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Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface

Preparations for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface

Note by the secretariat

Summary

By its decision 20/COP.16, the Conference of the Parties requested the development, during the 2025–2026 transition biennium, of a number of elements needed for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), beginning with the 2027–2030 quadrennium. These include arrangements relating to membership and governance, procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests for the SPI work programme, procedures for the preparation of flagship reports and the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice, options for ensuring adequate technical support, cooperation with other intergovernmental science-policy bodies and the financial implications of these arrangements.

In response, the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, with the support of the secretariat and input from the SPI, undertook work during the 2025–2026 biennium to prepare the institutional, procedural and operational foundations for the future functioning of the SPI. This included the renewal of SPI membership for the transition biennium, preparations for the transition to four-year work programmes, the development and trialling of new procedures, consideration of cooperation with partner scientific bodies and the preparation of a feasibility study on technical support arrangements, including the possible use of an external technical support unit.

This document summarizes the main outcomes of that work. It presents the updated modalities relating to the future functioning of the SPI, the procedures developed for requests and outputs, the main findings of the feasibility study on technical support, ongoing cooperation with other science-policy bodies and the estimated financial implications for the 2027–2030 quadrennium.



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I. Introduction

1. At its sixteenth session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided to establish a standing Science-Policy Interface (SPI) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to ensure the delivery of policy-relevant information, knowledge and advice, in a manner that is equitable and transparent, and to support the implementation of the Convention, building on the mandate outlined in decisions 23/COP.11 and 19/COP.13, and refined in decisions 19/COP.14 and 19/COP.15, as long as it operates within the approved administrative budget.

2. Following decision 20/COP.16, starting at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) in 2026, the future work programmes of the SPI will be fixed for a duration of two intersessional periods (usually four years) and the 2025–2026 work programme will serve as a transition programme. Decision 20/COP.16 requests the development of a number of elements for the future functioning of the SPI after COP 17 during the transition 2025–2026 biennium. These are summarized in table 1 below:

Table 1
Summary of the elements requested in decision 20/COP.16 for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface

<i>Section in this document</i>	<i>Decision 20/COP.16 Paragraph</i>	<i>Element for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface requested in decision 20/COP.19</i>	<i>Responsible</i>
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18	Feasibility study to identify ways of ensuring adequate technical support for the SPI, including the possible use of one or more external technical support units provided by partners	Secretariat
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<i>Section in this document</i>	<i>Decision 20/COP.16 Paragraph</i>	<i>Element for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface requested in decision 20/COP.19</i>	<i>Responsible</i>
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II. Working modalities: Membership and governance

A. Report on the 2025–2026 biennium modalities of work

3. In accordance with decisions 19/COP.13 and 19/COP.14, membership of the SPI through to COP 17 has been renewed each biennium in stages, through a rotating system, with some new and other remaining members. Following decision 20/COP.16, the membership consists of:

- (a) The elected members of the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST);
- (b) Fifteen independent scientists, selected through an open call;
- (c) Five independent early-career scientists selected from the same open call;
- (d) One independent scientist nominated from the same open call by each of the five United Nations regional groups; and
- (e) Five observers: four representing the United Nations system organizations and other international organizations selected from an open call, and one representing civil society organizations (CSOs) nominated by the UNCCD CSO panel.

4. To renew the SPI for the 2025–2026 biennium, the Bureau of the CST, in its 20 January 2025 meeting, requested the secretariat to invite SPI independent scientists who had actively contributed to reports during the last triennium to consider extending their service during the 2025–2026 biennium. The Bureau of the CST also requested the secretariat to issue an open call for new independent scientists to complete the membership of the SPI, as defined in decision 20/COP.16. The open call for independent scientists was available to candidates from 27 February to 26 March 2025.¹

5. The open call for independent scientists was advertised on the UNCCD website and within relevant scientific networks, supported by comprehensive recruitment efforts focused on encouraging applications from scientists meeting the SPI membership criteria established in decision 20/COP.16, including scientific expertise and demonstrated scientific impact relevant to the SPI work programme, demonstrated experience in interfacing science and policy, and the achievement, where possible, of regional, gender, career stage and disciplinary balance, with particular emphasis on addressing the disciplinary gaps identified in decision 7/COP.16.

6. A total of 106 applications were received from 49 different countries, across all regional groups and regional implementation annexes. There was a reasonable balance of applications received in terms of gender (58 per cent male; 42 per cent female) and career stage (27 per cent early career, defined as ≤ 6 years from obtaining a PhD; 25 per cent mid-career, defined as 7 to 13 years from PhD; and 48 per cent senior scientists, defined as > 13

¹ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/other/call-independent-scientists-serve-unccd-spi-closed-26-march-2025>.

years from PhD). The Bureau of the CST noted the overall high quality of applications in terms of scientific impact and experience in interfacing science and policy, as well as their disciplinary breadth, covering a number of relevant scientific domains not represented in the current SPI membership.

7. At meetings held on 10 April 2025 (part 1) and 16 April 2025 (part 2), the Bureau of the CST reviewed, evaluated and ranked the applications received through the aforementioned call, as per the criteria for SPI membership stipulated in decision 20/COP.16, as well as the selection modalities agreed by the Bureau of the CST, leading to the selection of nine new independent scientists. The selections, which focused on scientific impact and experience in interfacing science and policy, addressed gaps in the disciplinary balance of the SPI, and added a fifth early-career scientist. The selections also helped ensure that current gender and regional balance in SPI membership would be maintained. Of the nine selected independent scientists, two each are from the African States, Asia-Pacific States, Latin America and the Caribbean States and Eastern European States, and one is from the Western Europe and Other States, contributing to regional balance in SPI membership.

8. During a meeting held on 20 January 2025, the Bureau of the CST requested the secretariat to invite United Nations system organizations and other international organizations accredited to the UNCCD to express their interest in being appointed as an observer to the UNCCD SPI for the 2025–2026 biennium. The call for applications opened on 25 March 2025 and closed on 8 April 2025.

9. Following a virtual review of the applications received, the Bureau of the CST selected the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations University – Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to serve, through their nominated representatives and alternates, as observer organizations on the SPI. The Bureau of the CST also acknowledged the nomination by the UNCCD CSO panel of a representative of CSOs to serve on the SPI. Later in 2025, the CSO panel also nominated an alternate.

10. Taking into consideration those members of the SPI whose membership to the SPI was extended by the Bureau of the CST, as well as those that were selected through the 2025 open call, the membership of the SPI was renewed.

11. The Bureau of the CST, in its 20 January 2025 meeting, requested the SPI member having shadowed the former SPI independent scientist Co-Chair to serve as acting SPI Co-Chair. At the 21st Meeting of the SPI from 13 to 15 May 2025, this independent scientist was formally elected as Co-Chair following the election process defined in the terms of reference for SPI members.

12. The full SPI met virtually from 13 to 15 May 2025 and physically from 18 to 20 June 2025. It had intended to meet physically on a further two occasions, but these meetings were not possible due to the unavailability of resources. The SPI compensated for this through two physical lead author meetings and a meeting of the co-leads of its coordination activities. In addition, the three task teams of the SPI and smaller working groups engaged virtually numerous times during the 2025–2026 biennium. These streamlined meetings were key to the completion of the activities reported in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/6](#).

B. Report on the transition to the 2027–2030 quadrennium modalities of work

13. The Bureau of the CST, with the support of the secretariat, made preparations for the transition to the 2027–2030 quadrennium by updating the modalities of work of the SPI following decision 20/COP.16.

14. By the same decision, beginning with the 2027–2030 quadrennium, the SPI will be co-chaired by the Chair of the CST to be elected at COP 17, and by an independent scientist elected by the independent scientists serving on the SPI prior to the end of the 2025–2026 biennium, thus allowing the incoming Co-Chair to ‘shadow’ the outgoing Co-Chair, ensuring continuity in leadership for the next four-year term. The procedure for this election was

developed over the 2025–2026 biennium and implemented by the SPI Co-Chairs in preparation for the 2027–2030 quadrennium.

15. Also in accordance with decision 20/COP.16, and with the support of the secretariat, the Bureau of the CST updated the terms of reference and associated governance documents for members and observers of the SPI, taking into account the objectives and mandate of the SPI, the purpose, scope and organization of its substantive work, the modalities for the nomination and selection of its members and observers, the organization of its meetings, and other provisions identified as needed for the effective functioning of the SPI in order to fulfil its mandate under the governance of the Bureau of the CST.²

III. Procedures

16. In accordance with decision 20/COP.16, paragraph 6 (a), the COP requested the Bureau of the CST, with the support of the secretariat, to develop procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the SPI for its work programme, including thematic assessments forming the basis of Global Land Outlook (GLO) products or similar flagship reports, and for fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

17. In paragraphs 6 (b) and (c) of decision 20/COP.16, the COP requested the Bureau of the CST, with the support of the secretariat, to develop procedures for the:

(a) preparation of flagship reports, including the scoping of report outlines, which should include provisions for considering Parties' views, thematic assessments of scientific as well as Indigenous and traditional knowledge, independent scientific reviews, and the preparation and approval by the CST of Summaries for Policymakers (SPM); and

(b) development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

18. These procedures were developed collaboratively by the Bureau of the CST, with the support of the secretariat and input from the SPI over the 2025–2026 biennium, taking into consideration:

(a) the procedural approaches requested by Parties to select the topics for and develop past SPI technical reports;

(b) the procedural approaches employed by the secretariat to identify the topics for and develop the first and second editions of the GLO (GLO1 and GLO2);

(c) the respective procedural approaches adopted by other scientific bodies in their processes, notably the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and GRID-Arendal, a partner of the United Nations Environment Programme;

(d) the request by the secretariat in decision 20/COP.16, paragraph 2, to ensure that SPI products are supported by a comprehensive and innovative communications strategy; and

(e) the experiences gained and lessons learned over the 2025–2026 biennium through the collaborative efforts of the Bureau of the CST, the secretariat and the SPI to develop and trial procedures during the scoping and preparation of GLO3 as well as the piloting of a fast-track assessment.

19. Table 2 summarizes the procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the SPI that were endorsed by the Bureau of the CST in the run up to COP 17.³

² See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/spi-governance-documents>.

³ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/procedures-receiving-and-prioritizing-requests-spi-work-programme>.

Table 2

Summary of the procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the Science-Policy Interface

Purpose of the procedures: To guide how requests are received and prioritized for inclusion in the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) work programme, including requests for flagship reports and related thematic assessments, as well as fast-track assessments, information products and advice.
Types of SPI outputs covered: Requests may relate to: (a) flagship reports, including the Global Land Outlook (GLO) and similar flagship products; (b) fast-track assessments; (c) information products; and (d) advice.
Submission of requests for flagship-report topics by Parties: In response to a call issued by the secretariat, Parties may submit requests on priority scientific and technical matters for possible inclusion in the SPI work programme for consideration by the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). Joint submissions, including through regional groups, are encouraged, thereby enabling Parties to articulate shared regional priorities in a coordinated manner.
Other inputs to flagship-report topics: Inputs and suggestions may also be received, as appropriate, from other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and United Nations bodies, as well as from other relevant stakeholders, including scientific organizations, Indigenous peoples and local communities and civil society.
Information to accompany requests for flagship-report topics: Requests, inputs and suggestions should be accompanied by information on, inter alia, their relevance to the implementation of the Convention and to the SPI mandate, urgency, policy relevance, geographic scope, expected complexity, existing gaps and added value, availability of literature and expertise, potential impacts and beneficiaries, and indicative financial and human resource requirements and duration.
Indicative timing for flagship-report requests: Requests, inputs and suggestions for consideration by the CST are to be submitted to the secretariat approximately 9 to 12 months before the relevant session of the CST. On an exceptional basis, for the 2027–2030 quadrennium, this process will take place after CST 17/COP 17, and thus the approval of the topic of the GLO4 flagship report and the update of the SPI work programme will be undertaken by the Bureau of the CST.
Compilation and initial analysis of flagship-report requests: The secretariat compiles submissions received and prepares them for the attention of the CST Bureau, including an overview of their scope, thematic coverage and indicative resource implications.
Prioritization of flagship-report requests: The CST Bureau requests the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) to consider and prioritize the submissions against the agreed criteria, including relevance to the Convention and the SPI mandate, urgency, feasibility and resource implications; late submissions may be considered on an exceptional basis.
Reflection of Parties' views in prioritization: For thematic assessments forming the basis of GLO products or similar flagship reports, the CST Bureau consults with regions in order to receive feedback on Parties' views before, with the support of the secretariat, defining the topics to be proposed for inclusion in the SPI work programme. This provides a specific channel through which regional groups can help shape the prioritization of themes for the SPI's flagship work.
Role of regional groups: Regional groups provide an important means for Parties to articulate shared priorities in the request and prioritization process, including through joint submissions, regional consultations on thematic assessments for flagship reports, and coordination around requests for fast-track assessments, information products and advice.
Outcome of the prioritization process: A report is prepared containing, inter alia, a prioritized list of topics, information on scientific and policy relevance and financial implications, identification of areas of convergence across submissions, and analysis of thematic linkages and cross-cutting issues for consideration by the CST Bureau.
Transmission of recommendations to Parties: At least six months before a session of the CST, the CST Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, prepares recommendations on the SPI work programme based on the prioritization report. The secretariat processes these recommendations and makes them available to Parties at least six weeks before the session of the CST, in accordance with the applicable rules of procedure, for consideration and decision.
Treatment of urgent issues through fast-track work: Where the prioritization of requests reveals priority topics requiring urgent attention, the CST may determine that they should be addressed by the SPI through a fast-track assessment or another information product in line with the procedure for fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

Who may request fast-track assessments, information products and advice: Fast-track assessments, information products and advice may be requested by the Bureaux of the COP, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the CST, as well as by the secretariat and the GM, in accordance with decision 20/COP.16. Parties may raise such requests through the COP, CRIC and CST Bureaux, including through consultations within regional groups, or directly with the secretariat or the GM in order to initiate the process.
Timing and nature of fast-track requests: Requests for fast-track assessments, information products and advice may be raised at any time in order to respond to relevant or urgent needs, including, inter alia, implementation of COP decisions, emerging issues related to desertification, land degradation and drought, time-sensitive funding and partnership opportunities, and identified gaps in existing assessments or reports.
Information to accompany fast-track requests: Fast-track requests are accompanied by information on the nature of the requested deliverable (fast-track assessment, information product or advice), justification for its urgency, relevant decisions, scope, objectives and key questions to be addressed, and the proposed delivery timeline and expected outputs.
Feasibility assessment of fast-track requests: Upon receiving a request, the secretariat coordinates with the SPI Co-Chairs to conduct a brief feasibility assessment, taking into account the SPI workload, compressed timelines, availability of resources and expertise, and the urgency of the request; the same approach applies where the secretariat initiates a request.
Possible outcomes of the feasibility assessment: The SPI may: (a) meet the request within the SPI; (b) meet the request with the support of a partner organization and/or other appropriately specialized experts; or (c) decline the request where the necessary expertise, time or resources are not available; where external support is needed, the SPI and secretariat identify suitable partners and may establish a task team.
Communication with requesting entities: The outcome of the feasibility assessment is communicated to the requesting entity as soon as possible, ideally within two weeks and no later than one month, and requesting entities are kept informed of progress in the review and prioritization of their requests.

20. Table 3 summarizes the procedures for the preparation of flagship reports and for the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice that were endorsed by the Bureau of the CST in the run up to COP 17.⁴

Table 3

Summary of the procedures for the preparation of flagship reports and for the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice

Purpose of the procedures: Guides the preparation of flagship reports such as the Global Land Outlook, and the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice, in accordance with decision 20/COP.16.
Types of Science-Policy Interface (SPI) outputs covered: The procedures apply to flagship reports, including associated Summaries for Policymakers (SPM), as well as to fast-track assessments, information products and advice.
Flagship reports
Scientific leadership and institutional roles: The SPI takes the scientific lead in the preparation of flagship reports, while the secretariat supports process management, communication and publication, and the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) helps ensure that the process remains aligned with the mandate of the Convention and the needs of Parties.
How Parties shape flagship reports: Parties shape flagship reports through the prior process for identifying and prioritizing themes for the SPI work programme (see table 2), through their feedback during the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) stakeholder review, and through CST consideration and approval of the recommendations in the SPMs by way of CST discussions of the flagship report official document and draft decision.
Flagship report team and oversight: For each flagship report, the SPI identifies a report chair, coordinating lead authors and review editors, while a steering committee oversees scoping, drafting, review and preparation of the SPM, with participation from the SPI and the secretariat.

⁴ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/procedures-preparation-unccd-flagship-reports-and-fast-track>.

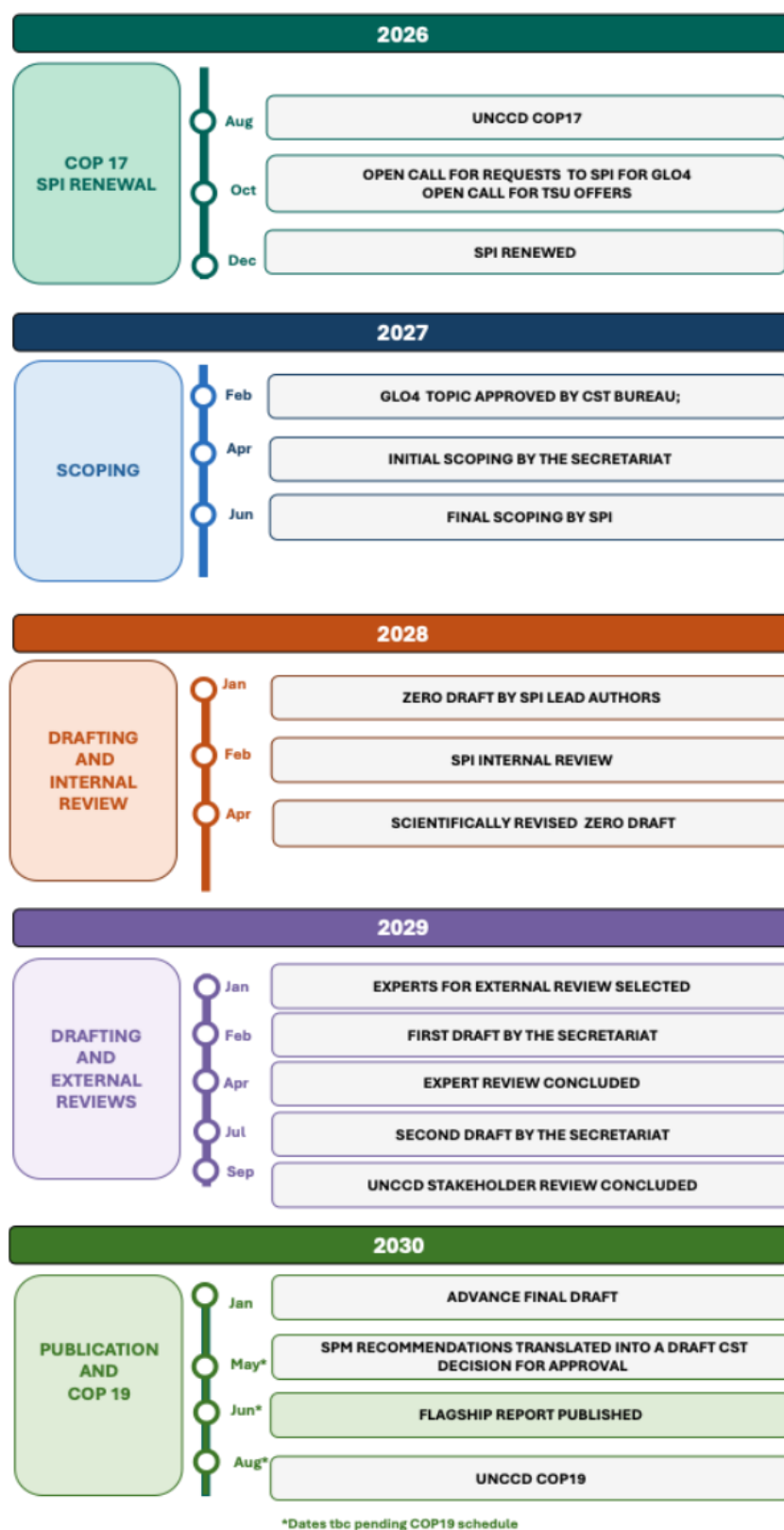
Basis of assessments: Flagship reports should be scientifically balanced and policy-relevant, drawing on publicly available and peer-reviewed literature as well as other accessible sources, including Indigenous and traditional knowledge, in accordance with the agreed procedures on literature use and knowledge inclusion.
Scoping of flagship reports: The preparation of flagship reports begins with an initial and a final scoping phase to define the scope, objectives, policy questions, chapter structure, methodologies, timetable, budget, communications approach and expected outputs of the report.
Contribution of Parties and stakeholders to scoping and content: In line with decision 20/COP.16, Parties' views are taken into account in the preparation of flagship reports, while the procedures also provide for the inclusion of relevant scientific, technical, Indigenous and traditional knowledge and other contributions, where appropriate.
Preparation of draft flagship reports: SPI coordinating lead authors, with support from contributing authors, prepare a zero-order draft, after which the secretariat develops a first-order draft, with support from the SPI and under the oversight of the steering committee, to ensure that the report is scientifically robust and accessible to policy audiences.
Internal SPI review: Before external review, the SPI undertakes an internal review of the zero-order draft of the flagship report in order to verify scientific accuracy, consistency of concepts and terminology, and traceability of evidence and sources.
Independent scientific review: The first-order draft of a flagship report is subject to independent scientific review by external experts selected for relevant expertise, gender balance and geographical representation, and all comments are to be recorded and addressed through the review process.
UNCCD stakeholder review: Flagship reports are also subject to review by UNCCD stakeholders, including Parties (represented by national focal points and science and technology correspondents), accredited civil society organizations, intergovernmental organizations and relevant caucuses and fora, in accordance with modalities established by the secretariat.
Review principles: The review process is intended to ensure that flagship reports are balanced, comprehensive, transparent and grounded in the best available scientific, technical and socioeconomic knowledge, with broad participation and due consideration of all substantive comments.
Summaries for Policymakers: Each flagship report includes an SPM that distils the main findings, key messages and policy-oriented recommendations emerging from the report, which is prepared and revised in parallel with the successive draft stages of the report.
Approval by the CST: In accordance with decision 20/COP.16, approval of UNCCD flagship report SPM at a session of the CST signifies that the material has been subject to a detailed scientific and policy review process (including national focal points and science and technology correspondents) prior to publication, with its recommendations subject to a line by line discussion and agreement within the draft decision corresponding to the respective SPM during the respective session of the CST.
Publication and dissemination of flagship reports: Following completion of the advance final draft, the secretariat coordinates copyediting, design, possible translation, proofreading and publication, with the format of publication determined according to the most appropriate and accessible means of dissemination.
Error correction: If a possible error is identified after publication, the secretariat requests the SPI Co-Chairs to investigate the matter and, where necessary, oversee corrective action so that any approved correction is reflected without undue delay in publicly available versions.
<i>Fast-track assessments and information products</i>
Preparation of fast-track assessments and information products: Once a request for a fast-track assessment has been received and accepted through the agreed feasibility process (see table 2), the SPI Co-Chairs and the secretariat consult with the requesting entity to prepare a scoping document, after which a draft is prepared, reviewed by the requesting entity and finalized within the agreed timeline.
Review of fast-track assessments and information products: Fast-track assessments and information products will be reviewed internally by the SPI to ensure scientific quality. If the entity requesting the product believes that further review is needed, an additional independent scientific review may also be conducted to further ensure the accuracy and integrity of the final report or information product.
Nature of fast-track outputs: Fast-track assessments provide concise findings, conclusions and recommendations or options for decision-makers, while information products may adopt different formats depending on the nature of the request and the agreed purpose of the output.
Provision of advice: Where a request for advice is accepted, the SPI, with the support of the secretariat, provides a formal response to the requesting entity within a short timeframe (days or weeks), with the possibility of further clarification if needed.

Role of Parties in fast-track work: Parties may shape fast-track work through requests brought forward under the agreed request procedures and through their role in the governing bodies of the Convention (see table 2), while the resulting outputs are designed to respond to specific and often time-sensitive needs.
Policy-oriented recommendations for consideration of the CST: Following decision 21/COP.16, the secretariat shall present a list and, where relevant and appropriate, links to fast-track assessments and information products, including, where appropriate, a concise set of policy-oriented recommendations, at subsequent sessions of the CST.
<i>Updating these procedures</i>
Updating the procedures: The Bureau of the CST, in consultation with the SPI Co-Chairs and with the support of the secretariat, may periodically review and update these procedures in the light of implementation experience and emerging needs.

21. Figure 1 provides the timeline for the development of a flagship report under the procedures summarized in table 3, using the example of GLO4, which is anticipated to be the first objective of the SPI work programme for the quadrennium 2027–2030.

Figure 1

Projected flagship report preparation timeline envisioned for the fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook



UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification); COP 17 (seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties); SPI (Science-Policy Interface); GLO4 (fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook); TSU (technical support unit); SPM (Summaries for Policymakers).

IV. Technical support feasibility

22. In accordance with decision 20/COP.16, paragraph 18, and decision 10/COP.16, paragraph 24 (c), the COP requested the secretariat to prepare a feasibility study to identify ways of ensuring adequate technical support for the SPI, including the possible use of an external technical support unit (TSU) provided by partners, similar to the IPCC and IPBES.

23. The secretariat engaged the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research (Senckenberg Gesellschaft für Naturforschung), which has experience serving as a TSU for both the IPCC⁵ and IPBES,⁶ to develop and refine a document on the feasibility of a TSU for the SPI based on their experience.

24. The feasibility study outcomes are provided in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/INF.2](#), which explores options for the establishment of a proposed TSU, as informed by the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research's comparative analysis and experience with the TSUs of the IPCC and IPBES.

25. Table 4 summarizes the results of the feasibility study to ensure adequate technical support for the SPI, as set out in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/INF.2](#).⁷

Table 4

Summary of a feasibility study to ensure adequate technical support for the Science-Policy Interface

Functioning of a technical support unit (TSU) for the Science-Policy Interface (SPI): A TSU would serve as the operational foundation of the SPI and a bridge between SPI experts, Parties, the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the secretariat, strengthening the quality, timeliness, visibility and uptake of SPI deliverables.
Mandate and core tasks of a TSU for the SPI: The mandate of a TSU would be to provide scientific, technical and operational support for SPI products, including flagship reports, fast-track assessments, information products and advice, and to support outreach and stakeholder engagement through coordinated workflows, scientific editing, data management, collaboration and monitoring of impact.
Hosting arrangements for a TSU for the SPI: A TSU would be sponsored by a host Party or Parties and an associated research institute, university or similar scientific organization in a manner that provides long-term stability, access to specialized expertise, and flexibility to collaborate with international science-policy networks and relevant data platforms.
Process and criteria for selecting TSUs for the SPI: Parties and relevant organizations could be invited, through the secretariat, to submit joint offers to host a TSU through an open call, with the Bureau of the CST, supported by the secretariat, reviewing offers against criteria such as research excellence, science-policy impact, host expertise, available resources and alignment with the SPI mandate and work programme.
Proposed structure of a TSU for the SPI: A TSU could comprise a core unit hosted by a partner institution and specialist sub-units in different regions, combining global coherence with regional presence, broad expertise and stronger representation of diverse knowledge systems.
Governance and reporting: A TSU would be accountable to the secretariat, the Bureau of the CST and the SPI Co-Chairs, operate under a memorandum of understanding, and report regularly through a management committee to ensure alignment with Conference of the Parties and CST mandates.
Staffing and capacity of a TSU for the SPI: A minimum of eight full-time equivalent staff would be required, comprising four full-time equivalent staff financed through a trust fund (or similar mechanism), expected to be secured through a host country voluntary contribution or equivalent host country funding mechanism, and four full-time equivalent staff provided as in-kind contributions by the host institution and partner institutions hosting the sub-units.

⁵ See the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Task Group on Data (TG-Data) at <https://www.ipcc.ch/data/>.

⁶ See the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Technical Support Unit of Knowledge and Data at <https://www.ipbes.net/knowledge-data>.

⁷ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/procedures-preparation-unccd-flagship-reports-and-fast-track>.

V. Cooperation

26. Following decision 20/COP.16, the SPI continued its cooperation with other intergovernmental science-policy bodies outlined in its 2025–2026 work programme, as updated by the Bureau of the CST.⁸ During meetings held from 13 to 15 May 2025 and 18 to 20 June 2025, the SPI reviewed the coordination activities outlined its work programme, including with the:

- (a) IPBES of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
- (b) IPCC;
- (c) Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) of the FAO;
- (d) International Resources Panel (IRP) of UNEP;
- (e) Global Land Indicators Initiative (GLII) of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat);
- (f) Integrated Drought Management Programme (IDMP), a joint initiative of the WMO and the Global Water Partnership.

27. In keeping with decision 21/COP.16, the SPI, as part of the SPI work programme for the biennium 2025–2026, cooperated with the aforementioned scientific mechanisms, while the activities and sub-activities proposed in the annex to that decision were also accomplished. At a meeting held from 13 to 15 May 2025, the SPI set up a task team for all coordination activities and identified co-leads for each. Over the 2025–2026 biennium, the SPI, with support from the secretariat:

(a) Summarized the key messages synthesized in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/6](#) and produced policy-oriented recommendations relevant to the UNCCD in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/8](#), based on two IPBES assessments:

(i) IPBES Thematic Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health (nexus assessment);⁹ and

(ii) IPBES Thematic Assessment Report on the Underlying Causes of Biodiversity Loss and the Determinants of Transformative Change and Options for Achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity (transformative change assessment);¹⁰

(b) Presented the UNCCD science-policy opportunities and needs at two IPBES policy-context webinars for experts and contributed to the external scientific review of the first-order drafts of the:

(i) IPBES methodological assessment of integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning and ecological connectivity (spatial planning and connectivity assessment);¹¹ and

(ii) IPBES second global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services (second global biodiversity assessment);¹²

(c) Monitored developments regarding the IPCC seventh assessment cycle working group assessment reports and special reports and contributed to the scientific review of the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities;¹³

(d) Monitored the activities of the ITPS, including the development of the indicator system of the GSP Action Framework (ISAF) and its Global Soil Health Index,¹⁴

⁸ See <https://www.unccd.int/resources/other/unccd-spi-work-programme-2025-2026>.

⁹ See <https://www.ipbes.net/nexus-assessment>.

¹⁰ See <https://www.ipbes.net/transformative-change-assessment>.

¹¹ See <https://www.ipbes.net/spatial-planning-assessment>.

¹² See https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2025-10/Annex_1_Decision_IPBES-11_1_EN.pdf.

¹³ See <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/special-report-on-climate-change-and-cities/>.

¹⁴ See https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/Plenary_assembly_13/PA_presentations/

the Global Symposium on Soil Sealing and Urban Soils (6 to 7 October 2025),¹⁵ and the Global Symposium on Soil Compaction (21 to 23 September 2026);¹⁶

(e) Monitored the activities of the IRP, and considered the findings of the Global Resources Outlook 2024 in the development of GLO3;¹⁷

(f) Monitored the activities of the GLII of UN-Habitat's Global Land Tool Network aimed at advancing globally comparable land governance indicators, and supported their application in Sustainable Development Goals monitoring and country-level data collection;¹⁸

(g) Monitored the activities of the IDMP on their development of science-based standards and guidance for assessing the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of drought and increasing aridity, which led to the publication of "Baseline Assessment of Drought Impact Monitoring",¹⁹ the development of guidance on institutional coordination for drought management, as well as tools on gender mainstreaming and legal and regulatory frameworks for drought management.

28. Furthermore, by decision 18/COP.16, the COP encouraged the SPI to continue to foster partnerships with scientific bodies and institutions, international organizations, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders, and invite the representatives of these entities to its meetings as external observers, where feasible and as appropriate, with a view to strengthening and formalizing collaboration. While limitations in financial resources prevented participation in physical meetings, such engagements took place virtually at the working group level. Examples include the SPI's:

(a) Invitation to the French Scientific Committee on Desertification²⁰ to collaborate with the SPI in meeting the request made by the secretariat and the GM to deliver a fast-track assessment on sand and dust storm source mitigation; and

(b) Support for civil society technical capacity-building through participation in a webinar series developed through a collaboration between Drynet,²¹ IUCN and Both ENDS²² through the Global Environment Facility-funded initiative, "Strengthening Civil Society Role in Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (CS4LDN)".

29. Following decision 18/COP.16, the COP also invited the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative (ELD) to collaborate with the SPI. Following a meeting from 18 to 20 June 2025, the SPI engaged ELD to contribute a working paper titled "Financing Land: Transformative Pathways to Resilient Futures" in support of the development of GLO3.

[GSPPA_XIII_Item_4.pdf](#).

¹⁵ See <https://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/gsus25/en/>.

¹⁶ See <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/cd2804f0-cde0-4ad4-988d-80dc3e5fc700>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.unep.org/resources/Global-Resource-Outlook-2024>.

¹⁸ See <https://gltn.net/sites/default/files/2025-07/GLII%20Progress%20and%20Prospects.pdf>.

¹⁹ See https://library.wmo.int/viewer/69496/download?file=WMO-1355-2025_en.pdf&type=pdf&navigator=1.

²⁰ The French Scientific Committee on Desertification is an advisory body composed of experts from scientific institutions across France, which provides scientific knowledge and advice on issues related to desertification, land degradation and drought, particularly in the context of sustainable development. See <https://www.csf-desertification.org/>.

²¹ Drynet is a global network of 26 civil society organizations driving collective action for a sustainable future in drylands. See <https://dry-net.org/>.

²² Both ENDS is an environmental justice organization. See <https://www.bothends.org/>.

VI. Financial implications

30. Voluntary financial and in-kind contributions made by Parties and other stakeholders to support the work of the secretariat on the science agenda of the Convention facilitated the work of the SPI, supported by the secretariat, over the 2025–2026 biennium. These contributions covered two secretariat staff members and all aspects of support provided to facilitate the work of the SPI. Contributions of this nature will be key to meeting the financial needs to support the future functioning of the SPI outlined in this document.

31. The extent of those needs was the subject of a costing analysis conducted by the secretariat, based on the procedures introduced in this document as well as on the SPI technical support feasibility study detailed in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/INF.2](#).

32. It is envisaged that the non-staff costs associated with supporting the work of the SPI, including any TSU, will be met primarily through voluntary financial and in-kind contributions from Parties and other partners, complementing the resources provided under the Convention's core budget. The implementation of the SPI work programme for the 2027–2030 quadrennium will be carried out subject to the availability of these non-staff resources, alongside the staff resources provided under the Convention's approved programme and budget as well as voluntary contributions.

33. The financial implications referred to in paragraphs 30–32 above are reflected in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/7](#) on the programme and budget for the biennium 2027–2028.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

34. Having considered the outcomes of the work of the Bureau of the CST, with the support of the secretariat, on the elements needed for the future functioning of the SPI beginning with the 2027–2030 quadrennium, the CST may wish to consider the following conclusions, with the aim of making recommendations to the COP.

A. Conclusion 1 on consolidating the transition to quadrennial functioning

35. The transition of the SPI from biennial renewal to a four-year work programme provides an important opportunity to strengthen continuity, strategic planning and the coherence of the scientific support provided to the Convention. The arrangements developed for the 2027–2030 quadrennium, including updated governance documents, continuity in co-chairing arrangements and a clearer sequencing of work programme development, can help the SPI to operate more predictably and effectively in support of the CST and the COP.

36. Consolidating this transition will require maintaining the principles that have underpinned the SPI to date, including scientific excellence, policy relevance, transparency, inclusiveness and balanced representation across regions, disciplines, gender and career stages. In this context, the renewal of membership should continue to address disciplinary gaps while preserving institutional memory and ensuring the capacity of the SPI to deliver on an increasingly diverse and technically demanding work programme.

B. Conclusion 2 on procedures for requests and preparation of outputs

37. The procedures developed for receiving and prioritizing requests for the SPI work programme, and for preparing flagship reports, fast-track assessments, information products and advice, constitute an important step towards a more predictable, transparent and fit-for-purpose operating framework for the SPI. By clarifying roles, timelines, review stages and pathways for Party input, these procedures can help ensure that future outputs are both scientifically robust and responsive to the needs of Parties and the governing bodies of the Convention.

38. In particular, procedures that distinguish between longer-term flagship work and more time-sensitive fast-track outputs can strengthen the ability of the SPI to respond both to strategic priorities and to urgent or emerging issues. Their effective implementation will depend on sustained coordination among the Bureau of the CST, the SPI, the secretariat, the GM and relevant stakeholders, as well as periodic refinement in light of implementation experience and evolving needs.

C. Conclusion on technical support for the Science-Policy Interface

39. The feasibility study on technical support indicates that more adequate and dedicated support arrangements would materially strengthen the ability of the SPI to deliver timely, high-quality and visible outputs. A TSU, if established in a manner consistent with the mandate and governance of the Convention, could reinforce scientific editing, coordination, review processes, outreach, data management and overall workflow support, while allowing the SPI to focus on its scientific leadership functions.

40. Any such arrangement should be designed to complement, not duplicate, the functions of the secretariat, and should preserve the intergovernmental legitimacy, scientific independence and accountability of the SPI. In this regard, an open, criteria-based process for identifying a host arrangement, combined with clear reporting lines, defined responsibilities and an appropriate balance between trust fund support and in-kind contributions, would help ensure that technical support is both operationally effective and financially realistic.

D. Conclusion on cooperation with other intergovernmental science-policy bodies

41. The experience of the 2025–2026 biennium confirms that the effectiveness of the SPI is enhanced through cooperation with other intergovernmental science-policy bodies, scientific institutions, international organizations, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. Such collaborations can broaden the evidence base available to the Convention, reduce duplication of effort, improve access to specialized expertise and strengthen the policy relevance and visibility of SPI outputs.

42. At the same time, the continued functioning of the SPI at the level expected by Parties will require stronger and more predictable resource mobilization. Voluntary contributions, partnership arrangements and in-kind support can play an important role in enabling meetings, author processes, communication, technical support and outreach, but these efforts will need to be organized in ways that support continuity, safeguard impartiality and match the scale and ambition of future four-year work programmes.

E. Conclusion on enabling effective delivery of the 2027–2030 work programme

43. The elements prepared during the transition biennium together provide the essential institutional foundation for the effective delivery of the 2027–2030 work programme of the SPI, including the anticipated preparation of GLO4 and the provision of fast-track outputs and coordinated scientific engagement with partner bodies. Taken together, these elements point to the need for an operational model combining clear procedures, adequate technical support, balanced and capable membership, and sufficient financial and partnership backing.

44. Strengthening the future functioning of the SPI should therefore be understood not as an end in itself, but as a means to ensure that the Convention continues to benefit from timely, credible, policy-relevant and accessible scientific knowledge. In this way, the SPI can better support Parties in addressing desertification, land degradation and

drought, and in positioning the Convention within the wider landscape of global science–policy cooperation.

45. Parties may wish to consider these conclusions when engaging in consultations on a draft decision to be considered by the COP based on the draft text for negotiations that can be found in document [ICCD/COP\(17\)/CST/8](#), which, following decisions 22/COP.16 and 36/COP.16, contains all draft decisions prepared for Parties for consideration at the seventeenth session of the CST.
