

Procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests for the Science-Policy Interface work programme

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1. Background

In accordance with decision 20/COP.16, paragraph 6 (a), the Conference of the Parties (COP) requested the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to develop procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to improve the effectiveness of SPI products and their recognition within the scientific community.

The following procedures are intended to guide the process for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the SPI for its work programme, including the preparation of Global Land Outlook (GLO) products and similar flagship reports.

These procedures are to be applied in accordance with other rules and procedures governing the work of the SPI.

With reference to document ICCD/COP(16)/24/Add.1, and decision 20/COP.16, paragraph 6 (a), (b) and (c), requests that may be submitted to the SPI for inclusion in its work programme include: flagship reports, fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

2. Terminology

For the purposes of this procedure:

"Flagship reports" mean comprehensive, multi-year, high-impact products, serving as "keystone publications" of the Convention, addressing environmental issues and trends relevant to the Convention's mandate, often at a global scale, and constituting a major communications tool drawing on thematic assessments and other scientific sources to provide authoritative, evidence-based analysis and key messages. Flagship reports like the GLO and products of comparable scope encompass a series of associated products, such as summaries for policymakers (SPM).

"Fast-track assessments" mean streamlined assessments conducted within a condensed timeframe in response to urgent requests, drawing on the best available science and knowledge to deliver timely, evidence-based findings on identified priority issues;

"Information products" mean rapid-response, concise and targeted outputs synthesizing available scientific and technical knowledge on specific issues.

"Advice" means expert guidance and technical input provided by the SPI in response to specific requests to address well-defined questions in a concise and timely manner, drawing on existing knowledge and scientific sources, without constituting an information product.

3. Procedures for receiving requests for flagship reports

3.1 Requests from Parties to the United Convention to Combat Desertification

In response to a call issued by the secretariat, Parties are encouraged to submit requests on priority scientific and technical matters requiring the attention and action of the SPI, with a view to the preparation of flagship reports for consideration by the CST. Through this process, flagship report topics are proposed and selected, determining the focus of the SPI work programme each quadrennium.

NB: On an exceptional basis, due to the transition from a two-year to four-year SPI cycle for flagship report preparation, the request submission process for the 2027–2030 quadrennium will commence after the seventeenth sessions of the CST (CST 17) and COP (COP 17), and thus be managed by members of the Bureau of the CST in consultation with their respective regional groups, with the assistance of the secretariat, beginning in September 2026.

3.2 Other sources of requests, inputs and suggestions

Where appropriate, consideration will also be given to inputs and suggestions submitted by other Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other environment-focused United Nations entities accredited to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in response to the call.

Where appropriate, consideration will also be given to inputs and suggestions submitted by other relevant UNCCD-accredited stakeholders, such as other intergovernmental organizations, international and regional scientific organizations, environment trust funds, non-governmental organizations, Indigenous peoples, local communities and the private sector, in response to the call.

3.3 Joint submissions of requests

In order to streamline requests sent to the secretariat for the SPI work programme, joint submissions of requests and inputs, including by multiple Parties through regional groups, are encouraged.

3.4 Information to accompany requests

Requests submitted to the secretariat for consideration by the CST will also outline the:

- Relevance to the implementation of the UNCCD;
- Relevance to the mandate, objectives and functions of the SPI;
- Urgency of action by the SPI in the light of the imminence of the risks caused by the issues to be addressed by such action;
- Relevance of the requested action in addressing specific policies or processes;

- Geographic scope of the requested action, as well as issues to be covered by such action;
- Anticipated level of complexity of the issues to be addressed by the requested action;
- Previous work and existing initiatives of a similar nature and evidence of remaining gaps, such as the absence or limited availability of information and tools to address the issues, and reasons why the SPI is best suited to take action;
- Availability of scientific literature and expertise for the SPI to undertake the requested action;
- Scale of the potential impacts, and potential beneficiaries of the requested action;
- Requirements for financial, technical and human resources, and potential duration of the requested action.

Where relevant, inputs and suggestions submitted to the secretariat for consideration by the CST for the SPI work programme will also fulfil the information requirement set out in the paragraph above.

3.5 Indicative timing

All requests, inputs and suggestions should be received by the secretariat nine to twelve (9–12) months prior to the session of the CST.

On an extraordinary basis, the Bureau of the CST, with the support of the secretariat, may consider requests received after the indicated deadline.

4. Procedures for prioritizing requests for flagship reports

The secretariat should compile the received requests, inputs and suggestions for the attention of the Bureau of the CST.

The Bureau of the CST requests the secretariat and Global Mechanism (GM) to consider and prioritize the submitted requests, inputs and suggestions in accordance with the criteria outlined in section 3.4 above to identify emerging and important issues for Parties.

4.1 Reporting on prioritization

The Bureau of the CST and the secretariat, with input from the GM, will prepare a report containing a prioritized list of topics emerging from the requests received. The report will provide information on the scientific and policy relevance of the requests and their financial implications as referred to in paragraph 3.4 above, including the possible need for additional scoping and the implications of the requests for the SPI's work programme and resource requirements.

The report will highlight areas of convergence across submissions and identify requests addressing common themes that may be considered jointly. The report will also highlight thematic linkages, identifying and synthesizing major overarching issues and cross-cutting themes underlying the various requests.

The synthesized issues will be sent to the Bureau of the CST for consideration.

The report will elaborate on the most appropriate means of addressing the identified priority topics.

If the prioritization of requests indicates that certain priority topics require urgent attention by the SPI, the Bureau of the CST may prepare a fast-track assessment or another information product in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of UNCCD flagship reports and fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

4.3 Reflection of Parties' views and regional consultations

For GLO products and similar flagship reports, the Bureau of the CST will consult with regions on the issues to receive feedback on Parties' views, and work with the secretariat to define report topics. This provides a specific channel through which regional groups can help shape the prioritization of themes for the SPI's flagship work.

4.4 Transmission of recommendations

At least six (6) months prior to a session of the CST, the CST Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, will draft recommendations for the SPI work programme based on the above-mentioned report and prioritized list of requests. In accordance with the rules of procedure of the CST (decisions 1/COP.1 and 33/COP.15), the secretariat will process the recommendations and make them available to Parties at least six (6) weeks prior to the session for consideration and approval.

NB. As noted above, on an exceptional basis, for the 2027–2030 quadrennium, this process will take place after CST 17/COP 17, therefore approval of the topic of the fourth edition of the GLO flagship report (GLO4) and the update of the SPI work programme will be undertaken by the Bureau of the CST.

The process set out in the sections above will apply, as appropriate, to the prioritization of inputs and suggestions.

5. Procedures for receiving requests for fast-track assessments, information products and advice

Fast-track assessments, information products and advice are intended to provide focused, streamlined and science-based support, upon request, enabling informed decision-making, including on time-sensitive and/or urgent matters.

In accordance with decision 20/COP.16, paragraph 6 (c), fast-track assessments, information products and advice fall within the scope of the work of the SPI, provided that they are in response to requests from the Bureaux of the COP, the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) or the CST, as well as the secretariat and the GM of the UNCCD.

The above-mentioned bodies and the GM will submit to the secretariat requests on priority scientific and technical matters requiring the attention and action of the SPI, with a view to the preparation of fast-track assessments, information products and advice.

Parties interested in raising a request to the SPI for a fast-track assessment, information product or advice can coordinate with the Bureaux of the CRIC, CST or COP, or send the request directly to the secretariat or GM in order to initiate the process.

5.1 Timing and nature of requests

Given that fast-track assessments, information products and advice are intended to address relevant or urgent needs, these requests may be raised at any time following the renewal of the SPI.

Requests may relate to, inter alia, implementation of COP decisions; rapid response to emerging desertification, land degradation and drought, or related thematic issues; time-sensitive funding, partnerships or project approvals; or identified gaps in existing reports.

5.2 Information to accompany fast-track requests

Any request submitted for fast-track assessments, information products or advice will outline the:

- Nature of the deliverable required (e.g., fast-track assessment report, information product, such as a technical paper or fact sheet, advice in the form of a formal response);
- Justification for urgency (e.g., environmental, social, political, financial, technical or operational matter, research gap);
- Reference to relevant decisions (where applicable);
- Scope, objectives and key questions to be addressed;

- Proposed delivery timeline and expected outputs.

6. Feasibility and prioritization of fast-track requests

Upon receipt, the secretariat will coordinate with the SPI Co-Chairs to conduct a brief feasibility assessment of the request, taking into consideration the SPI's current workload, compressed timeline, availability of resources and the urgency of the request.

In cases where the secretariat initiates a request, it will be submitted directly to the SPI, accompanied by a supporting document outlining the information in section 5.2. The secretariat will then coordinate with the SPI Co-Chairs to jointly conduct a feasibility assessment of the request, taking into consideration the SPI's current workload, compressed timeline, availability of resources and the urgency of the request.

6.1 Possible outcomes of the feasibility assessment

The feasibility assessment will determine whether the SPI will:

- Meet the request entirely on its own;
- Meet the request with the support of a partner organization and/or other appropriately specialized members of the scientific community; or
- Decline the request due to the relevance of the topic, lack of necessary expertise or insufficient time/resources to address the topic.

6.2 Communication of the outcome

The feasibility assessment and the resulting outcome should be completed and communicated to the requesting entity by the SPI Co-Chairs and secretariat as soon as possible, ideally within two (2) weeks and no later than one (1) month following receipt of the request.

6.3 Basis for feasibility and prioritization

The feasibility of a request and prioritization among multiple requests will be determined based on the eligibility criteria and information provided to the secretariat and SPI Co-Chairs on the submission of requests, as indicated in section 5.2.

The SPI Co-Chairs and secretariat will consider whether there is expertise among SPI members on requested topics and whether members have the capacity to address the request.

In situations where a request can be met only with external support, the SPI and the secretariat will be asked to indicate alternative approaches for obtaining the required information.

In these cases, the SPI Co-Chairs and the secretariat will work together to identify a partner organization and/or other members of the scientific community specializing in the topic to form a task team to fulfil the request.

The SPI Co-Chairs and secretariat will ensure that requesting entities are kept informed of progress in the review and prioritization of submitted requests.

7. Updating the procedures

The Bureau of the CST, in consultation with the SPI Co-Chairs and with the support of the secretariat, will periodically review and update these procedures to reflect implementation experience and emerging needs.