



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Second review of the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface

Consultancy reference number: CCD/22/EO/C/53

Introduction

Established in 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification - UNCCD - is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. Its 2018-2030 Strategic Framework states as the vision "A future that avoids, minimizes, and reverses desertification/land degradation and mitigates the effects of drought in affected areas at all levels and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within the scope of the Convention". The Convention's 197 Parties work together to improve the living conditions for people in areas affected by land degradation, to maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and to mitigate the effects of drought. The UNCCD is particularly committed to a bottom-up approach, encouraging the participation of local people in combating desertification and land degradation.

Decision-making under the UNCCD is done at the Conference of the Parties (COP) that brings together all signatories to the Convention every two years. The COP is assisted by two subsidiary bodies: the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC). The work under the UNCCD is supported by two entities: the UNCCD secretariat that organizes the intergovernmental process and facilitates cooperation and information exchange among countries, development partners, the scientific community, the civil society and other key stakeholders; and the Global Mechanism (GM) that promotes the mobilization of resources for sustainable land management.

About the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI)

The UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) was established at the 11th session of the COP¹ in 2013 to facilitate a two-way science-policy dialogue and ensure delivery of policy-relevant information, knowledge and advice on desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD). Later on, the SPI mandate, activities and members have been refined through COP decisions and as a result of its first assessment in 2017². Currently the SPI is assigned to analyse, synthesize and translate relevant scientific findings and recommendations from DLDD-related scientific conferences and relevant stakeholders and networks into proposals to be considered by the CST for the consideration of the COP; interact with existing multiple scientific mechanisms, in particular the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITS) and other new and existing scientific networks and platforms; and assist the Bureau of the CST in organizing the UNCCD scientific conferences and assessing their results.

Furthermore, the SPI, under the leadership of the Bureau of the CST, is to provide the CST with clear and well-defined thematic guidance on scientific knowledge requirements (e.g. thematic assessments, scientific studies and/or user guides) for implementing the UNCCD; identify the most optimal way forward (e.g. commissioning an individual or group of experts, organizing expert meetings, encouraging the organization of regional meetings by regional scientific institutions or networks) to address these knowledge requirements; draft terms of reference for the scientific work to be commissioned to external experts or institutes and ensure the quality of content according to the contract

¹ Decision 23/COP.11

² Decision 19/COP.13; please see also document ICCD/COP(13)/CST/6 containing the assessment results



administered by the secretariat; and select experts, including from scientific societies, science and knowledge organizations, and CSOs, and networks known for their expertise in DLDD.

In practical terms, the SPI operates in accordance with COP decisions pertaining to its activities: it proposes for the approval of each COP a work programme, with focus on one or two broad, globally relevant priority topics. Its first work programmes were mostly focusing on how to monitor progress toward the UNCCD strategic objectives and assessing the impact of the three UNCCD scientific conferences that had been held prior to the establishment of the SPI. From 2016-2017 on, the SPI has during each biennium generated a small number of thematic reports and related policy briefs of selected priority topics, including different aspects of advancing land degradation neutrality, assessing soil organic carbon and enhancing drought preparedness. For each COP, the SPI thematic reports are synthesized into conference documents containing policy-oriented recommendations for the consideration of the Parties.

The SPI is also actively coordinating with other scientific bodies and processes, particularly IPCC and IPBES. The SPI members participate in the meetings and working groups for those IPCC and IPBES reports that are most relevant to the UNCCD objectives, with the aim to ensure that land matters are taken into account in these reports. The secretariat reports to each COP on the coordination activities carried out by the SPI.

The SPI has 20 members comprising the five members of the CST Bureau, five regionally selected scientists (one nominated by each of the five Regional Implementation Annexes), and ten scientists nominated by the CST Bureau through an open call. In addition, it has five observers representing civil society organizations, international organizations and relevant UN organizations. The membership is renewed in stages through a rotating system, with part of the members new and others remaining.

Following the first review of the SPI in 2017, the COP decided that the SPI will operate up to the end of the sixteenth session of the COP, at which time a review of the SPI will be presented³. COP 15 further decided⁴ that CST 16 (in 2024) should focus on, inter alia, the review of the work conducted by the SPI, including its overall achievements since the last review completed at COP 13, in order to decide on the future functioning of the SPI. The terms of reference for the consultancy to conduct an external assessment for the basis of the second SPI review are presented in this document

Objective of the consultancy

An external assessment report that will support the UNCCD preparation for the second review of the SPI, to be conducted at COP 16 by the CST. The assessment report may be considered also during the midterm evaluation of the UNCCD 2018-2030 strategic framework.

Duties and Responsibilities

Aims and general principles of the external assessment

The external assessment for the SPI review will look at the work conducted by the SPI and its overall achievements during the period 2018-2022. It will consider the results achieved and aim to clarify how well the SPI logic and setup have supported the generation of the intended outcomes, whether the assumptions behind the SPI establishment were accurate and the choices concerning its aims and working modalities suitable – and on this basis, contribute to further consideration of the SPI. As an external assessment, its findings and conclusions will be based on sound evidence and objective analysis, clearly documented in the assessment report. Information will be triangulated as far as possible, and when verification is not possible, the single source will be mentioned. Analysis leading

³ Decision 19/COP.13

⁴ Decision 21/COP.15



to conclusions will be clearly spelled out. The findings and the emerging recommendations of the external assessment will be discussed with the SPI, to ensure their accuracy and to enrich the content with the thinking of the SPI members. Other key stakeholders will be consulted as well.

The information provided through the assessment is intended to assist the UNCCD Parties in their considerations and decision-making on the future functioning of the SPI. The findings and conclusions that will be generated will be of interest and use for the CST, its Bureau and the SPI members, various stakeholders involved in the UNCCD process, as well as the UNCCD secretariat. The assessment will also offer evidence-based information of the results produced by the SPI to the involved donors and to those planning to make a contribution.

Criteria and scope of the external assessment

The criteria for the external assessment will be loosely based on the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, with the understanding that as a learning process, the review may result in observations and options for further consideration rather than strictly defined, specific findings and recommendations. The provisional focus areas are outlined below; they may be further developed if deemed appropriate.

Relevance: The assessment will consider, in line with the OECD/DAC definition of relevance, the extent to which the SPI work is suited to the priorities and policies of the CST as its primary audience; and through the CST recommendations, those of the UNCCD and its stakeholders more broadly.

Coherence: The assessment will consider the compatibility of the SPI work with other science-policy entities and partners whose actions influence the UNCCD, with the aim to clarify the current and potential added value of the SPI.

Effectiveness: The assessment will look at the SPI success in producing the outputs and deliver the tasks set in the work programmes. Any modifications/revisions made will be considered as well. The delivery of outputs will be assessed in terms of both quantity and quality. The assessment will also consider the use of the SPI products, and the timeliness of their delivery. For facilitating the measurement of the achievement of the outcomes of the SPI, the inception phase of the assessment will include a (re)construction of the SPI theory of change, building on the SPI mandate, its work programmes, the overall aims of the CST, and the rationale of linking science with policy for the UNCCD and its implementation. If some outputs or outcomes are inaccurately stated in the plans, their amendments will be included in the reconstructed theory of change.

The assessment will consider the communication and public awareness activities for the SPI and its products that have been undertaken so far. It will consider whether existing communication channels and networks were used effectively and what new channels were established.

Efficiency: In keeping with the OECD/DAC definition of efficiency, the assessment will look at the extent to which the SPI has delivered maximum results from the given resources. This will include an assessment of the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of executing its activities, including also some reflection on the approaches to science-policy functions for other Conventions. The assessment will consider whether the SPI work programmes were implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternative interventions or approaches. It will give special attention to efforts by the SPI to make use of/build upon the activities of other science-policy bodies, institutions and initiatives, to increase its efficiency.

Impact: Through reflecting the SPI outputs and outcomes against the reconstructed theory of change, the assessment will consider the likelihood of the intermediate and long-term UNCCD aims of linking science and policy becoming a reality. It will identify major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the expected impact. Any unintended positive effects will also be identified, as well as the likelihood that the SPI would contribute to unintended negative effects. The assessment will also



briefly consider the CST, including the role of the national science-technology correspondents, as the channel through which the SPI products become part of the UNCCD policy debates, and are expected to generate the long-term impact.

Sustainability: Sustainability is understood as the probability of the SPI work being continued and its results being used in the future. The assessment will consider the key conditions or factors that are likely to undermine or contribute to the sustainability of the SPI, which will include reflection on its continued added value to the work of the CST, the UNCCD and its implementation, the level of interest and commitment of the scientific community to participate in the SPI, and the extent to which the resources needed by the SPI to deliver its work programme are made available.

Cross-cutting issues: In addition to the above criteria, the review will consider the integration of gender aspects into the functioning and products of the SPI.

Deliverables

The findings of the assessment will be based on a study of relevant documentation and direct feedback from the SPI members, UNCCD national focal points and science-technology correspondents, representatives of relevant scientific processes and institutions, other key UNCCD stakeholders, as well as the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism. The format for collecting the direct feedback (surveys, questionnaires, interviews...) will be defined at the beginning of the assignment.

The consultant(s) to be selected to conduct the external assessment will prepare the following main products:

- Inception report including a draft reconstructed theory of change of the SPI, a conceptual framework, work programme and tentative schedule of the assessment process;
- Preliminary summary of the main content of the draft assessment report, which will be a 4-6 page overview of the main findings and emerging conclusions and recommendations. The summary will be used for discussion with the UNCCD secretariat and the Global Mechanism to ensure that all essential information sources have been accessed, to factually check and to verify emerging findings, and get first reactions of the involved staff to the conclusions and recommendations;
- A workshop, tentatively of half-day length, bringing together the consultant(s), the SPI and the UNCCD staff to consider the findings and the emerging recommendations of the review, with the aim to consider how to further strengthen the successes and address the challenges that have been identified by the assessment, and to jointly brainstorm of the future functioning of the SPI.

Final report containing detailed analysis of the findings of the assessment, organised by the criteria and supported with evidence; lessons learned and recommendations.

Contractual terms

The contract is expected to start in October 2022; it will last until the end of 2023 or as otherwise agreed, with the aim to ensure that the consultant(s) will have adequate time to present their work to the SPI. The actual workload is expected to be around 30 days. The consultancy is home based with possible travel which will be discussed at the beginning of the consultancy.

Requirements

- Advanced university degree (master's or above) in fields relevant to this assignment is required.
- Extensive expertise in scientific research, networking and collaboration in fields relevant to the UNCCD



- Experience in evaluations and assessments similar to this assignment, including the use of a standard, defined criteria as the basis of the assessment and the construction of logic models/theories of change
- Good knowledge/understanding of science-policy work under the UNCCD at different levels (global/national).
- Knowledge of science-policy work under the other Rio Conventions will be an asset.
- Excellent writing skills and fluency in English language is required.

Special notice

Only individuals who can act as independent, individual economical operators are qualified to apply. Individuals who can provide their services only on account of an institution or enterprise not in their individual capacity are not eligible under this procedure.

Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations Secretariat and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultant and individual contractor is responsible for determining tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.

Submission of application

Applications should be submitted by e-mail to staffing@unccd.int with a UNCCD Personal History Form⁵, CV and cover letter, specifying the reference number: [CCD/22/EO/C/53](#).

The deadline for applications is **05 October 2022**. Only applications submitted by the deadline and with complete documentation will be taken into consideration.

Due to the volume of applications received, receipt of applications cannot be acknowledged individually. Please address your application as indicated above and please do not address or copy your application to an individual at the Secretariat or Global Mechanism. Candidates who do not receive any feedback within three months of the deadline should consider their application as unsuccessful.

Date of issuance: 22 September 2022

⁵ UNCCD P-11 form in electronic fill-in .pdf OR .docx format available: <https://www.unccd.int/about-us/secretariat/vacancies/applying-unccd>