United Nations
Convention to Combat Desertification

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultancy to support UNCCD SPI provision of science-based evidence on sustainable land use systems.

Consultancy reference number: CCD/23/C/17

Background

Established in 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)[1] is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management. The vision embraced by the Convention's 197 Parties in its 2018-2030 Strategic Framework[2] is for "a future that avoids, minimizes, and reverses desertification/land degradation and mitigates the effects of drought in affected areas at all levels and strives to achieve a land degradation-neutral world consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Strategic Objective 1 of the Framework is to improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification/land degradation, promote sustainable land management and contribute to land degradation neutrality (LDN). The ambition expressed by countries to achieve this vision is significant: the international community has pledged to restore one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030, half of which are LDN targets, the progress against which is reported under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3.[3] Both the IPCC[4] and the IPBES[5] have documented unprecedented rates of land use change, highlighting the finite nature of land and underscoring that more than 70 per cent of the global ice-free land surface has been affected by human use. However, the demand for land resources for many competing needs continues to grow, exacerbating land conversion and further amplifying existing environmental and societal challenges.

Land use plays a critical role in achieving international commitments for land, climate, biodiversity and sustainable development. The reports by the IPCC and IPBES have demonstrated that governments must leverage synergies and navigate trade-offs to create more sustainable land use systems. These reports also highlight that avoiding and reducing land degradation and restoring degraded land through a holistic and integrated policy approach, such as provided by LDN[6], can facilitate the achievement of multiple benefits.

The required integration takes place on two levels:

(a) Land use planning with the goal of optimizing across multiple objectives and navigating trade-offs, and

(b) Response options which, if pursued in an integrated manner, can address desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) while contributing to sustainable development including enhanced food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation and halting biodiversity loss.

If the land use planning process successfully optimizes the mix of land uses, minimizes trade-offs, and implements the most appropriate array and placement of response options throughout the landscape, it is assumed that the resulting sustainable land use system will lead to a higher level of ecosystem goods and services and increase the resilience of communities and ecosystems to global market volatilities and climate change. However, despite the large body of evidence on current and expected impacts of land use, land use change and land degradation, in practice, sustainable land use systems still play only a minor role in most landscapes. In many cases, their role in the policy domain also appears modest.

[1] UNCCD website: https://www.unccd.int/
[2] UNCCD2018-2030 Strategic Framework: https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-02/cop21add1_SF_EN.pdf
[3] Goals and Commitments for the Restoration Decade: https://www.pbl.nl/en/publications/goals-and-commitments-for-the-restoration-decade
[4] IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land: https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/
[5] IPBES Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/ldr
[6] Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality: https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2018-09/LDN_CF_report_web-english.pdf

Moreover, understanding continues to evolve in terms of what constitutes a sustainable land use system and what institutions, strategies, policies and mix of integrated response options[7] are required to create it at global, national and sub-national levels. A scientific assessment focused on addressing these knowledge gaps can provide Parties with guidance on how to pursue more sustainable land use options. Against this backdrop, UNCCD decision 18/COP.15[8] established the work programme of the Science-Policy Interface (SPI)[9] for the triennium 2022–2024, including the provision of science-based evidence on sustainable land use systems and their potential to address desertification/land degradation and drought while also contributing to the achievement of multiple United Nations goals and targets, taking into account environmental, economic and sociocultural conditions.

To meet this mandate, Parties have requested the SPI to produce a technical report, based on a review of existing synthesis reports and the primary literature, which provides

(a) a typology or framework of sustainable land use systems, including their capacity to enhance ecosystem goods and services, to be less vulnerable to system volatility and shocks while addressing social inequities;

(b) an analysis of the potential of sustainable land use systems to reconcile different United Nations goals and targets that compete for land resources; and

(c) an assessment of the contextual applicability of these land use options across the globe including barriers and opportunities as well as the possibility for broader diffusion.

Objective of consultancy

Research support (scientific and grey literature review, a survey and an analysis of UNCCD national reports) for a technical report which provides science-based evidence on sustainable land use systems and their potential to address desertification/land degradation, and the other SDGs.

Duties and Responsibilities:

Under the overall management of the Unit Chief, Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) the scientific oversight of the Chief Scientist, and the direct supervision of an assigned Officer, the consultant will support the SPI members working to deliver on SPI Work Programme Objective 1 by:

(1) identifying multidimensional criteria, features and management/governance schemes of sustainable land use systems from review of scientific literature; and

(2) identifying needs of countries for support in facilitating sustainable land use systems, through survey of experts involved in LDN planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting.

The following duties and deliverables are expected from the consultant:

- Develop an inception report in consultation with members of the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) to include (a) a conceptual framework and methodological approach, and (b) confirmation of the schedule of work and presentation of deliverables (April – May 2023)
- Review and document how “sustainable land use systems” has been defined and applied in the scientific literature, including socio-political (land tenure, governance), socio-economic and biophysical contexts, and elements of sustainability researchers have identified, quantified and categorised, with reference to land management. (April - May 2023)
- Review and document frameworks of principles/criteria/indicators for sustainability assessment that are relevant to sustainable land use systems, and their potential to contribute to the SDGs. (May - June 2023)
- Contribute to, in collaboration with the SPI and UNCCD secretariat, the design of a survey (see item 4, below) and identification of key stakeholders who will be candidate respondents, for the survey. (May - June 2023)

[7] See IPCC SRCCL Summary for Policy Makers B.2.2 and Figure SPM 3 3 https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/ and the IPCC SRCCL Technical Summary Table TS.1, Figure TS.8 Figure TS.12, TS.7 (page 68) , https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/technicalsummary/

[8] UNCCD decision 18/COP.15 (Annex, Table 1, Objective 1): https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-10/18_cop15.pdf

[9] UNCCD Science-Policy Interface: https://www.unccd.int/science/overview

- Undertake a survey of LDN planning/implementation/evaluation experience to identify barriers, knowledge gaps, opportunities, further support needed in ensuring that LDN planning is integrative (i.e., it adopts a participatory multi-stakeholder approach), iterative (permitting double and triple loop learning), contributes simultaneously to sustainable land management at landscape scale (i.e., developing and upscaling sustainable land use systems), contributes to SDG target 15.3 on LDN, and contributes synergistically progressing other SDGs. The survey will include an online component and verbal interviews with key respondents. (June 2023)
- With guidance from the SPI, undertake the analysis, interpretation and documentation of survey results. (July 2023)
- Review and collate information from UNCCD national reporting[10] by countries, to determine alignment of the reporting process and policy responses with the LDN concepts and key LDN guidance documents, and with the elements of sustainable land use systems identified in items 1 and 2. (June - August 2023)
- Contribute the results of the survey and reviews (items 1, 2, 5 and 6) to the SPI's zero draft technical report on sustainable land use systems. (August - September 2023)
- Respond to any feedback provided by the SPI and put all deliverables into final form for the zero draft of the SPIs technical report. (September – October 2023)
- Respond to reviewer comments on the first order draft of the SPI's technical report (February - March 2024).

Deliverables

Key deliverables:

- ✓ Inception report that frames and sets out the methodology and work plan for the execution of the assignments as described in these Terms of Reference to be prepared within four weeks of signing the contract. The inception report will be further informed by discussions with the UNCCD secretariat and relevant members of the SPI and shall address the following: (a) the approaches/methods to be employed, and (b) confirmation of the schedule of work and presentation of deliverables. Draft inception report should be presented at the SPI Meeting of 2-4 May 2023. Inception report to then be finalized by 15 May 2023.
- ✓ A scientific and grey literature review and documentation of a) how "sustainable land use systems" has been defined and applied, b) frameworks of principles/criteria/indicators for sustainability assessment that are relevant to sustainable land use systems, and their potential to contribute to the SDGs. While additions will be made throughout the contract, the preliminary draft of this review to be finalized by 15 June 2023.
- ✓ The design, testing, implementation of the online survey followed by the compilation, analysis, and interpretation of the data and presentation of results, to be finalized by 31 July 2023.
- ✓ A review of the UNCCD national reports to assess alignment of the reporting process and policy responses with the LDN concepts and key LDN guidance documents, and with establishing sustainable land use systems, to be finalized by 30 August 2023.
- ✓ Contribution of the results of the survey and the reviews to the SPI's zero draft technical report on sustainable land use systems to be presented at the SPI Meeting of 12-14 September 2023, to then be finalized by 30 September 2023.
- ✓ Response to any feedback provided by the SPI and assistance in putting all deliverables into final form for the zero draft of the SPIs technical report, to be finalized by 15 October 2023.
- ✓ Response to comments on the first order draft, to be finalized by 15 March 2024.

Contractual terms

The service of the selected consultant is estimated to be for a period of 11 months (part-time). This contract is based on deliverables and payment is defined by outputs whereby the first instalment covers outputs 1-2, the second instalment outputs 3-4, the third instalment outputs 5-6, and the fourth instalment 7.

[10] Overview of UNCCD national reporting: https://www.unccd.int/data-knowledge/unccd-national-reporting-process

Start date is planned 15 April 2023 until 15 March 2024. The consultancy is home based. Travel is planned under this consultancy and will be organize and paid separately. Incumbent is expected to travel to SPI meetings scheduled for May 2023 and September 2023 to lead relevant sections of the report, and interpretation of the reviews and survey. The incumbent will also be expected to participate in relevant SPI Objective 1 virtual meetings. Contract is based on deliverables and payment is defined by outputs and deadlines.

All products developed and delivered through this consultancy shall remain the exclusive property of the UNCCD secretariat and shall not be divulged and/or used without prior written authorization. Participation by the consultant in authorship of publications derived from this work, including the technical report and any other publications, is encouraged, under agreement of any co-authors as well as the UNCCD Lead Scientist, and if the contribution of the consultant and any other co-authors meets the criteria of ICMJE Role of Authors and Contributors[11].

Requirements

- Master's degree in a relevant field (e.g., Environmental Sciences, Environmental Management, Natural Resource Management, Land and Water Management, Earth Science, Geography, Social Sciences, Global Change, Climate Change Adaptation, Sustainability Science, and related areas of expertise).
- A minimum of five (5) years' demonstrable experience in land management, environmental research or related discipline, in government, development agency, university or industry context.
- Excellent understanding of sustainable land management concepts and practices
- Excellent conceptual understanding of sustainability assessment, including existing frameworks relevant to sustainable land use systems.
- Strong working knowledge of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the three "Rio Conventions", including the national reporting processes of the conventions, and LDN concepts and implementation.
- Demonstrated experience in environmental assessment and monitoring.
- Proven experience using collaborative work environments such as MS Teams and MS SharePoint.
- Strong research and analytical skills and the ability to synthesize and present complex information in an understandable, systematic and visually clear manner.
- Demonstrated experience in technical writing for non-experts and/or science journalism in English (please provide a link in your cover letter to a published example of a product where you effectively translated a highly technical topic into language accessible to non-experts).
- Excellent and demonstrated writing skills and fluency in English 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.

[11] ICMJE Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html

Submission of application

The following documents should be sent to **staffing@unccd.int** as **one document**: UNCCD Personal History Form[12] /CV and cover letter, specifying the following in the email subject line: **CCD/23/C/17.**

The deadline for applications is **07 April 2023**. 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: 24 March 2023

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