

Update on the work of the UNCCD SPI

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Background

Since it was established in 2013 at COP 11, the UNCCD Science-Policy Interface (SPI) has provided the much-needed scientific underpinning for the Convention and enabled a discourse between scientists working on the other two Rio Conventions that has significantly contributed to achieving some of the desired synergies between the Conventions.

The mandate of the SPI was renewed and refined in 2017 at COP 13, and COP 14 approved the SPI work programme for the current biennium. The mandate will again be reviewed in 2023 at UNCCD COP 16.

The primary mandate of the SPI is to provide the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) thematic guidance on knowledge requirements for implementing the UNCCD. SPI information is available on this link:

<https://knowledge.unccd.int/science-policy-interface>

The list of members and observers of the previous SPI is available in this link, and will be updated by the end of the week to reflect the current SPI membership:

<https://knowledge.unccd.int/science-policy-interface/members-and-observers-science-policy-interface>

SPI meeting in Bonn in February 2020

In my role as CSO Observer, I attended the first meeting of the newly constituted SPI in Bonn on February 17 – 19 this year. Although the CSO member of the SPI is formally an observer, the ethos of the SPI is that everyone should be granted a full opportunity to participate and contribute.

The meeting focused on the work programme for 2020 -21 as agreed at COP 14. It was opened by UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw who warmly welcomed the participants and expressed strong appreciation for the work done by the Science-Policy interface (SPI), grounding the work of the Convention in sound scientific knowledge.

The meeting reviewed the decisions of COP 14 that are of importance to the SPI, including those related to the CRIC and National Reporting, the UNCCD communications strategy, the UNCCD gender action plan and mainstreaming gender into SPI products and the decisions on land tenure. A technical guide on the incorporation of land tenure considerations into DDLD is being prepared in collaboration with FAO and will be presented at the next COP for adoption by the Parties.

The meeting also considered how it would coordinate its activities with and share strategic information with other relevant UN scientific bodies including the IPCC, IPBES and the GEF STAP.

The main task undertaken at the February meeting was planning for the implementation of the SPI Work Programme for the biennium 2020-2021. Two important tasks given to the SPI by the COP are:

1. Provision of science-based evidence on the potential contribution of integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management to positive transformative change achieving LDN and addressing LDDD issues.
2. Provision of science-based evidence on the approaches for the assessment and monitoring of the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems to drought, also considering the effect of climate change on drought risk.

Working teams were established at the meeting that will take this work forward in the course of the coming months. In terms of the first Deliverable, what is planned is a technical report providing science-based evidence of how, in the context of working to achieve or exceed LDN, integrated land use planning and integrates landscape management can contribute to positive transformative change, including examples of cases where these approaches have been applied.

Country Parties are interested in understanding what the experience of countries is, and this has been tabled at two COPs; however, at that stage it was still too early to do so, as LDN had not yet been adequately tested. Currently, 183 countries are engaged in LDN target setting, and of these, 90 have already set targets. Case studies will be invited so that they can be compiled by Sept- Oct this year and launched at the CRIC in December. The plan is that by January analysis will have taken place and a report produced by a consultant to be presented to the Parties at COP 15. The SPI will shape the ToR for the consultant and review the report.

How can you contribute?

As a global CSO community, our ability to shape emerging science-based policy and decisions of the COP depends on the quality of our contributions of evidence and innovative ideas to the on-going discourse. If anyone in the CSO community can contribute insightful experiences related to how integrated land use planning and integrated landscape management have contributed to positive transformative change while achieving LDN and more broadly addressing LDDD issues, please share these with me at: dryland@global.co.za.

I look forward to hearing from you, and will be glad to discuss your questions, concerns and inspirations as regards the SPI.