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Items 2 (b) and (c) of the provisional agenda

Items resulting from the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface for the biennium 2016–2017

Sustainable land management for addressing desertification/land degradation and drought, climate change mitigation and adaptation

Rehabilitation, restoration and reclamation measures and practices in degraded lands

Cooperation with other scientific panels

Report by the Science-Policy Interface

Summary

By its decision 21/COP.12 the Conference of the Parties (COP) adopted the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) work programme for the biennium 2016–2017 which contained coordination activities with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soil. In the same decision, the COP mandated the SPI to contribute to the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO) prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

By the same decision, the SPI was requested to report on the coordination activities conducted during the biennium 2016–2017 to the thirteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST).

The present document reports on the cooperation of the SPI with other scientific panels and bodies and the main outcomes and contributions of the SPI to preparing the first edition of the GLO. The CST may wish to consider the progress made by the SPI during the biennium 2016–2017 and make recommendations to the COP for future SPI work to promote and strengthen existing and new cooperation with other scientific panels and bodies.

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I. Introduction and background information

1. At its eleventh session, the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) established the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and mandated it, *inter alia*, to interact with the multiple existing scientific mechanisms, in particular the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) and other existing scientific networks and platforms (decision 21/COP.11, para. 3).

2. By decision 21/COP.12, in line with this mandate, the COP adopted coordination activities in the SPI work programme for the biennium 2016–2017 to follow up on existing cooperation with the IPBES, ITPS and IPCC or, if required, to initiate new cooperation pathways with these scientific mechanisms.

3. In the same decision, the COP mandated the SPI, as part of its work programme for 2016–2017, to contribute to the development of the Global Land Outlook (GLO). In discharging this mandate, the SPI was requested to participate in the steering committee of the GLO and in the scientific review of the content.

4. This document presents a summary of the main outcomes of the cooperation of the SPI with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies as well as conclusions and proposals for consideration by the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) at its thirteenth session.

II. Report on coordination activities of the Science-Policy Interface with other intergovernmental scientific panels and bodies

A. Cooperation with the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

5. The IPBES is undertaking a thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration (LDRA) as part of its work programme for the period 2014–2018. A report by the IPBES on this assessment is contained in document ICCD/COP(13)/CST/INF.1.

6. The UNCCD is recognized as a key user of and key contributor to this IPBES assessment. In this context, the IPBES called for developing collaboration with the UNCCD, especially its SPI and CST (IPBES-3/1, Annex VIII, page 42). In response to this call, and following the mandate given by Parties by decisions 23/COP.11 and 21/COP.12, the SPI and the UNCCD secretariat have contributed to the IPBES assessment in accordance with the procedure established by the IPBES as one of the activities included in the SPI work programmes for 2014–2015 and 2016–2017. The objective is to ensure that the LDRA will be of relevance to the UNCCD process and the needs of its Parties.

7. The LDRA is being prepared by a group of experts selected by the IPBES from the lists of nominations of experts received after a public call launched by the Chair of the IPBES in February 2015. After consultation with the Bureau of the CST and the SPI, the UNCCD secretariat invited 27 experts to submit their applications to the IPBES secretariat. Five of 27 experts invited finally submitted their applications and three were selected. In addition, two SPI members and one observer to the SPI were nominated by their respective governments or organizations, and now form part of the expert group developing the LDRA.

8. A first order draft (FOD) of the LDRA was released for external expert review from 30 May–18 July 2016. The Chair of the CST and SPI provided collective input on the eight chapters of LDRA to the IPBES, summarizing the views expressed by the SPI.

9. The SPI noted that the report uses a biodiversity-focused definition of land degradation that supports the assessment of “processes that cause biodiversity loss and the loss of ecosystem functions”. While the findings of the LDRA are considered useful by the SPI in the context of safeguarding and sustainably using biodiversity, using a biodiversity-focused definition shifts the focus away from the effects of land degradation on the provisioning services of the terrestrial ecosystems which are essential to the sustainable livelihood of land users and a critical life support for all humanity.

10. The SPI suggested a more inclusive approach when assessing land degradation, including consideration of the farmers’ perspectives. The SPI considered that the assessment of changes in ecosystem services resulting from land degradation and restoration should be strengthened. The SPI proposed structuring the report around a Driving forces, Pressure State-Impact and Response model in order to minimize repetition between chapters.

11. The SPI also recommended that the report should assess the linkages between land degradation and restoration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their associated targets, particularly SDG 15, “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”, and target 15.3, “By 2030 combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods , and strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world”. The SPI noted that the report will benefit from considering the scientific conceptual framework for land degradation neutrality (LDN) developed by the SPI. LDN provides an incentive for reversing land degradation and is thus able to fill the gap with respect to the need for quantitative policy options for ecosystem restoration.

12. A review of the second order draft of the LDRA and the FOD of the summary for policymakers has been launched by the IPBES, running from 1 May–26 June 2017. The SPI and the CST will submit comments on these documents in accordance with the IPBES procedure.

B. Cooperation with the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils of the Global Soil Partnership

13. By decision 21/COP.12, the COP encouraged the SPI to continue its cooperation with the ITPS with a focus on the following three topics agreed during the first joint ITPS-SPI meeting held on 20 April 2015: (i) the SDG 15 and its target 15.3 on land degradation neutrality, (ii) the promotion of common land-based and soil-related indicators, including the three land-based UNCCD progress indicators serving the reporting obligation of Parties of the three Rio Conventions, and (iii) soil organic carbon.

14. In March 2016, the Chair of the CST and Co-Chair of the SPI participated in the fifth working session of the ITPS. In the course of this meeting, representatives of the ITPS, SPI and IPCC agreed on a common interest in organizing a scientific event on soil organic carbon (SOC) to highlight the importance of maintaining and enhancing SOC to meeting the objectives of LDN, reducing greenhouse gases emissions and enhancing climate change adaptation.

15. The Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon was held from 21–23 March 2017 in Rome, Italy, to review the role of soils and SOC in the context of climate change and

sustainable development. The symposium was co-organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the ITPS of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), the IPCC, the SPI and the World Meteorological Organization. It was attended by 488 participants from 111 countries, including national representatives, organizing institutions, the private sector and civil society, as well as scientists and practitioners working on SOC and related fields.

16. The overall aim of the symposium was to review the role of soils and SOC in the context of climate change, sustainable development and LDN. The symposium also aimed to build scientific evidence to be assessed in IPCC reports, starting with the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) and other reports to be produced in the sixth assessment cycle, as well as reporting to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UNCCD and on the SDGs.

17. The symposium was structured around three main themes focusing on the assessment of SOC, the maintenance and increase of SOC stocks, and SOC management in specific types of soil. The SPI contributed to preparing a concept note used in the planning of the symposium.

18. A report entitled ‘Unlocking the potential of soil organic carbon’¹ was produced, containing a comprehensive synthesis of the main outcomes and presenting a series of detailed conclusions and recommendations reflecting the collective view of the participants. The SPI would like to highlight the conclusions below as relevant to the UNCCD.

19. There is convincing scientific evidence that a sustained increase in SOC contribute to the multiple objectives of climate change mitigation and adaptation, food security and achieving LDN. There are often synergies between climate change adaptation and mitigation and achieving LDN. Increasing SOC has crucial positive benefits for food security, climate change adaptation and achieving LDN by improving soil quality, reducing soil erosion and increasing soil water-holding capacity and drought resilience.

20. The main priorities of the upcoming “SOC agenda” are preventing further SOC losses and, where feasible, providing incentives to increase SOC stocks. This can be achieved by avoiding or reducing soil and land degradation, supported, where possible, by increasing SOC. This strategy is consistent with the LDN target.

21. There is the strong potential for achieving SOC conservation and sequestration through sustainable land management (SLM) practices.

22. To trigger the wide-scale adoption of sustainable practices, tangible short- and long-term benefits for farmers, such as yield increases, resistance to drought, or monetary incentives, must be evident, highlighted and achievable. Mechanisms are needed to facilitate and incentivize the implementation of management practices that contribute to SOC sequestration and remove the barriers to adoption of such practices.

23. Dryland soils contain more than one quarter of the global organic carbon store and are especially vulnerable to land degradation and desertification and associated SOC losses as SOC storage decreases with decreasing soil water content.

24. National monitoring of and reporting on SOC is becoming increasingly important in the fulfilment of global conventions and mechanisms. SOC is also a key indicator for LDN as it is a proxy for change in land condition.

¹ <www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/25eaf720-94e4-4f53-8f50-cdfc2487e1f8/>.

C. Cooperation with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

25. The COP requested the SPI, with the support of the secretariat, to explore the possibility of working with the IPCC to address the link between climate change and land degradation.

26. In July 2015, following a call made by the IPCC for proposals on topics to be addressed in special reports during the sixth assessment cycle, the UNCCD secretariat, under the guidance of the SPI and based on the outcomes of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference, submitted a proposal to the IPCC to prepare a special report on “climate change and land degradation”. This proposal was then grouped together with similar ones from IPCC members and observers in a cluster on land use, land degradation and agriculture.

27. At its 43rd session in Nairobi, Kenya, in April 2016, the IPCC decided to prepare a special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, SLM, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems (SRCCL).

28. The steering committee for the SRCCL circulated a questionnaire to IPCC Focal Points and Observer Organizations, including the UNCCD, ahead of the Scoping Meeting in February 2017 to get input on the structure and contents of the report. Upon the request of the UNCCD secretariat, the SPI contributed to this questionnaire by providing consolidated inputs. These inputs were later discussed with the members of the steering committee through a teleconference held on 13 January 2017 and attended by SPI members and the UNCCD secretariat. A questionnaire and stakeholder consultation report ² summarizing the results of the stakeholder consultation were made available for the participants of the scoping meeting.

29. In order to provide technical support to the scoping meeting for the SRCCL of the IPCC, the FAO and the IPCC co-organized an expert meeting on climate change, land use and food security from 23–25 January 2017 in Rome, Italy. The UNCCD secretariat was invited to be part of the Scientific Advisory Committee, and the SPI participated in the meeting and undertook the functions of keynote speakers, session moderators and panellists.

30. The meeting in Rome, attended by over 100 participants, was structured around five themes: (i) Direct climate impacts on land-ecosystems and food provision, (ii) Human-directed impacts on food and land-based ecosystems and their implications for food security, (iii) Greenhouse gas fluxes from agriculture and land systems: A scoping of mitigation options, (iv) Adaptation and resilience in food and land-based systems, and (v) Policies for land use, sustainable food production and consumption and climate action.

31. A report ³ was produced with a comprehensive synthesis from the meeting proceedings and key messages and recommendations.

32. The scoping meeting for the SRCCL was held from 13–16 February 2017 in Dublin, Ireland. The meeting resulted in a draft scoping paper,⁴ setting out the objectives and an annotated outline of the special report as well as the process and timeline for its preparation. The paper resulted from discussions that took place in a very constructive, science-based atmosphere with substantial contributions from representatives of the UNCCD secretariat and the SPI. At its 45th Session (Guadalajara, Mexico, 28–31 March 2017), the Panel approved the outline⁵ for Climate Change and Land: a SRCCL by the IPCC. The special

² <www.ipcc.ch/report/sr2/pdf/sr2_stakeholder_consultation-final.pdf>.

³ <www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/d5400b77-1533-4c37-86a7-4945c320ea8d/>.

⁴ <<http://ipcc.ch/apps/eventmanager/documents/43/090320170624-INF.7-SRLandUse.pdf>>.

⁵ <www.ipcc.ch/meetings/session45/Decision_Outline_SR_LandUse.pdf>.

report will be developed under the joint scientific leadership of Working Groups I, II and III and supported by the Technical Support Unit of Working Group III.

33. The SPI considers that the outline adopted for the development of the SRCCL provides an integrated and inclusive environment for further cooperation between the SPI and the IPCC. This will allow investigations into the interlinkages between desertification, land degradation and climate change and their effects on livelihoods and human well-being, thereby addressing the scientific needs expressed at the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference.⁶

34. In April 2017, the IPCC issued a call for IPCC members and observers to nominate experts to serve as authors and review editors of the SRCCL. With the guidance of the SPI, the CST Bureau proposed to the UNCCD secretariat to nominate five of the current SPI members and observers and five independent experts.

III. Contribution of the Science-Policy Interface to the Global Land Outlook

35. The SPI nominated two members to serve as focal points in the development of the first edition of the GLO. The focal points were also members of the GLO steering committee which met several times during the intersessional period. They provided leadership and guidance in the scoping, objectives and structure of the report, which was designed as a strategic communication product to spread the knowledge about the process of land degradation and present it in an engaging and accessible format. In addition, they provided feedback on the terms of reference for the working papers contributing to the production of the GLO, as well as organized consolidated SPI comments during the review and consultation on the FDO. The SPI may continue to play a role in the development of the second edition of the GLO as a member of the steering committee, participating in scoping and author meetings, and providing guidance for the science-policy aspects of the GLO to ensure credibility and the overall quality of GLO content.

IV. Conclusions and proposals

36. The SPI suggests that the CST considers the following proposals and recommends that the COP:

(a) *Proposal 1:* Requests the SPI to review the LDRA of IPBES, analyse its key messages relevant to the UNCCD and present an analysis at the 14th session of the CST;

(b) *Proposal 2:* Also requests the SPI to contribute to the preparation and review of the SRCCL of the IPCC and the AR6 of the IPCC in a timely manner and in accordance with the procedure established by the IPCC;

(c) *Proposal 3:* Encourages the SPI to continue the cooperation with the ITPS by following up on any UNCCD-relevant activities emerging from the conclusions of the Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon. These could include (i) measuring, mapping, monitoring and reporting on SOC stocks, (ii) further quantification of the potential of SOC sequestration through SLM, including the full greenhouse gases balance and interactions with climate change, (iii) the design of implementation strategies and land management practices for SOC protection and

⁶ Document ICCP/COP(12)/CST/2.

sequestration, considering land use and the local environmental, socio-economic, cultural and institutional contexts, and potential barriers to adoption;

(d) *Proposal 4:* Requests the secretariat to notify Parties, the SPI and experts included in the UNCCD Roster of Independent Experts to respond to the call for expert reviewers for the SRCCL;

(e) *Proposal 5:* Also requests the secretariat to facilitate participation of UNCCD representatives in the sessions of the IPCC, and the participation of the Chair of the CST in the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel of IPBES, as an observer;

(f) *Proposal 6:* Further requests the secretariat to facilitate the involvement of the SPI in the steering and reviewing of the second edition of the GLO.
