



Towards the Establishment of the Global Soil Partnership

Summary Report and Way Forward of the launch event 7-9 September 2011, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy

1. Introduction

After six months of intense preparatory activities, a major meeting to launch a Global Soil Partnership for food security and climate change mitigation and adaptation was conducted by FAO at its headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 7 to 9 September 2011. The meeting was organized in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission (EC). The main purpose of the meeting was to present to FAO Member Countries and key stakeholders the proposal by FAO of a Global Soil Partnership and to obtain reactions and recommendations on the way forward towards the establishment of such a partnership.

The three-day meeting was attended by a large audience of some 200 participants representing major soil institutions, associations and projects from all regions of the world, FAO Permanent Representatives/country delegations and civil society organizations. The meeting enabled a very lively and constructive debate about the rationale and importance of establishing a Global Soil Partnership and the possible way forward aiming at a fully collaborative process with all interested partners. Simultaneous translation in the six official UN languages facilitated the debate. The function of secretary of the meeting was assured by Mr Alexander Müller, Assistant Director General (ADG), FAO Natural Resources Management and Environment Department.

2. Opening Session

An opening statement was given by the FAO Director-General, Mr Jacques Diouf, introducing the relevance of global soil resources for food security and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The first session of the meeting, chaired by Mr Alexander Müller (ADG/NR), proceeded with a series of keynote lectures highlighting the relevance of the GSP initiative. Main speakers were Dr Amadou Boubacar Cisse, Minister of Planning, Republic of Niger; Dr Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); Dr Pia Bucella, European Commission-DG Environment; Dr Corrado Clini, Chairman, Global Bioenergy Partnership (GBEP); and Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), India. All speakers

emphasized the need to establish a Global Soil Partnership for assuring the safeguard of soil resources for future generations and highlighting the potential of soils to act as a major sink for greenhouse gases (mitigation) and to increase resilience to climate change (adaptation). The proposed way forward by FAO, including the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Soils, was supported and potential synergies with other UN agencies and Conventions were underscored.

The second session, chaired by Dr David Wilkinson, Director of Programmes at the European Commission, DG JRC, was opened with an introductory speech by Mr Alexander Müller, outlining the FAO proposal for a GSP and highlighting the two main elements of the proposal: an open Partnership, that should be inclusive of all stakeholders, with a model similar to the Global Water Partnership, and the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Soils, based on a more formal process through FAO Governing Bodies. This would include consideration and approval of terms of reference of the Partnership and the Panel and nominations of Panel members to ensure the necessary high-level scientific and technical advice on soil related matters. Two other keynote lectures were provided by Dr Pedro Sanchez, Columbia University/CIAT, and Dr Jochen Flassbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency, Germany (UBA). Both speakers elaborated on the urgent need for action and the need to be inclusive of all already existing initiatives, such as the GlobalSoilMap.net consortium, the Africa Soils Information Service, among others.

A Plenary Discussion with numerous statements by country delegates and various stakeholders followed, which was lively and generally very supportive of the GSP proposal. Concerns were raised by Argentina, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), recalling the recommendations of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) in 2011 that FAO undertake a preliminary exploratory process into the possibility of establishing a Global Soil Partnership and noting that the formal launch of such an initiative could only be announced following its formal endorsement by FAO's governing bodies. Besides these procedural concerns, there was a strong recognition for, and indeed consensus on, the urgent need to act in order to protect the limited soil resources of the planet.

3. Further Keynote Presentations and Substantive Discussions

The first session of the second day of the meeting was chaired by Mr Modibo Traoré, DG, FAO Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department who opened with a further session of keynote presentations highlighting possible linkages of the GSP with other initiatives and policy areas including research, climate change, water resources, biodiversity, etc. Invited keynote speakers were Dr Martin Yemefack, President of African Soil Science Society; Dr Neil McKenzie, Director Land and Water, Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO); Dr Mohamed Bakarr, Global Environment Facility (GEF); and Dr Ania Grobicki, Executive Secretary, Global Water Partnership (GWP). All speakers asserted from various perspectives the relevance of the initiative and the need to make rapid progress in establishing such a partnership. Mr Ahmed Djoghlaif (Executive Secretary, Convention on Biology Diversity (CBD)), originally scheduled for delivering the opening speech of this session, cancelled his participation at the last moment due to personal reasons, but forwarded to the meeting a written statement of support. The session ended with the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between FAO (Mr Alexander Müller) and the Global Water Partnership (Dr Ania Grobicki). The proposed Global Soil Partnership is expected to model itself on and to cooperate closely with the Global Water Partnership.

The subsequent session was chaired by Mr Eduardo Rojas Briales, ADG, FAO Forestry Department, who opened with a keynote by Prof. Dr Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). Dr Töpfer welcomed FAO's initiative and expressed his full support through the Global Soil Forum that aims at enhancing the bridge between soil science, society and decision making. A presentation and detailed discussion of the FAO proposal for the GSP was presented by Mr Pasquale Steduto, Deputy Director, FAO Land and Water Division, and included the

proposed governance structure, including a Secretariat, headed by an Executive Secretary, and an Intergovernmental Panel on Soil as well as the main pillars of action of the partnership. A very fruitful debate ensued with numerous interventions and statements by stakeholders and country representatives. The discussion initially focused on the main pillars of action for the GSP, including its proposed vision and mission. The afternoon session was chaired by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan (MSSRF, India) who provided a summary of the main issues presented during earlier sessions and made a statement emphasizing the importance of addressing soil management at all levels. Brief regional statements were presented by key organizations and institutions working on soils: Asia was introduced by the Chinese Institute of Soil Science, Europe by the European Commission, Latin America by the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (EMBRAPA), North Africa and Middle East by the Ministry of Agriculture of Jordan, North America by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS-USDA), Oceania by CSIRO and Sub-Saharan Africa by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). The regional discussion then highlighted the need to take into account the specificities of each region and to be inclusive of all major stakeholders. There was also a strong call to consider sub-regional country groupings for areas with very specific soil degradation problems, such as the Mediterranean basin.

At the end of the second day, a clear picture emerged of the main opinions and reactions from the global soil stakeholder community and FAO's Member and Associated Nations. The plenary confirmed a soils community intent on the urgency of tackling soil degradation through a concerted global platform and partnership effort for soil protection and sustainable soil management.

The following main areas of concern were raised:

GSP mission: it was suggested to avoid limiting the GSP Mission focus on food security and climate change adaptation and mitigation alone as soils are vital for many other globally important issues, including poverty alleviation, water resources, provision of energy and other products, biodiversity, and human health and security.

Scope of the Partnership: some countries advocated that the GSP should explicitly include in its mandate the issue of land and water, and the relation with existing initiatives such as the Global Water Partnership was raised. However, the majority agreed on the need to avoid overlap of competences with other processes, structures and organizations or risk of dilution of the GSP mandate.

The process to set up the GSP: some participants, in particular GRULAC, commented on the timing the GSP launch, noting that the background documentation, notably the draft GSP terms of reference (ToR) prepared by the Secretariat had been made available too late for country representatives to provide official feedback. This limited their mandate to respond on behalf of their governments. Moreover, because of its proposed intergovernmental nature, the GSP could not be launched before submission of the ToR for consideration by FAO's Programme Committee (PC) and in turn by COAG.

The "North-South" dimension: some developing countries seemed to fear that OECD countries may use the GSP to promote their own interests and stressed that GSP standards should not be modeled on northern policies.

Inter-governmental Panel on Soils: various proposals were made by country and organizational representatives on the composition and mandate of the Panel. Queries were raised on the proposed 25 members. It was noted that such a size has been effective in other FAO committees. More importantly, care would be needed to ensure the Panel is balanced, for example, in terms of the proposed pillars (mapping/data, soil ecosystem functions, soil management interventions, policy, etc.) and regions. Concerns were also raised regarding the potential dilution of the "soil

momentum” by creating a Panel on Land and Soils. It was suggested that the Panel should be focused on “Soils” only while still recognizing the fundamental link to land and its attributes. Consensus has to be reached on this issue. A realistic work plan should be developed and the frequency of meetings clarified. The process should be effective and avoid introducing too much bureaucracy.

4. Final Session

On the basis of the well articulated feedback and clear positions by participants on some issues, the FAO Secretariat elaborated a presentation summing up the results of the discussions for the Global Soil Partnership. This was prepared by the rapporteurs, Ms Sally Bunning (FAO) and Ms Constance Neely (FAO) supported by Mr Luca Montanarella (JRC) and José Benites (FAO).

4.1 Main Areas of Consensus and Conclusions

The response as a summary report to the main issues raised during the first days of deliberations was presented by Mr Alexander Muller, ADG/NRD for consideration by the Plenary at the last session of the meeting that was chaired by Mr Ronald Vargas (FAO). The main conclusions and recommendations emanating from the final statements and discussions are outlined as followed:

4.1.1 Support for the Global Soil Partnership

- a) **Sustainable development agenda:** there was unanimous support on the need to bring soils to the **top of the political agenda** (to bring it out of the “blind spot”, and highlight cost of non-action in terms of food production, food security, poverty etc.). **Rio+20** offers an important window of opportunity to put soils at the top of the sustainable development agenda.
- b) **Multiple benefits of soils:** awareness raising of policy makers is needed to **recognize the importance of soils** not only for sustainable and productive agriculture but for food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation, water resources management, poverty alleviation, human health and peace. Policy makers need to understand the implications of urbanization and loss of productive soils for food security, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management, etc. Holistic policies are needed to meet escalating demands of humankind for food, biofuel and other products while ensuring sustainable land use systems (soil, water and biodiversity management) that provide increased resilience to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- c) **Informed policy makers:** there is a need for promoting appropriate sharing of information and providing evidence-based information and data for policy makers to enhance soils resources management and protection and address relevant national, regional and global issues. This requires an intergovernmental process and justifies the establishment of an **Inter-governmental Panel on Soils** by FAO Governing Bodies.
- d) **World Soil Charter:** the GSP process should build on the World Soil Charter, which contains 13 principles that address degradation, competition over resources, effects on productivity, effects on water, environment and the economy. On the whole, the principles are still relevant and opportune today. The Charter deserves widespread application and it could be reviewed and updated as appropriate.
- e) **Soils knowledge:** there is a wealth of knowledge and data and expertise on soils worldwide; however, it is dispersed and partial, not harmonized and not accessible to the broad range of stakeholders (farmers to policy makers). The vital importance of soils as underpinning

healthy, functioning ecosystems that provide multiple services is not yet recognized by the majority of stakeholders. Mechanisms are needed to enhance the wide sharing of knowledge, data, methods, technologies, etc. Communication strategies are required for targeting specific audiences.

- f) **Coordination for added value:** there is a need for effective collaboration and coordination among key soils partners, projects and networks to make effective use of resources and to build national soils capacities. The GSP has clear opportunities for added value and synergy to bring about better coordination among existing soil-related initiatives and thus avoid the high costs and implications of non-coordination.
- g) **Partnership:** it was proposed to build on and learn lessons from existing partnerships, notably the Global Water Partnership which recognizes the value of the Knowledge - Policy – Action interrelations. The GSP should build on the comparative advantage of partners and include all sizes of organization and institutions. Several major soils initiatives/organizations stated that they are prepared to partner in the GSP:
 - i. at national level (National Soil Science Associations and institutes, etc.); individual countries should recognize the benefits of their involvement in the GSP;
 - ii. at regional level (regional bodies such as AAAS, ESSC, FARA, SLCS, etc., regional nodes of Globalsoilmap.net, regional Farmers Associations, etc.);
 - iii. at international level (IUSS, UNCCD, Global Soil Forum, etc.).
- h) **Regional collaboration:** more consultation is needed within the regions to develop the spirit of partnership and to investigate and agree on regional leadership/coordination. There was a proposal to develop smaller sub-regional groups with similar contexts and soils (e.g. farming systems, traditions and cultures such as the Mediterranean); this would need to be further investigated in each region.
- i) **Stakeholders:** a broad stakeholder partnership process is required with gender and youth balance (representatives of government, farmers' organizations, scientific and academic bodies, public and private sector, media, extension and NGOs). Soil management and protection requires local and national solutions as demonstrated by the successful Landcare movement. Solutions cannot be found for farmers/land users without their participation at all levels and from the beginning of the process.
- j) **Roles and Responsibilities:** there was agreement that FAO is the appropriate organization to initially coordinate the Initiative, on the basis of FAO's knowledge, mandate, neutral role and historical background and as the GSP requires an intergovernmental process (international process and commitment to soils related efforts). Clear roles and responsibilities of partners should be identified vis-à-vis the proposed pillars/priority areas of action (building on existing work and comparative advantage). In addition, the implications (funding, human resources, etc.) for FAO and key partners need to be clarified through developing a business plan and financing strategy.

4.1.2 Pillars of the Global Soil Partnership - Technical suggestions

While there was less opportunity for in-depth discussion on the proposed five pillars or thrusts of the proposed GSP, some feedback was obtained and many organizations and institutions expressed an interest in contributing to the GSP within specific areas/pillars.

- a) **Scope:** the GSP focus should be on soils while framing efforts within a wider landscape, watershed and sustainable livelihoods context. It should ensure that work on soils includes all main land uses and habitats (cropping, rangelands, forests, wetlands, urban areas, etc). It should clearly articulate the central role of soil organic matter and soil carbon sequestration in reducing methane and nitrous oxide emissions and in retaining soil moisture and nutrients and enhancing biological activity and thereby providing the basis for increased plant growth and productivity as well as climate change resilience.
- b) **Harmonizing terminology and methods and improving information:** there is a need for setting up this process. The GSP could help develop a common soil language and terminologies, to harmonize existing knowledge, standards and methods and universal soil classification as a basis for cooperation. This should include:
- obtaining agreement on technical standards and norms for measurement, management, and monitoring including indicators of soil health and change;
 - producing the next generation of soil information ensuring a finer resolution of digital soil mapping for targeted information and modeling (e.g. specifying uncertainties);
 - developing a common data infrastructure/bank for soil information, management technologies, and modeling capacity (e.g. for scenario development);
 - integrating soil information into holistic, ecosystem standards and knowledge systems (e.g. soil, water and biodiversity are intrinsically linked);
 - ensuring data availability for the multiple stakeholders concerned (end users on the ground and policy makers) while paying due attention to intellectual property rights (IPRs) related to soils data.
- c) **Targeted Research:** the GSP should promote targeted research in soil sciences to fill knowledge gaps and address emerging issues. For example, there is a need to better understand and maintain soil processes (hydrology, geochemical, carbon and nutrient flows, and biological activity).
- d) **Ecosystem and watershed approach:** soils need to be considered from both a watershed perspective to take account of upstream-downstream soil-water relations and an ecosystem perspective to assess and improve the carbon balance, nutrient flows, and biological diversity and to identify improved management practices in specific farming systems and contexts (e.g. crop residues may be used for soil protection, livestock feed, manure may be used for fuel for cooking and other purposes; understanding these flows is pivotal for improving soil fertility).
- e) **Knowledge management and development:** the GSP must invest in capacity development. Not all countries have the same capacities and expertise, so there are opportunities for enhancing South-South cooperation. There is a need to take advantage of the many existing training efforts and capacities (e.g. universities, national and regional institutes) worldwide. It is important to build on the knowledge of those managing the land and to combine traditional knowledge with modern science.
- f) **Soil policies and regulations:** there are valuable experiences stemming from efforts all over the world to protect soils and there is a need to build on these lessons learned in order to strengthen soil policies and integrate soil issues into natural resources, agriculture and

environmental policy. Efforts are needed to bridge gaps between science, policy making and civil society.

- g) **Link soil knowledge with soil policy and soil management:** find ways to translate soils data and information into policies and binding legal agreements for soil protection and to ensure the application of good management practices (i.e. through incentives; enforcement). For example:
- develop agriculture and land planning policy and regulations to prevent uncontrolled expansion of cities and loss of productive soils/land;
 - develop and/or make available methods and indicators for soil quality assessment for land suitability and assess soil protection effectiveness (e.g. from contamination by heavy metals and other pollutants, transfer of soluble pollutants from soil to groundwater);
 - develop minimum standards of soil management, specify where and how they should be met, and provide advice on appropriate management practices and/or advanced interventions for specific soil types and livelihood contexts.
- h) **Soils and society:** soil science is seen as being “out of fashion” and there is a need to promote efforts to attract and educate the next generation of soil expertise through public media and awareness of soil’s importance to society, updated curricula, etc.
- i) **FAO soils capacity:** meanwhile, FAO must reinforce its capacities on soil, which have been undermined during recent decades, to enable it to provide adequate support to member countries.

5. Urgency to take action in establishing the GSP: the Way Forward

On the basis of the discussions chaired by Ronald Vargas (FAO) and supported by Alexander Müller (ADG/NRD), as Secretary of the meeting, Mr Pasquale Steduto (FAO) presented the following proposals/decisions for the way forward and next steps:

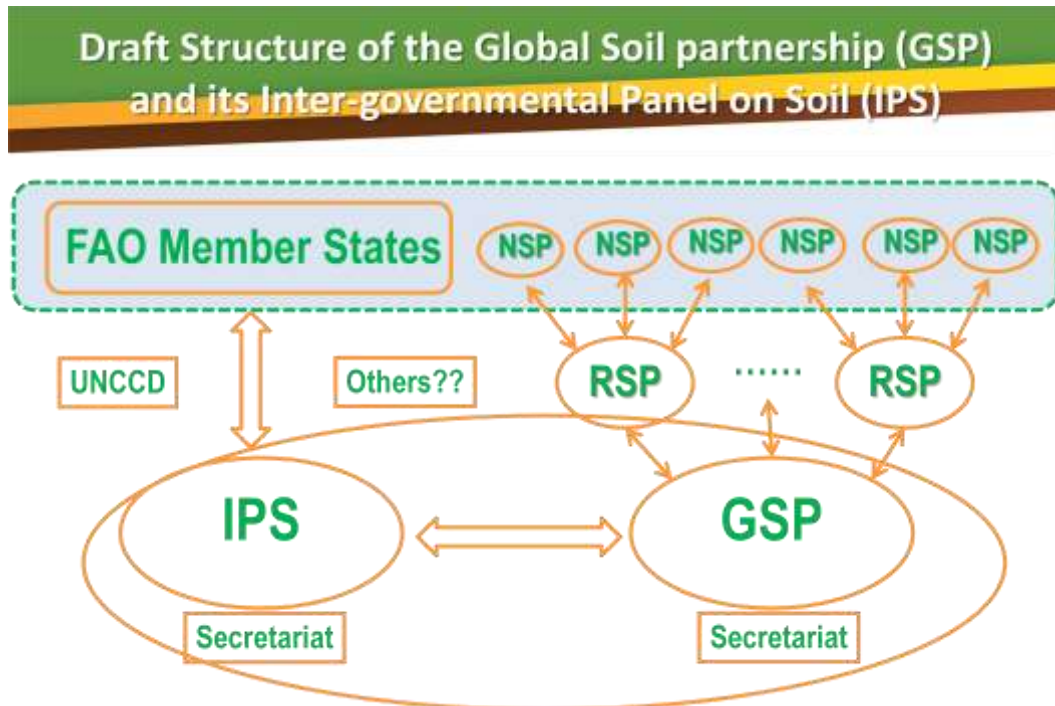
- a) It was proposed/agreed to set up a **Technical Working Group (GSP-TWG)** to be coordinated by FAO to, inter alia:
- develop sound zero draft terms of reference (ToR) for the GSP;
 - ensure a well structured and balanced partnership (Regional and National partners and FAO and its decentralized offices);
 - identify priority actions, clear products, targets, resource needs for an initial work plan and potential lead and collaborative partners for specific pillars/components; and,
 - develop a business plan and financial and communication strategies.

The TWG should work remotely (via e-mail) and/or in-person if needed.

- b) It was recommended to establish an **Open-ended Working Group (GSP-OWG)** through FAO Governing Bodies and in accordance with FAO procedures.
- c) It was recommended that the OWG consider establishing an **Inter-governmental Panel on Soils** as supported by the meeting. It was agreed that the title of the Panel should not include “land” to ensure due focus on soil. Nonetheless, it was noted that it would

necessarily address land-soil-water-human interrelations and promote an ecosystems approach.

- d) It was agreed that FAO should seek support to the OWG, as appropriate, by the Rome-based Agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP), by UNCCD and CBD Secretariats and by other UN Organizations if requested.
- e) A tentative draft structure of the GSP is presented below (where NSP = National Soil Partners and RSP = Regional Soil Partners).



6. Next Steps

In order to take advantage of the created momentum, the following concrete steps are foreseen:

- a) FAO (ADG/NR) will send to all participants a summary report of the meeting and a call for candidates for the **GSP Technical Working Group** (TWG) to be coordinated by FAO.
- b) The TWG should: a) develop sound zero Draft of the GSP Terms of reference (ToR) on the basis of the GSP proposal; b) ensure a well-structured and balanced partnership; c) identify priorities for action, targets, resources needs and an initial work plan; and d) work on business, financial and communication strategies.
- c) The Zero Draft ToR of the GSP, to be duly provided by the TWG, will be submitted for consideration by an Open-Ended Working Group (OWG) to be created by FAOs Governing Bodies (PC and COAG).
- d) The OWG's conclusions and recommendations including the agreed ToR will be forwarded, as appropriate, to FAO's Governing Bodies.

- e) In order to speed up the process, in view of the urgency and to enable to report on progress to be shared during Rio+20 (June 2012), OWG establishment could run in parallel to the TWG process. In that regard, the ADG/NR will contact immediately the Secretariats of COAG and Regional Conferences, to ensure that there will be space for the GSP discussion in their agendas.
- f) FAO will seek collaboration with the other Rome Based Agencies in order to leverage support and mobilize resources.

Mr Alexander Müller closed the meeting by thanking all the participants for the strong support and commitment to this new initiative.

Annex 1:

The documentation of the meeting is available on the FAO website:

http://www.fao.org/nr/water/landandwater_gsp.html

Agenda of the meeting
Background document
Statements and presentations by keynote speakers
Flyer on the Global soil Partnership
List of participants
Report

Annex 2: List of Participants

The meeting was attended by 200 people coming from 80 countries from all the regions of the world and from different types of organizations. 40 Permanent Representations to FAO including their Embassy staff attended the meeting. Around 130 people were soil scientists coming from the main soil organizations/institutions from the world. The complete list of participants it is below:

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