



United Nations

ICCD/COP(15)/CST/5



## Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.: General  
23 February 2022

Original: English

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### Conference of the Parties Committee on Science and Technology

#### Fifteenth session

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 11–13 May 2022

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

#### Interfacing science and policy, and sharing knowledge

#### The Science-Policy Interface, the dissemination and the accessibility of best practices, and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub

## Interfacing science and policy: The Science-Policy Interface, the dissemination and accessibility of best practices, and the UNCCD Knowledge Hub

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

By its decision 19/COP.14, regarding the Science-Policy Interface, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Knowledge Hub, and the analysis, dissemination and accessibility of best practices, the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the secretariat to report at the COP on the implementation, as well as on measures taken to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and the interfacing of science and policy.



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## I. Background

1. By decision 23/COP.11, the Conference of the Parties (COP) established 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) to all interested Parties. Following an external assessment of the work of the SPI, by its decision 19/COP.13, the COP decided to continue the SPI and to extend its current mandate, as defined in decisions 23/COP.11 and 19/COP.12, to the end of the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) in 2023.
2. By decision 19/COP.14, the COP requested the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to refine the SPI renewal procedure to facilitate the staged renewal process introduced in decision 19/COP.13, and requested the secretariat to facilitate the communication between the SPI and the science and technology correspondents of Parties, and to mobilize resources for the effective functioning of the SPI.
3. Also by decision 19/COP.14, the COP requested the secretariat to continue the expansion and further enhancement of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Knowledge Hub and to work in coordination with other Rio conventions and relevant partners to ensure coherence and alignment between ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA), ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR), nature-based solutions (NbS) and sustainable land management (SLM).
4. Chapter II of this document provides a report on the practices and working modalities for the SPI in 2020 and 2021. A synthesis of the outcomes of the current work of the SPI is contained in documents ICCD/COP(15)/CST/2, ICCD/COP(15)/CST/3 and ICCD/COP(15)/CST/4.
5. Chapter III of this document provides information on the dissemination of relevant knowledge through the UNCCD Knowledge Hub while chapter IV of this document provides information on the outcomes of the consultation regarding coherence and alignment between EbA, Eco-DRR, NbS and SLM.
6. Chapter V of this document provides an overview of the cooperation between the UNCCD and the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT), and the availability of best practices on SLM. Chapter VI of this document provides conclusions and recommendations.

## II. Practices and working modalities for the Science-Policy Interface in 2022 and 2023

7. Based on the revised terms of reference of the SPI, and in accordance with decision 23/COP.11, paragraph 4, and its Corrigendum, as amended by decision 19/COP.13, paragraphs 2–4, the membership of the SPI is comprised of:
  - (a) The five members of the Bureau of the CST;
  - (b) Five scientists, one nominated by each region;
  - (c) Ten independent scientists selected by the Bureau of the CST through an open call, taking into account regional and disciplinary balance; and
  - (d) Five observers with at least one from a relevant civil society organization, one from a relevant international organization and one from a relevant United Nations organization.
8. To renew the SPI, recruitment processes were opened from 24 October to 24 November 2019, including:
  - (a) An open global call for the selection of independent scientists, taking into account regional and disciplinary balance, for which 70 applications were received from 45 different countries;

(b) An open global call for the selection of observer organizations, for which seven applications were received.

9. At its meeting from 8 to 9 December 2019, the Bureau of the CST renewed the membership of the SPI based on the rotating system introduced in decision 19/COP.13.

10. In the same meeting, the Bureau reviewed, evaluated and ranked the applications received for the aforementioned calls, as per the selection modalities agreed by the Bureau of the CST, leading to the selection of four new independent scientists and two new observers. These new members/observers completed the membership of the SPI for the 2020–2021 biennium in a way that maintained the regional and disciplinary balance called for in decision 23/COP.11, paragraph 4.

11. By the nature and timing of the rotating cycle for the renewal of the SPI, CST Bureau members were not required to nominate scientists to represent each region for the 2020–2021 biennium. However, the Bureau took steps to prepare for the next staged renewal of the SPI by refining the SPI renewal procedures according to decision 19/COP.14, paragraph 1. As such, all applicants responding to a single call for new members will be considered in the process of identifying and selecting global independent scientists as well as in the regional processes for identifying and nominating one scientist to represent each respective region. Within the staged renewal cycle, the first opportunity to implement these refined procedures will be during the SPI renewal stage scheduled to take place following COP 15.

12. During the SPI renewal process, the Bureau of the CST noted that although women were encouraged to apply in the open call text for independent scientists, only 19 per cent of the applicants were female. Although similar to estimates of faculty gender balance in the Earth and environmental sciences,<sup>1</sup> this percentage is lower than the global estimates for gender balance among researchers across all scientific domains<sup>2</sup> and falls far short of the objective of gender parity, as mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in all United Nations activities.<sup>3</sup> The General Assembly has also recognized that full and equal access to and participation in science, technology and innovation for women of all ages is imperative to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>4</sup>

13. During their discussions on gender considerations, the Bureau of the CST also noted the need for and requested secretariat assistance in mainstreaming gender into the scientific assessment work of the SPI. Based on the guidance of the Bureau, gender experts in the secretariat have participated in all SPI meetings and contributed to all internal reviews of SPI technical reports to help address this need. More information on gender mainstreaming and the secretariat's plans for the preparation of a gender policy are available in ICCD/COP(15)/17.

14. Also, during the SPI renewal process, the Bureau of the CST took note of feedback received from both current and former SPI members of the need to involve earlier career scientists in the work of the SPI.

15. At its meeting of 8–9 December 2019, the Bureau of the CST requested that the SPI co-Chairs, with the support of the secretariat, develop and pilot, under the umbrella of the

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<sup>1</sup> The statistics for the Earth and environmental sciences are similar, but there is an indication the trend is improving. A recent study reported that, “within the U.S. geoscience workforce, the proportion of female PhD recipients increased from 23 per cent to 40 per cent, and the proportion of female full professors increased from 5 per cent to 14 per cent between 1996 and 2015”. See introduction of: <<https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1029/2019EA000706>>.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO's 2017 report “Measuring Gender Inequality in Science and Engineering” notes that “women represent nearly 30 per cent of all researchers globally, with regional differences visible across the world”. See page 20: <<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/saga-toolkit-wp2-2017-en.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> See Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system <<https://undocs.org/en/A/72/220>>, administrative instructions ST/AI/1999/9 (Special measures for the achievement of gender equality) and ST/AI/2016/1 (Staff selection and managed mobility system).

<sup>4</sup> See A/RES/70/213, paragraph 6 <<https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/213>>.

UNCCD mentorship programme for young professionals detailed in ICCD/CRIC(20)/6, a pro bono fellowship programme which would involve earlier career scientists in the work of the SPI, taking into consideration the additional objective of improving the diversity and gender balance of the SPI by encouraging the involvement of those traditionally underrepresented in science.

16. With guidance provided by the Bureau of the CST and the secretariat, the SPI co-Chairs developed and launched, as a pilot, the SPI Early Career Scientist Fellowship Programme, a pro bono UNCCD-secretariat administered fellowship programme focused on engaging experts with at least three, and no more than six, years of post-PhD research experience to contribute to the work of the SPI over the period of its work programme. The goal of this programme is to provide an opportunity for outstanding early career individuals from all backgrounds and disciplines working on DLDD to support the secretariat to the UNCCD and the SPI in their efforts to provide thematic guidance on knowledge requirements for implementing the UNCCD.

17. After reviewing candidates recommended by SPI members, and with special consideration given to gender, diversity and qualities that could make an immediate impact on the work of the SPI, two SPI Early Career Scientist Fellows were selected. Both have made important contributions to the work of the SPI during the 2020–2021 biennium. The SPI co-Chairs, supported by the secretariat, will review the results of the pilot following COP 16 to further refine the programme.

18. The working modalities of the SPI are governed by terms of reference and associated policies, including a code of conduct, conflict of interest policy and a communications strategy which were adopted by the 13th Bureau of the CST.<sup>5</sup> At its meeting on 8–9 December 2019, the 14th Bureau of the CST also adopted these, without amendment.

19. The SPI is co-chaired by the Chair of the Bureau of the CST and an independent scientist elected by the members of the SPI who is not part of the Bureau of the CST. This election took place on 19 February 2020 at the 11th meeting of the SPI.

20. The practices and modalities of work of the SPI during the 2020–2021 biennium centred around working groups and meetings. Members and observers joined one or more of three SPI working groups for each SPI work programme sub-objective and each of the six SPI coordination activities with other scientific mechanisms, as defined in decision 18/COP.14. These working groups were guided by three co-leaders and at least one advisor from an observer organization and met virtually on a regular basis, including dedicated working sessions that were central to the full meetings of the SPI: the 11th meeting of the SPI (17–19 February 2020), the 12th meeting of the SPI (4–6 November 2020), and the 13th meeting of the SPI (29 March–1 April 2021). The 14th meeting of the SPI was held in a hybrid online–in person format where face-to-face working sessions were possible (19–21 October 2021).

21. The working groups developed a preliminary approach and action plan for their work, leading to concept notes which were submitted to the secretariat for review and for the approval of the resources allocated to these activities. Following the guidance provided in decision 19/COP.12, paragraph 2, these concept notes identified the optimal way forward to address the knowledge requirements, involving the commissioning of experts whose inputs contributed to the SPI scientific assessments and technical reports.

22. Over the course of the 2020–2021 biennium, the SPI produced two technical reports and associated science-policy briefs, which contributed to the key messages and policy options detailed in documents ICCD/COP(15)/CST/2 and ICCD/COP(15)/CST/3.

23. The terms of reference for the SPI encourages members and observers to develop scientific publications building upon the assessment work of the SPI. Over the course of the

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<sup>5</sup> <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/science-policy-interface/mandate-and-tor-spi>>.

2020–2021 biennium, current and former SPI members and observers contributed to over 150 peer-reviewed publications which have resulted from their work on the SPI.<sup>6</sup>

24. As detailed in document ICCD/COP(15)/CST/4, the SPI contributed to and cooperated with six other international scientific panels and bodies dealing with DLDD issues, including the scientific peer review of thematic assessments and other major reports produced by these scientific mechanisms. Where requested by Parties in decision 18/COP.14, the SPI conducted additional analyses of key messages in these reports relevant to the UNCCD, and provided scientific oversight for the 2nd edition of the Global Land Outlook. During this biennium, the SPI, working with the secretariat, also established more formal relationships with these scientific mechanisms, as requested by Parties in decision 20/COP.14.

25. The secretariat worked to facilitate communication between the UNCCD and other stakeholders on matters related to the SPI and its scientific partners over the course of the 2020–2021 biennium. This included raising awareness of national focal points, science and technology correspondents and the roster of experts on scientific peer review opportunities open to experts from all countries. The secretariat also worked with the SPI on contributions to the UNCCD Science to Policy Blog, which has been designed for scientists, experts, practitioners, policy-makers and journalists to share their insights, expertise and ideas with other UNCCD stakeholders.<sup>7</sup>

26. During the 2020–2021 biennium, the secretariat, the Bureau of the CST and the SPI explored ways to further facilitate communication between the SPI and the science and technology correspondents (STC) of Parties. On the new UNCCD website, which was launched in early 2022, the science section is prominent, centred around the products of the SPI. Expanding direct communications on the progress of SPI work beyond the communications between CST Bureau members within their regions has also been explored, recognizing the limitations of presenting the preliminary results of SPI scientific assessments prior to the independent review process described in decision 19/COP.12. Targeted direct communications with STCs focused on participation in scientific meetings relevant to the UNCCD, and the milestones achieved by SPI cooperation partners, have been expanded.

27. During the 2020–2021 biennium, the secretariat continued to mobilize resources for the effective functioning of the SPI, which made it possible for the SPI to complete all tasks in its work programme according to the means defined in its mandate.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. Dissemination of relevant knowledge through the UNCCD Knowledge Hub**

28. The UNCCD Knowledge Hub, which was launched at the fifteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, aims to, inter alia, scale up SLM practices and increase the knowledge and scientific and technical skills of stakeholders in the Convention. The Knowledge Hub aims to provide UNCCD stakeholders with the knowledge and information needed to effectively implement the Convention.

29. The Knowledge Hub connects relevant scientific knowledge from, inter alia, the SPI to policy and implementation. It does so by making the various SPI products easily

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<sup>6</sup> A list of all the peer-reviewed publications co-authored by one or more Science-Policy Interface (SPI) members or observers resulting from the work of the SPI in the 2020–2021 biennium can be accessed online: <[https://catalogue.unccd.int/SPI\\_2020-2021\\_Publications.pdf](https://catalogue.unccd.int/SPI_2020-2021_Publications.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> <<https://knowledge.unccd.int/knowledge-products-and-pillars/unccd-science-policy-blog>>.

<sup>8</sup> As per decision 19/COP.12, paragraph 2, the Science-Policy Interface is mandated to identify and pursue the optimal way forward to complete the tasks of its work programme (e.g. commissioning an individual or group of experts, organizing expert meetings, encouraging the organization of regional meetings by regional scientific institutions or networks) in order to provide the Committee on Science and Technology with clear and well-defined thematic guidance on scientific knowledge requirements for implementing the UNCCD.

accessible, and enriching these, in collaboration with partners, with examples and case studies.

30. By decision 19/COP.14, the COP requested the secretariat continue the expansion and further enhancement of the UNCCD Knowledge Hub in response to the needs and priorities of country Parties to facilitate the dissemination of relevant knowledge to all stakeholders. Through the same decision, the COP also encourages Parties and invites stakeholders to continue sharing relevant information and knowledge through the Knowledge Hub. Throughout 2020–2021, the Knowledge Hub has been kept continuously up-to-date through information shared by stakeholders, as well as the latest relevant scientific publications.

31. The UNCCD-led Drought Toolbox, which was launched at COP 14, forms an integral part of the Knowledge Hub. By decision 23/COP.14, the COP requested the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) to further upgrade and expand the Drought Toolbox.

32. Further additions to the toolbox database have been made based on suggestions received from Parties, regional and sub-regional stakeholders and partners, as well as through a survey with Parties and regional organizations.

33. Further, in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme–Danish Hydraulic Institute (UNEP-DHI) Centre on Water and Environment and other partners, the secretariat organized several online training webinars on the Toolbox. Further information about the Drought Toolbox and workshops and training opportunities provided can be found in document ICCD/COP(15)/15.

34. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) is supporting a project on ‘Enabling Activities for Implementing UNCCD COP Drought Decisions’. The project was launched in April 2021 and the expected completion date is December 2023. Under component two, Enhancing the Drought Toolbox, the following activities are planned: (i) Drought Toolbox scaled out and enhanced with datasets for monitoring and early warning, improved risk assessment and including gender-responsive tools for risk mitigation; (ii) Capacities of the member countries for utilization of the enhanced Drought Toolbox developed; and (iii) A community of practice established and capacities strengthened on drought risk management to contribute to knowledge sharing between countries and individual users.<sup>9</sup>

35. In 2021 the secretariat and the GM engaged with the FAO, the UNEP–DHI Centre on Water and Environment, WOCAT, and other partners, to implement this project.

36. Following decision 17/COP.14, the secretariat also conducted a stock-taking exercise, then developed a preliminary inventory of existing information and knowledge on drought-tolerant species. Most repositories for this information are not in the public domain, however the preliminary assessment suggests that bringing together a wide range of public and private partners may encourage greater sharing. To this end, the secretariat has invited the two largest repositories outside of the private sector, Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and FAO, to explore options for sharing information on plant varieties and animal breeds tolerant to drought with UNCCD stakeholders.

37. By decision 25/COP.14, the COP requested the secretariat, in collaboration with relevant United Nations entities, institutions and partners, to develop a toolbox for sand and dust storms (SDS). In order to create an inventory of available tools, a number of workshops were organized in 2020 and 2021 with relevant partners and participants in the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms.

38. The SDS Toolbox is expected to be launched in 2022, building on the structure and knowledge collected in the SDS Compendium, which was published in early 2022. The

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<sup>9</sup> Further information about this project and the other components is provided in document can be found in ICCD/COP(15)/15.

updated Global SDS Source Base-Map was published in 2021 as part of the Knowledge Hub, with the aim of inclusion in the SDS Toolbox. Further information about the SDS Toolbox can be found in document ICCD/COP(15)/16.

39. In order to improve access to knowledge on SLM, within the context of both drought risk mitigation and SDS source mitigation, the secretariat engaged in a project with WOCAT in 2021, with the aim of inclusion in both the Drought Toolbox and the SDS Toolbox. The first phase of this project assessed the SDS and drought responsiveness of existing SLM technologies and approaches documented in the WOCAT Global SLM Database, and improved and classified the data to clarify and enhance its relevance to the different user needs. The project also aims to integrate the SDS and drought-relevant WOCAT data into both the UNCCD SDS and Drought Toolboxes for a user-friendly search of relevant SDS and drought mitigation options. With these outcomes, UNCCD stakeholders will have easy access to concrete guidance on SLM technologies for drought risk mitigation and SDS source mitigation, directly accessible through the UNCCD SDS and Drought Toolboxes.

40. Since its launch in 2016, the number of unique visitors to the Knowledge Hub has increased to over 20,000 per month. A substantial part of the growth in visitors during 2020 and 2021 can be attributed to content related to drought risk mitigation.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 1  
**Access statistics for the Knowledge Hub, provided by Google Analytics**



41. In the second half of 2021, the secretariat initiated a project to further integrate the Knowledge Hub into the main UNCCD website as part of a UNCCD-wide website redesign and rebranding effort. This project will fully integrate the website and the Knowledge Hub, enabling the Knowledge Hub, under the “Knowledge and Data” section of the new website, to provide a scientific and factual basis for UNCCD communications.

42. In the coming biennium, the secretariat aims to continue developing the knowledge and data tools, within the structure of the UNCCD website, to ensure the latest relevant

<sup>10</sup> Provided by Google Analytics: unique users per month for <<http://knowledge.unccd.int>>. Individuals that browse the site multiple times per day or month only get counted as one unique visitor. Numbers displayed are estimates as provided by Google Analytics.

scientific knowledge is available to UNCCD stakeholders, underpinning the overall messaging of the new website.

#### **IV. Coherence and alignment in ecosystem-based adaptation, ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction, nature-based solutions and sustainable land management**

43. In response to decision 19/COP.14, the secretariat collaborated with the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), which coordinated with the secretariats of the UNCCD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other relevant partners to produce an independent assessment and research report on coherence and alignment among SLM, EbA, Eco-DRR and NbS.<sup>11</sup>

44. The UNU report, entitled *Coherence and Alignment among Sustainable Land Management, Ecosystem-based Adaptation, Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction and Nature-based Solutions*, was published in November 2021.<sup>12</sup> The report presents an assessment of these approaches and provides information on their specificities, similarities and differences in reference to how each term is used in the context of implementing the Rio conventions and other international agreements, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

45. The report contains an analysis of these concepts, providing the historical background, a comparison of the intergovernmentally agreed definitions, a comparison of the terminology used, and the relevant global and national targets, frameworks, strategies and conventions. The report also presents three selected case studies, aimed at illustrating how the approaches align and highlighting the synergies and co-benefits among them.

46. The report was developed beginning with an extensive document review, primarily focused on official publications from United Nations entities (UNCCD, UNFCCC, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), FAO, CBD), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the SPI of the UNCCD and grey literature published by relevant organizations, including WOCAT, the Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction, the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), the World Bank and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This was supplemented by a comprehensive review of relevant scientific literature.

47. The desk research culminated in a preliminary draft of the report which was then shared and enhanced through a participatory workshop, involving representatives of organizations that have been central to development of or are primary end users of one or more of the approaches. These included the CBD, FAO, FEBA, IUCN, UNCCD, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDRR, UNEP, UNFCCC, Ramsar Convention, Wetlands International and WOCAT. Feedback from the participants was used to enhance the quality and utility of the report. The final report was developed and peer-reviewed by the same workshop participants.

48. The historical analysis in the report recognizes that SLM is the oldest of these concepts, highlighting that SLM has been recognized as an important instrument to address the issues of the three Rio conventions synergistically.

49. In comparing the conceptual similarities and differences among the approaches, the report categorizes NbS as a broader, umbrella concept, then focuses the analysis on the commonalities between SLM, EbA and Eco-DRR, and what is unique about each.

<sup>11</sup> Walz, Y., Nick, F., Higuera Roa, O., Nehren, U., Sebesvari, Z. (2021). *Coherence and Alignment among Sustainable Land Management, Ecosystem-based Adaptation, Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction, and Nature-based Solutions*. UNU-EHS, UNCCD. Bonn, Germany <<http://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:8495>>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

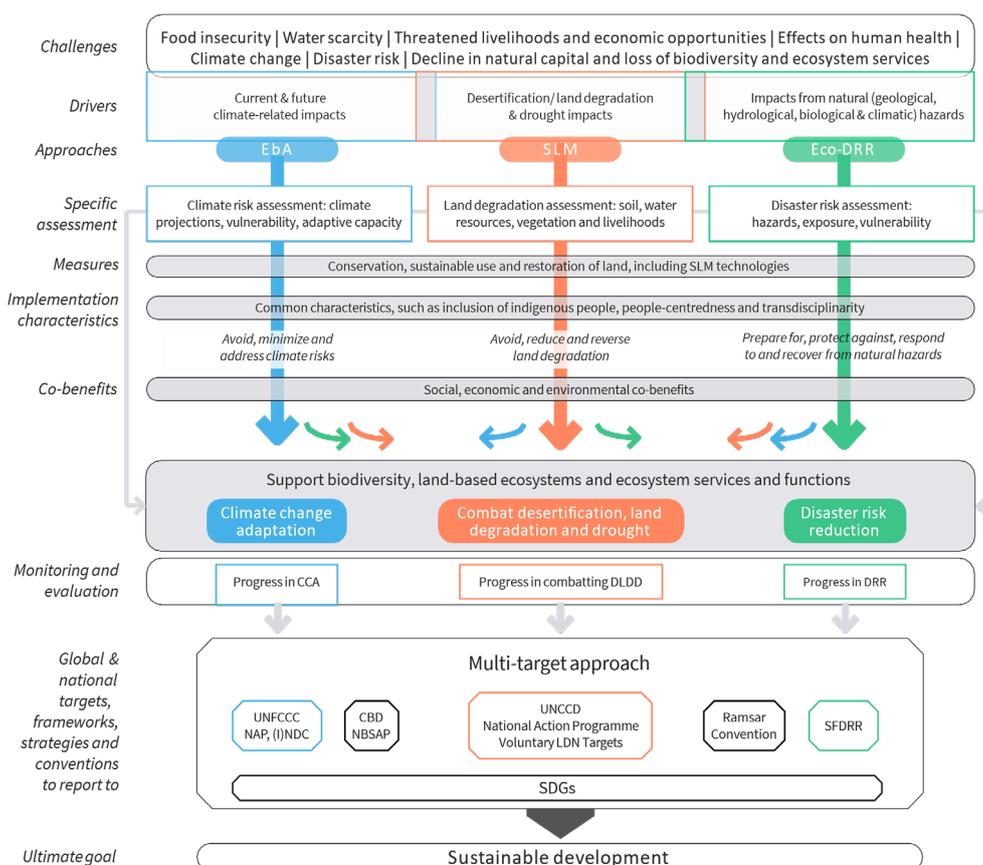
50. The report analysed the three approaches based on their specific goals, and the associated monitoring and evaluation frameworks. A conceptual framework (figure 2) illustrates the similarities and differences for the different categories analysed.

51. Many similarities were identified between the three approaches: all three use measures to conserve, sustainably use and restore land and all employ SLM technologies. The implementation characteristics are also similar, including, inter alia, their people-centred nature, transdisciplinarity, focus on equity and inclusion and integration of traditional and indigenous environmental knowledge and practices.

52. Further, the report found that although the specific goals and some of the core terminology used in the contexts of the different approaches varied, the underlying definitions and implementation characteristics are compatible, and many secondary objectives, such as protecting biodiversity, supporting ecosystem functions and services or promoting sustainable development were shared.

53. The report also found that, despite different specific goals, projects under each approach can generate multiple co-benefits. Due to this, projects launched under any of these approaches have the potential to contribute to the achievement of the specific goals of the other approaches, meaning that these projects could deliver on the objectives of multiple conventions and frameworks simultaneously.

Figure 2  
**Conceptual framework of similarities and differences of sustainable land management, ecosystem-based adaptation and ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction<sup>13</sup>**



<sup>13</sup> Walz, Y., Nick, F., Higuera Roa, O., Nehren, U., Sebesvari, Z. (2021). Coherence and Alignment among Sustainable Land Management, Ecosystem-based Adaptation, Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction, and Nature-based Solutions. UNU-EHS, UNCCD. Bonn, Germany: <<http://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:8495>>.

EbA: ecosystem-based adaptation / SLM: sustainable land management / Eco-DRR: ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction / DLDD: desertification/land degradation and drought / CCA: Climate Change Adaptation / UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change / NAP (UNFCCC): National Adaptation Plan / (I)NDC: (Intended) Nationally Determined Contribution / CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity / NBSAP: National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan / UNCCD: United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification / LDN: land degradation neutrality / SFDRR: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

54. As the different approaches can, and likely will, generate multiple mutual co-benefits, the report also found that the co-benefits are not always counted towards the targets set by the different processes. Due to the specific financing windows created for the achievement of specific goals, projects are often geared towards only one of the multiple goals.

55. In order to ensure that the multiple co-benefits are counted towards all relevant goals, the report suggests that the potential for multiple mutual co-benefits must be taken into consideration in the project design phase. Doing so could help countries to reduce the duplication of efforts and optimize the overall investments needed to meet the multiple but related goals.

56. In the report review workshop, some participants also noted that there has been an expansion of new and existing approaches to the sustainable management of water and land that may also fall under and be coherent with the umbrella concept of NbS, however they may not yet be formally recognized in intergovernmental frameworks. Examples, as mentioned by some participants, include, but are not limited to, conservation agriculture, agroecology, regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, permaculture, biodynamic agriculture and drought-smart agriculture. The workshop participants suggested a similar cohesion and alignment analysis as conducted by UNU would benefit all the SLM, EbA and Eco-DRR, the UNCCD and other multilateral environmental agreements, and the organizations implementing NbS, SLM, EbA and Eco-DRR.

57. As a follow-up to this report, the UNU and the secretariat to the UNCCD aim to continue collaborating with the various stakeholders involved in the next biennium. This will take the form of a workshop to evaluate the conclusions reached and aim to jointly develop actions to ensure the multiple co-benefits achieved by the various approaches are taken into consideration in the project design phase.

## V. Accessibility of best practices on sustainable land management

58. The sustainable management of land and water resources is central to the objective of the UNCCD (article 2 of the Convention) and knowledge of appropriate practices is key to its effective implementation. The provision of evidence-based practical guidance for on-the-ground solutions has been emphasized in numerous COP decisions related to interfacing science and policy and sharing knowledge. For knowledge on SLM practices, the secretariat collaborates with, inter alia, WOCAT, which features a rich database of SLM practices (technologies and approaches).

59. Established in 1992, WOCAT is a global network of SLM specialists, uniting more than 2000 members registered on the WOCAT platform, as well as over 60 participating institutions and around 30 national and regional initiatives. It connects stakeholders with SLM specialists and experts who share tools and methods for identifying fields of action, and gives the members an opportunity to share knowledge of land-resource management.

60. WOCAT Consortium Partners include the University of Bern/Centre for Development and Environment, the FAO, the International Soil Reference and Information Centre, the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.

61. In 2014, following decision 17/COP.11, WOCAT was recognized as the primary recommended database for UNCCD stakeholders to exchange knowledge and best practices

on SLM. Further, following this decision, the SLM best practices previously reported by Parties through the performance review and assessment of implementation system were transferred to and integrated into the WOCAT database. As part of the UNCCD National Reporting Process, Parties are encouraged to share relevant best practices on SLM through the WOCAT database. References to the best practices in the WOCAT database can be made in the official country reports, under the ‘Action on the ground’ section of the reporting form. All best practices from the WOCAT database are disseminated through the UNCCD Knowledge Hub, contributing to the Drought Risk Mitigation tools offered in the UNCCD Drought Toolbox.

62. At UNCCD COP 14 in India, WOCAT presented the WOCAT 2020+ Initiative, which was developed by the WOCAT Consortium Partners in close collaboration with the secretariat to the UNCCD.<sup>14</sup> This initiative aims to boost the uptake of SLM practices around the world through a strengthened global partnership.

63. WOCAT 2020+ strives to establish a leading platform of expertise and create transformative momentum to enable countries and institutions to scale up SLM, achieve land degradation neutrality and reach the related Sustainable Development Goals addressed by the three Rio conventions on land, climate and biodiversity. Building on the vast knowledge presented in the global SLM database and the new partnership actions, WOCAT 2020+ synthesizes local, national and regional experiences, provides tools for evidence-based decision-making, facilitates targeted research and disseminates lessons learned. This gives a wide range of stakeholders – from agricultural extensionists to UNCCD national focal points – the access to new SLM insights and guidance.

64. On 17 February 2020, the secretariat to the UNCCD and WOCAT signed a partnership agreement, committing to implement the WOCAT 2020+ Initiative together with the Consortium Partners.

65. Under this partnership agreement, a number of projects were initiated in 2020 and 2021, including a project on the cost and benefits of SLM, in collaboration with GIZ and the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) initiative. With the purpose of contributing to the current efforts of developing information on the costs and benefits of SLM, this project aims to carry out a review of WOCAT’s global SLM database in terms of the costs and benefits of SLMs technologies as well as the analysis of the potential jobs created by the different types of SLM technologies.

66. Further, a project was initiated to develop a module on gender in the WOCAT database. The new module, which is currently being tested in 13 different countries, aims to provide better insight into the potential gender-responsiveness of SLM technologies, while also increasing awareness of gender issues amongst WOCAT users, the SLM community and UNCCD stakeholders. For more information this project, see ICCD/COP(15)/17.

67. In 2021, as part of the FAO-led and GEF-funded project to strengthen the UNCCD Drought Toolbox, a project was initiated to strengthen the knowledge on SLM in relation to drought risk mitigation, and to better integrate the WOCAT SLM knowledge into the UNCCD Drought Toolbox. Analysis of the access statistics to the UNCCD Drought Toolbox show a significant increase in interest in drought risk mitigation.<sup>15</sup> With this project, the secretariat aims to address this need by providing policy guidance and showcasing and providing easier and better access to SLM practices, relevant to the specific user context. For more information this project, see ICCD/COP(15)/15.

68. Under the same project, the secretariat partnered with WOCAT to identify SLM practices for SDS source mitigation, with the aim of integrating these practices into the UNCCD SDS Toolbox. The project, which is expected to be finalized during 2022, also aims to strengthen the synergies between the Drought Toolbox and the SDS Toolbox. The

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<sup>14</sup> <[https://www.wocat.net/documents/1082/WOCAT2020\\_Concept\\_Note.pdf](https://www.wocat.net/documents/1082/WOCAT2020_Concept_Note.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> Access statistics to the UNCCD Knowledge Hub are provided by Google Analytics. This service provides estimates of the number of visitors to the various pages and sections of the knowledge hub, as well as an indication of internet search queries that brought users to the Knowledge Hub. See also Paragraph 40 above.

project is coordinated and managed by the University of Bern on behalf of the WOCAT consortium, while ICARDA provides the required expertise.

69. Further, the secretariat collaborated with WOCAT in 2020 and 2021 to produce a brochure and social media campaign on sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration to mark the launch of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The brochure demonstrates how SLM has a central role in all eight ecosystems identified to structure the activities of the decade. Building on the collection of best practices in the WOCAT database, the brochure is illustrated with many concrete examples of SLM projects on the ground for all eight ecosystems defined, ranging from dynamic agroforestry in Bolivia and rotational pasture management in Uzbekistan to urban agriculture in Uganda.<sup>16</sup> For further information, please see ICCD/COP(15)/3.

70. For the upcoming biennium, the secretariat aims to further the collaboration with WOCAT, developing further knowledge tools and products on SLM, and addressing needs identified by UNCCD stakeholders.

## VI. Conclusions and recommendations

71. Having considered the reports in this document, the working modalities of the SPI, the progress made on the development of the UNCCD Knowledge Hub, the report on the coherence and alignment among EbA, Eco-DRR, NbS and SLM, and on the dissemination of best practices on SLM, the CST may wish to consider the following conclusions, with the aim of making recommendations to the COP.

72. The refinements to the stage renewal process for the SPI maintained an appropriate regional and disciplinary balance in SPI membership. However, the concerns raised by the Bureau of the CST about the balance of men and women, as well as the need to mainstream gender into all SPI work, highlight the need for an SPI-specific gender policy and implementation plan to improve gender balance and address gender-related issues within the SPI, which would supplement the SPI terms of reference. In recent years, other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies have developed and instituted a gender policy and implementation plan.<sup>17</sup> Although challenges remain, this approach has contributed to the progress made in improving gender balance and addressing gender-related issues.<sup>18</sup>

73. Further exploration is needed in terms of expanding direct communications with Parties on the progress of SPI work beyond the communications between CST Bureau members within their regions, recognizing the limitations of presenting preliminary results of SPI scientific assessments prior to the independent review process described in decision 19/COP.12.

74. Through the generous support of Parties, the secretariat has been successful over the 2020–2021 biennium in mobilizing resources for the effective functioning of the SPI, which made it possible for the SPI to complete all tasks assigned to it in its work programme.

75. The UNCCD Knowledge Hub has proven to be an effective tool that connects relevant scientific knowledge from, inter alia, the SPI, to policy and implementation.

<sup>16</sup> <<https://www.unccd.int/publications/restoring-life-land-role-sustainable-land-management-ecosystem-restoration>>.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the gender policy and implementation plan of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:  
<[https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2020/05/IPCC\\_Gender\\_Policy\\_and\\_Implementation\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2020/05/IPCC_Gender_Policy_and_Implementation_Plan.pdf)>.

<sup>18</sup> See the experience of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:  
<<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00208-1?proof=tNature>>.

76. The secretariat can build on the synergies between the knowledge tools developed by the SPI, and other tools offered, such as the Drought Toolbox and the SDS Toolbox, by providing them all in one platform.

77. The report on coherence and alignment between EbA, Eco-DRR, NbS and SLM provided valuable insight into the differences and similarities between these approaches, and highlighted the central role of land-based solutions and SLM in all approaches.

78. Based on the report, it can be concluded that the approaches are compatible, and that when multiple mutual co-benefits are considered in the project design phase under all approaches, the overall investments needed to meet the multiple but related goals can be optimized. This could also enable UNCCD stakeholders to benefit from funding opportunities geared towards multiple goals in the implementation of SLM projects. These projects can be designed to include co-benefits geared towards the specific goals of the UNCCD, while enabling stakeholders to report on progress made towards goals of multiple Rio conventions.

79. Additionally, other approaches not included in the comparison made in this report, and not yet formally recognized by the UNCCD and other multilateral environmental agreements, may present an opportunity. Considering the breadth of activity taking place under these other approaches, which may not yet be captured in the reporting of multilateral environmental agreements, a similar alignment analysis to that conducted by UNU would benefit all stakeholders.

80. The collaboration between the UNCCD and the WOCAT Consortium has effectively aligned the goals of the new WOCAT strategy with the goals of the UNCCD. Multiple projects aimed at providing specific knowledge tools geared towards the needs of UNCCD stakeholders have been and are being developed.

81. The WOCAT database can continue to be a valuable tool for UNCCD stakeholders for the exchange of knowledge, while tools under development are helping to build the capacity of UNCCD stakeholders in line with the UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework.

82. The CST may wish to consider these conclusions when engaging in consultations on a draft decision for the COP based on the draft text for negotiations found in ICCD/COP(15)/CST/8, and which, following decision 32/COP.14, contains all draft decisions prepared for Parties for consideration at the fifteenth session of the CST.

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