Decision 11/COP.17

Procedures and technical support for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface

The Conference of the Parties,

Noting decisions 20/COP.16 and 21/COP.16,

Acknowledging with appreciation the 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, including the activities of the Science-Policy Interface,

Noting with appreciation the feasibility study on ways of ensuring adequate technical support for the Science-Policy Interface provided in document ICCD/COP(17)/CST/INF.2,

Having considered document ICCD/COP(17)/CST/5 and the conclusions and recommendations contained therein,

1. *Requests* the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, with the support of the secretariat, to renew the membership of the Science-Policy Interface for effective delivery of its 2027–2030 quadrennium work programme, following the guidance and criteria established in decision 20/COP.16, and in the terms of reference of the Science-Policy Interface, as well as the need to reflect different geographical and ecological conditions and all knowledge systems, through an improved process with more transparency and an improved assessment methodology for selection;

2. *Adopts* the initial procedures of the Science-Policy Interface annexed to this decision and *requests* the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, with the support of the secretariat, to update the full version of these procedures linked in footnote 3 and footnote 4 of document ICCD/COP(17)/CST/5 accordingly;[5,6]

3. *Also requests* the Science-Policy Interface, for the quadrennium 2027–2030 and as specified in the agreed initial procedures, to prepare a fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook on the global assessment of land degradation, desertification and drought;

4. *Decides* that the Science-Policy Interface shall prepare a scoping report setting out the proposed outline of the fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook, to be presented to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention at its twenty-fifth session for consideration and scoping recommendations by Parties;

5. *Also decides* that the Science-Policy Interface shall refine the scoping report accordingly and submit it to the Committee on Science and Technology at its eighteenth session for approval;

6. *Tasks* the secretariat to conduct a feasibility study to assess the budget implications and time required to negotiate text for the Summary for Policymakers of the fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook of varying lengths, from one to five days of negotiations, at the nineteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology, as specified in the agreed initial procedures. Based on these assessments, and recognizing the need to negotiate other draft decisions, the Committee on Science and Technology, at its eighteenth session, will determinate the length of the Summary for Policymakers;

7. *Decides* that, for the purposes of the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface, a flagship report is defined in agreement with table 3 in the annex to this decision;

8. *Also decides* that the status and consideration of the Summary for Policymakers are determined in accordance with table 3 in the annex to this decision;

[5] See https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/procedures-receiving-and-prioritizing-requests-spi-work-programme.

[6] See https://www.unccd.int/resources/manuals-and-guides/procedures-preparation-unccd-flagship-reports-and-fast-track.

9. *Requests* the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, with the support of the secretariat, to develop and issue an open call in line with, but not limited to, document ICCD/COP(17)/CST/INF.2, within six months of the closing of the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties, for Parties and relevant organizations to submit offers to host the technical support unit for the scientific assessment for and development of the fourth edition of the Global Land Outlook over the 2027–2030 quadrennium, complementing the technical and administrative support provided by the secretariat and the scientific leadership provided by the Science-Policy Interface for the development of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification flagship reports;

10. *Also requests* the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, to submit the full list of received proposals and a summary information document with an indicative ranking of the proposals, including a footnote reference to the full proposals as well as the applied criteria for consideration by the Committee on Science and Technology at its eighteenth session;

11. *Decides* that any technical support unit shall only be hosted or operationalized with an explicit decision by the Conference of the Parties defining its terms of reference and *requests* the secretariat, with support of the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology, to prepare a respective information document for the consideration of the Committee on Science and Technology at its eighteenth session;

12. *Encourages* the Science-Policy Interface to continue to foster partnerships with scientific bodies and institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders, and to invite the representatives of these entities to its meetings as external observers when feasible, as appropriate, with a view to strengthening and, where appropriate, formalizing their collaboration within the approved work programme, subject to oversight by the Committee on Science and Technology;

13. *Requests* the secretariat to continue mobilizing voluntary contributions, partnership arrangements and in-kind contributions to support the work of the Science-Policy Interface, and to consider how this external resource mobilization could be further enhanced for the future four-year work programmes of the Science-Policy Interface, with full transparency, no earmarking that influences scientific priorities or conclusions, and regular reporting to the Committee on Science and Technology;

14. *Encourages* Parties, international, regional and financial organizations, private sector entities, scientific institutions and funds, and civil society organizations to consider contributing financially to enable the Science-Policy Interface to carry out its work in an optimal, effective manner;

15. *Requests* the secretariat to present a report on the implementation of this decision at the eighteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology.

14th plenary meeting
28 August 2026

Annex

Tables

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

Section in ICCD/COP(17)/CST/5	*Decision 20/COP.16 Paragraph*	*Element for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface requested in decision 20/COP.16*	*Responsible*
I. Introduction			
II. Working modalities: Membership and governance			
	12	Renewal of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) membership	Committee on Science and Technology (CST) Bureau
	14	Election by the current independent scientists of the SPI of the next Co-Chair to serve in the next quadrennium	SPI Co-Chairs
	15	Updating the terms of reference for members and observers of the SPI for the next quadrennium	CST Bureau
III. Procedures			
	6(a)	Procedure for receiving and prioritizing requests put to the SPI for its work programme	CST Bureau for preparation CST for approval
	6(b)(c)	Procedures for the preparation of flagship reports and for the development of fast-track assessments, information products and advice	CST Bureau for preparation CST for approval
IV. Technical support			
	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
V. Cooperation			
	4	Coordination with other intergovernmental science-policy bodies	SPI
	20	Exploration of the creation of a Global Science-Policy Alliance on Land	CST Bureau for exploring CST for approval

Section in ICCD/COP(17) /CST/5	*Decision 20/COP.16 Paragraph*	*Element for the future functioning of the Science-Policy Interface requested in decision 20/COP.16*	*Responsible*
VI. Financial implications			
	7	Estimates of the financial implications associated with providing technical support to the SPI proposed in paragraph 18, including implementing the procedures listed in paragraph 6 (a)–(c)	Secretariat
	16	Mobilizing voluntary contributions, partnership arrangements and in-kind contributions to support the work of the SPI	Secretariat

Table 2
Initial 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.

Flagship reports, as mentioned in decision 20/COP.16, are comprehensive, high-impact products, addressing key topics relevant to the Convention's mandate. These reports represent authoritative, science-based, thematic assessments, such as the Global Land Outlook. Their results are summarized in Parties' agreed SPMs.

Fast-track assessments, information products and advice are not adopted or approved by the CST and shall not constitute guidance adopted under the Convention; and the status of each fast-track assessment, information product and advice shall be stated on its face, and should be transmitted for information only.

Flagship reports

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 in response to the same call , 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 for consideration by the CST.

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.

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 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.

Fast-track assessments and information products

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, as defined above, 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, and requesting entities are kept informed of progress in the review and prioritization of their requests.

Table 3
Initial 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, as mentioned in decision 20/COP.16, are comprehensive, high-impact products, addressing key topics relevant to the Convention's mandate. These reports represent authoritative, science-based, thematic assessments, such as the Global Land Outlook. Their results are summarized in Parties' agreed SPMs.

Fast-track assessments, information products and advice are not adopted or approved by the CST and shall not constitute guidance adopted under the Convention; and the status of each fast-track assessment, information product and advice shall be stated on its face, and should be transmitted for information only.

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 review of the report including the scoping and through their feedback during the UNCCD Parties review, and through CST consideration and approval of SPMs by detailed, line-by-line negotiation and agreement by consensus during regular CST sessions.
The regular CST session prior to the approval session of the SPM, will decide on the length of the SPM recommended by the secretariat, based on a requested feasibility study.

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.

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 and a first-order draft, with support of the secretariat and under the oversight of the CST Bureau, 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 first-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.

Fast-track assessments and information products

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.

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.

"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.

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.

Updating these procedures

Updating the procedures:

The CST may update the procedures each cycle as appropriate.