeting fully or partially, s/he shall, through the secretariat, immediately inform the co-Chairs of this fact. Input from the absent members shall be provided via electronic means.
35. Members as well as observers of the SPI are expected to contribute to fulfilling the mandate of the SPI as described in section B above, guided by the work programme of the SPI agreed upon by the COP for each biennium.
36. Should any member or observer fail to contribute to fulfilling the mandate of the SPI, fail to fulfil her/his assignments and/or fail to attend three consecutive meetings of the SPI, s/he will be replaced by an alternate.
37. The Bureau of the CST will review the terms of reference of the SPI as needed.