

Meeting of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) 19-20 September 2016, Bonn, Germany

Date: 19 – 20 September 2016

Venue: UN Campus - Langer Eugen
Meeting Room: LEU 2705
Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1
53113 Bonn, Germany

Working language: English

Working hours: Monday 19 September: 9:30 – 13:00, 14:30 – 18:00
Tuesday 20 September: 9.00 – 13.00, 14.30 – 17.30

- DRAFT REPORT -

I. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

1. The SPI co-chairs welcomed all participants (see annex I) and presented the objectives, agenda (see annex II) and organization of work of the meeting. Some SPI members suggested issues for discussion under “Other matters”. The agenda was adopted as amended.

II. SPI work programme 2016-2017: status and way forward

a. Objective 1: Provide scientific guidance to the operationalization of the voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) target

2. The SPI team leaders for objective 1 presented progress made in the development of the scientific conceptual framework for LDN, including how the process was coordinated, outputs already produced and proposals for the way forward. The conceptual framework builds on extensive scientific consultations which involved scientists of the SPI, external experts and an international scientific review process.

3. Markus Replik, Managing Director of the Global Mechanism (GM), expressed his appreciation for the work conducted by the SPI on LDN and highlighted the relevance of the conceptual framework for the on-going LDN Target Setting Programme (TSP) spearheaded by the GM and involving, as of September 2016, 100 countries. He identified three major areas of collaboration between the SPI and the LDN TSP related to substance, process and communication. On substance, he noted that the conceptual framework provides a common language and understanding of the LDN concept at country level. On process, he recalled the role of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is represented as observer to the SPI by Jonathan Davis, as implementing agency for the LDN TSP. On

communication, he announced the joint launch of three publications at the occasion of CRIC 15: the science-policy brief on the conceptual framework for LDN, which was prepared by the SPI, and two brochures prepared by the GM, one on building blocks for LDN target setting and the other one on lessons learnt from the 14 pilot countries' experiences. He concluded by emphasizing the potential of the LDN approach at national level to foster policy coherence and to promote the identification and implementation of large scale programs/projects.

4. Several SPI members put forward suggestions for the further fine-tuning of the conceptual framework for LDN. Among the issues to be further studied and/or explained, the following were mentioned: baseline setting, "one-out, all-out" approach, monitoring of sustainability, magnitude based approach to ensure consideration of the quality of the land, impact of fragmentation on the provision of ecosystem services, socio-economic assessment and indicators, leakage, as well as modalities to safeguard human rights.

5. The creation of an adequate enabling environment was seen as one of the most challenging aspects for LDN implementation. Some SPI members highlighted that LDN is becoming an attractive tool for governments, since it provides a concrete target. However, it is still a poorly understood and known concept. Hence, it requires further guidance for implementation as well as further efforts for awareness raising. Synergies with the other Rio conventions and with other Sustainable Development Goals were seen as opportunities for leverage at the national level.

6. One SPI member expressed concerns on the scientific style, or lack of thereof, of the conceptual framework for LDN; he particularly pointed to the lack in the document of a thorough literature review of the science related to land degradation/use, the little emerging science on LDN, and state-of-the-art conceptual frameworks that could have been applied/enhanced for LDN. He also expressed concerns on the process devised for the development of the conceptual framework. In his view the SPI has the role of communicating science to policy makers rather than of synthesizing existing peer-reviewed scientific knowledge, and therefore should not have been tasked to engage in the development of the conceptual framework.

7. The SPI co-chairs recalled the mandate received by the SPI, through its approved work programme 2016-2017, to provide scientific guidance to the operationalization of the voluntary LDN target. The co-chairs underscored that the LDN target-setting is a very new policy-driven concept that is intrinsically linked to the endorsement of the SDGs by the United Nations General Assembly in autumn 2015. With the development of the conceptual framework for LDN the SPI has provided the UNCCD and the international scientific community with a scientific foundation for further research and the development of concrete actions for its operationalisation. While acknowledging the different opinions within the SPI, the co-chairs proposed to accept the report on the conceptual framework for LDN and to finalize it by integrating the comments made during the meeting. There was a general consensus within the SPI that LDN should be considered as an evolving concept and that the conceptual framework should evolve, in future, by taking into consideration scientific, political and practical concerns, as well as lessons learnt through implementation.

8. A tentative strategy to encourage a strong scientific engagement and build awareness on LDN was devised. This involves four parallel and connected elements: 1) publishing a long manuscript of the scientific conceptual framework for LDN in a high-impact domain journal such as Land Degradation & Development; 2) developing a “response” Special Issue in same journal focused on teams of authors addressing different elements of the framework; 3) Developing a communication manuscript for Nature; and 4) organizing a session and townhall focused on LDN at the General Assembly of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) in April 2017. The latter was further discussed under “Other matters”.

b. Objective 2: Highlight the science-based synergistic potential of sustainable land management (SLM) practices to address DLDD, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

9. The SPI team leaders for objective 2 presented the status of work and way forward for the preparation of expected deliverable. Terms of Reference (ToR) for commissioning the elaboration of the deliverable to a qualified entity had been prepared and posted online from 15/7 to 16/9/2016.

10. The following suggestions were put forward by several SPI members:

- While climate change adaptation is quite an underdeveloped area of science, mitigation research is rich. It was recommended to look back into the literature, particularly into the first assessment of the contribution of dryland forests to climate mitigation, commissioned by the IPCC, as well as in the more recent REDD+ literature.
- The report should include key definitions (e.g. SLM definition) and could be enriched with case studies. SPI members wishing to contribute by providing case studies and other inputs were encouraged to do so.
- Institutions/experts with recognized expertise on SLM technologies, such as WOCAT, should be involved in the process; relevant experts can be invited to participate in the scoping meeting or other expert meetings organized by the selected entity.
- The work conducted under objective 2 should be synergized with coordination activity 4; preliminary outputs produced under this objective could be fed into the Scoping Meeting of the IPCC Special Report on “on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems” (SR2).

11. As a next step, it was agreed that the SPI team leaders will develop criteria to assess the received applications. The selection process will then be conducted in collaboration with the secretariat.

c. Objective 3: Encourage the development and implementation of specific rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands.

12. The SPI team leaders for objective 3 reported having established, jointly with the SPI co-chairs and in collaboration with the secretariat, a contact with the UNEP International

Resource Panel (IRP) which was planning to develop a report on land restoration. A potential collaboration was generally welcome by the IRP. However, as of September 2016, the scope, modalities and timeline of the preparation of this report by the IRP were not yet clear.

13. In view of the unclear situation regarding the collaboration with the IRP, it was agreed that alternative options and ways forward based on available research may also be explored.

14. In particular, it was suggested to review the work on Forest and Landscape Restoration done by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as well as other restoration initiatives by the IUCN and the World Resources Institute or available peer-reviewed publications. Some SPI members also noted that any work done under this objective should complement and possibly provide added value to existing research and ongoing assessments, such as the land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA) conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

d. Coordination activity 1: Follow up and contribute to the land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA) conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

15. The SPI team leader for coordination activity 1 recalled that in June – July 2016 the SPI had contributed to the review of the 1st order draft of the LDRA.

16. Some SPI members expressed concerns on the focus and perspectives of the draft assessment which would appear to strictly apply a biodiversity lens and thus consider all managed ecosystems as degraded. It was noted that this could severely limit the relevance of the assessment for the UNCCD and its stakeholders.

17. Acknowledging the need for a scientific synthesis of the interrelationships between land degradation and biodiversity, there was a general consensus within the SPI on the importance of continuing the collaboration with the IPBES by providing further inputs at the occasion of the 2nd order draft of the full technical report, planned for May – June 2017. All SPI members were encouraged to actively participate in the review process.

e. Coordination activity 2: Contribute to the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO)

18. One of the SPI team leaders for coordination activity 2 presented a report from his participation to the 3rd meeting of the GLO Steering Committee, which was held on 30 June and 1 July 2016 in Bonn. He briefly presented the GLO purpose and structure, including key messages, chapters outline, working papers and annexes such as an LDN enabling environment index. He identified two potential contributions from the SPI to the GLO as discussed at the Steering Committee meeting:

- Some of the outputs prepared as part of the SPI work programme, particularly under objective 1 and 2, might be incorporated in the GLO structure (first or future editions) as possible working papers;

- Members of the SPI might be able to review GLO working papers and draft chapters during the external review process planned for December 2016 – January 2017.

19. The secretariat recalled that the GLO is expected to be the flagship publication of the UNCCD; primarily a strategic communication document to be launched at the World Day to Combat Desertification in 2017. He encouraged the SPI to contribute to the review process and recommended that comments from SPI members be collated by the team leaders for coordination activity 2 and jointly submitted.

20. The SPI co-chairs noted that, as agreed in previous SPI meetings, the contribution of the SPI to the GLO could be limited given the nature of the report as a communication product rather than a scientific one. It was highlighted that the SPI is a member of the GLO steering committee, and that those SPI members interested in contributing to the GLO are encouraged to do so.

f. Coordination activity 3: Follow up on current collaboration with and explore further means of collaboration with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS)

21. The SPI team leader for coordination activity 3 recalled that at the 5th Working Session of the ITPS on 14–18 March 2016 the following three joint activities for 2017 had been identified (GSPPA: IV/2016/2):

- The ITPS was invited to contribute with a chapter on soils in the Global Land Outlook (GLO) that is currently under development;
- ITPS would work in collaboration with the SPI on assessing soil organic carbon (including a new global soil organic carbon (SOC) map by 2017) in the framework of indicator 15.3.1 of the SDGs and the endorsed metrics for the assessment of land degradation neutrality (LDN);
- A joint global assessment of soil erosion will be performed under the leadership of Working Group 1 “Sustainable Soil Management” of the ITPS (Lead G. Erpul, Turkey).

22. The SPI team leader also recalled that SOC was one of the three topics, which the SPI and the ITPS had agreed to collaborate on in 2015 and highlighted the possibility of organizing a soil organic matter symposium in 2017, co-sponsored by the UNCCD/SPI, GSP/ITPS and the IPCC.

23. The SPI underscored the need to further consolidate collaboration between ITPS and SPI on SOC, particularly given the importance of this theme for the implementation of the Conceptual Framework for LDN (objective 1). It was agreed that the SPI co-chairs would send an email to the ITPS to reiterate the SPI interest and willingness to co-organize the soil organic matter symposium in 2017.

g. Coordination activity 4: Initiate and coordinate interactions between the UNCCD and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

24. The secretariat recalled that at its 43rd session (11-13 April 2016), the IPCC decided to produce 3 special reports, including one on “on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems” (SR2). At the beginning of September, the IPCC issued a call for the nomination of experts who will participate in the Scoping Meeting of the SR2 to be held in the week of 13 February 2017.

25. SPI members were encouraged to express their interest in being nominated by the UNCCD, through the CST Bureau, for the Scoping Meeting.

26. It was noted that the work conducted under objective 2, as well as the soil organic matter symposium to be co-organized with the ITPS and IPCC in 2017, should be synergized with this coordination activity. Preliminary outputs produced under objective 2 could be fed into the Scoping Meeting of the SR2. A list of background documents, particularly scientific literature, relevant to the subject matter will be compiled and made available to the IPCC in preparation for the Scoping Meeting.

27. Further to the preparation of the SR2, the SPI identified the VI assessment report as another potential avenue of collaboration with the IPCC to be further explored.

III. Report of the SPI to CST 13

28. The secretariat recalled that, in accordance with decision 21/COP.12, the SPI will have to prepare for consideration at CST 13: i) a synthesis report, including policy-oriented recommendations, for each objective included in its work programme for 2016–2017; and ii) a report on the coordination activities conducted during the biennium 2016– 2017. Tentative deadline for the preparation of the reports will be June 2017.

29. It was proposed that synthesis reports follow a common template and include key messages and policy-oriented recommendations/options. The IPBES summary for policymakers on the pollinator assessment was mentioned as an example of a possible template.

30. One SPI member raised the issue of fostering further engagement of the scientific community in the provision of scientific inputs to the UNCCD. In order to make it worthwhile for scientists around the world to come forward and organize themselves around groups to provide scientific inputs to the CCD, he suggested that the SPI procedures for addressing knowledge gaps and delivering scientific advice to the UNCCD should be consistent and sufficiently frequently repeated.

IV. SPI work programme 2018-2019

31. The SPI agreed to prepare its draft work programme 2018-2019 to be presented at the CST 13 by the following modalities:

- Parties and other UNCCD stakeholders will be invited submit views on potential thematic issues to be addressed by the SPI in the next biennium; a call will tentatively be launched at the beginning of December 2016 for about 2 months. The call will include a short summary of thematic issues already addressed in previous work programmes.
- The CST Bureau in collaboration with the SPI, and with the support of the secretariat, will review the received inputs and identify a limited number of priorities for inclusion in the draft SPI work programme 2018-2019, based on a pre-agreed set of criteria.
- The draft work programme will be presented at the CST 13 for adoption.

V. Information on the evaluation of the SPI

32. The secretariat recalled that, in accordance with decision 23/COP.11, the SPI is currently set to operate up to the end of the COP 13. In decision 23/COP.12, the COP decided that the work conducted by the SPI during the biennium 2016–2017 and its overall achievements since its establishment will be reviewed at the CST 13, in order to decide on the future functioning of the SPI.

33. As background information for that review, the secretariat, under the supervision of the CST Bureau, will commission an assessment that will look at the performance of the SPI in 2016-2017 and consider its overall achievements. This assessment will identify and document lessons learned and make recommendations for the future, with the aim to provide evidence-based information and elements that will assist Parties in their consideration of the future functioning of the SPI.

34. The assessment will be conducted by an independent expert who will be selected through a competitive process. The work will start at the beginning of 2017, and it will involve study of relevant documentation and interviews of key stakeholders, including the SPI members. The report is expected to be ready by mid-May 2017.

VI. Other matters

a. Views of the Executive Secretary on the SPI work and emerging thematic priorities

35. The Executive Secretary, Monique Barbut, addressed the meeting to share her views on the work of the SPI and emerging thematic priorities. She noted that, as of September

2016, 100 countries had expressed their interest in setting LDN targets and confirmed LDN as a priority. She commented on the policy-friendly format used by the SPI for the development of its first two policy briefs. Ms Barbut invited the SPI to look beyond LDN target setting and monitoring, and focus on approaches for successful implementation. The Executive Secretary also mentioned a few emerging issues for consideration of the SPI, including drought and associated early warning systems, sand and dust storms, migration, the nexus between land and energy, as well as the nexus between land and climate change. Concerning the latter, she noted that more than 100 countries had included land-based activities for mitigation and adaptation in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) for the Paris Agreement. She mentioned she envisages a lively scientific debate around ways to achieving a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases, as well as on the reform of the Clean Development Mechanism. She invited the SPI to engage into this debate and contribute to defining the role of the land use sector and climate-smart land management practices in reducing emission while sequestering carbon.

b. The Global Land Indicator Initiative

36. One SPI member brought to the attention of the SPI the Global Land Indicators Initiative (GLII), a collaborative and inclusive process for the development of global indicators for land tenure and governance started by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, UN-Habitat and the World Bank, and facilitated by the Global Land Tool Network.

37. Indeed, the work of the GLII, particularly on biophysical land and soil indicators to monitor the achievement of the SDGs,¹ had been cited by the SPI in its report to CST 12 on “Monitoring the contribution of sustainable land use and management to climate change adaptation/mitigation and to the safeguarding of biodiversity and ecosystem services” (ICCD/COP(12)/CST/INF.1).

38. While acknowledging the importance to develop indicators, data and monitoring mechanisms for land tenure and governance, some caution was expressed concerning the establishment of a collaboration with GLII in light of the political sensitivity of the subject matter and since this would go beyond the SPI work programme.

c. A special issue on the outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd scientific conference

39. One of the SPI members recalled that the publication of a scientific journal’s special issue on the outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd scientific conference had been planned as part of the post-conference activities. She informed the SPI that the idea of publishing the special issue had been abandoned since little interest had been expressed by potential authors in submitting papers.

¹ http://www.iass-potsdam.de/sites/default/files/files/land_and_soil_indicators_proposal.pdf

d. A potential SPI session and townhall at General Assembly of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) in April 2017

40. It was suggested by the SPI co-chairs that the SPI member bringing this matter to the attention of the SPI should discuss with the former chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference the possibility of developing just one multi-authored paper for a high-impact journal instead of a Special Issue requiring the development of several papers. Based on the outcomes of this discussion the SPI co-chairs would consider further action to support the publication process.

41. The SPI discussed the possibility of organizing a session and townhall focused on LDN at the General Assembly of the European Geosciences Union (EGU) in April 2017. There was a general consensus that such an event could help increasing the visibility of the SPI and engaging the broader scientific community, particularly in preparation for the publishing of a special issue on LDN in Land Degradation & Development (see objective 1). The commitment of the SPI and of the UNCCD secretariat in supporting the organization of this event and ensuring institutional representation were confirmed.

42. It was also agreed to prepare a list of targeted international and regional scientific events in 2017, which could be used by SPI to organise sessions on topics of interest to the UNCCD. The focus should be on large events that could increase the impact of the SPI and visibility of the UNCCD. SPI members were invited to identify potential events in their respective regions.

e. Procedural matters for development of future science-policy briefs

43. It was agreed that the SPI science-policy brief would be circulated within the SPI for review prior to being published.

VII. Next meeting

44. The secretariat presented two possible options for the organization of the next SPI meeting, the last one before COP 13: the meeting could be held in the spring of 2016 or back-to-back with COP 13.

45. SPI members expressed different opinions as to whether the priority should be given to the meeting in the spring 2017, that would allow the SPI to finalize the preparation of deliverables for the COP, or to the one back-to-back with the COP, that would provide the SPI with an occasion for physical interface with policymakers.

46. The SPI requested the secretariat to explore the availability of financial resources for the organization of both meetings.

Annex I – List of participants

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Annex II – Agenda

Date: 19 – 20 September 2016

Venue: UN Campus - Langer Eugen
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 - a. Objective 1: Provide scientific guidance to the operationalization of the voluntary land degradation neutrality (LDN) target.
 - b. Objective 2: Highlight the science-based synergistic potential of sustainable land management (SLM) practices to address DLDD, climate change mitigation and adaptation.
 - c. Objective 3: Encourage the development and implementation of specific rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands.
 - d. Coordination activity 1: Follow up and contribute to the land degradation and restoration assessment (LDRA) conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).
 - e. Coordination activity 2: Contribute to the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO).
 - f. Coordination activity 3: Follow up on current collaboration with and explore further means of collaboration with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS).

g. Coordination activity 4: Initiate and coordinate interactions between the UNCCD and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

- III.** Report of the SPI to COP 13
- IV.** SPI 2018-2019 work programme
- V.** Evaluation of the SPI
- VI.** Other matters
- VII.** Next meeting