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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Third session

Rome, 22-24 June 2015

Report on Regional Soil Partnerships

Executive Summary

- Since the inception of the GSP, the Secretariat has given due priority to the establishment of Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs). To date, all regions have established RSPs and most of these have entered a consolidation phase.
- The appointment of GSP Focal Points by many countries has been a significant step forward as they are becoming key players in regional cooperation processes. While the principle of partnership is considered important and willingness is a natural pre-requisite to a successful RSP, it is also necessary for the partners to express formal engagement.
- Making use of available funds (most notably the EC funded project, a key component of which is to support RSPs on the development of Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs)) and enlisting contributions from some regional FAO offices, regional workshops have been organized in the current year in order to consolidate RSPs, including establishing steering committees and working groups and initiating or pursuing RIP formulation.
- Several RSPs have already viable RIPs, including confirmation of the main priorities identified in the region and concrete agenda for action in order to promote sustainable soil management and reverse soil degradation. The next step is obviously to start execution of these RIPs but that will only be possible if sufficient resources (in-kind and financial) are made available. In this context, it is clear that some regions require more external support than others.
- The Chairpersons of the various RSPs are to provide oral reports on major achievements, especially with regard to RIPs and the way forward. A very important point emanating from the regional workshops relates to the incapacity of many countries to fund the participation of their focal points at the GSP Plenary Assembly. These countries have requested to find a solution to this problem so as to allow them to be fully involved in this decision making body.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
 - renew its call to all partners to actively join and participate in the regional soil partnerships, and most importantly empower these RSPs for finalization/execution of the Regional Implementation Plans.

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- call on all partners to contribute resources (in-kind and financial) for the execution of the RIPs.
- invite further consolidation of the RSPs, leading to active engagement of all concerned partners and generating investment on identified priorities.

I. Background

1. Section 5.4 of the GSP Terms of Reference stipulates that: “the Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) will be established among interested and active stakeholders in the regions. These RSPs will work in close coordination with FAO Regional Offices and their activities will be supported by the GSP Secretariat. The RSPs will establish an interactive consultative process with national soil entities and relevant regional institutions.”

2. Since the inception of the GSP, the Secretariat has given due priority to assisting partners in establishing Regional Soil Partnerships. To date, all regions have established RSPs and most are actively engaged in further consolidation. The appointment of Focal Points in many countries has been a significant step forward as those focal points are becoming key players in regional processes. The main priority for all RSPs is clearly the formulation of viable Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs) and their execution, subject to availability of sufficient funds, both from within as well as – in most cases – outside the region.

3. The last two RSPs recently established are the Pacific Soil Partnership and the North America Soil Partnership.

II. Overall progress report

4. A brief summary of recent (or planned) achievements is provided below.

A. African Soil Partnership (AfSP)

5. The main actions undertaken by the AfSP were:

- Establishment of a working group and launch of an email-consultative process with the aim to developing the Regional Implementation Plan.
- With the financial support of the European Commission, a capacity development programme on digital soil mapping was implemented benefiting all Sub-Saharan countries. Participants from forty one countries were provided with training on state of the art digital soil mapping techniques and were given a powerful computer to continue application of the concepts back home.
- A consultant was recruited to support the partnership, especially in the development of the RIP.
- An AfSP workshop was organized in Accra, Ghana on 20-22 May, during which a Steering Committee was established and concrete progress was made in the development of the RIP.

B. Asian Soil Partnership (ASP)

6. The main achievements of the ASP were:

- A working group started a consultative process to identify regional priorities as the starting point for the development of the RIP.
- The FAO regional office for Asia together with the GSP Secretariat organized an ASP consultative workshop bringing together focal points, the presidents of soil science societies and ITPS members from the region.
- The ASP Steering Committee was established and the way forward for the RIP was defined. The “Bangkok Communiqué” was prepared during this workshop to incarnate the formal engagement of partners.

C. European Soil Partnership (ESP)

7. The main achievements of the ESP were:
- Consultative workshop held on 17-18 March 2015 at FAO premises. A number of important topics were discussed and the extension of the ESP Steering Committee was postponed to the next regional workshop (due on 8 March 2016).
 - A progress review in relation to the GSP pillars pointed to the need for further analysis as the basis for the development of the RIPs.

D. EuroAsian Soil Partnership (EASP)

8. The main actions connected to the EASP are:
- The first Plenary and Steering Committee met in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 10 – 11 September 2014, in the framework of the International Conference on Arid Land Studies (ICAL2,) with the active support of the EASP Secretariat. 24 delegates participated in the meeting. Participants agreed on the regional priorities, outlined the process for formulation of the RIP, structured further the partnership (appointment of Chair and Vice-chair for the EASP and nomination of Chairs and members for the five pillars) and agreed on the expected outputs for each of the five pillars.
 - A working group meeting for Pillar 1 was jointly organized with Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MoFAL) of Turkey in Antalya-Turkey on 16 October 2014. The outcome of the meeting was a draft Implementation Plan for Pillar 1 and the outline of a multi-country project proposal: 'Integrated natural resources management in drought prone and salt affected agricultural production landscapes in Central Asia and Turkey' under GEF 6 (4 years, about 12 000 000 USD).
 - The Secretariat together with the Ministry of Agriculture of Turkey is organizing a regional workshop planned for 15-17 June 2015 in Izmir, Turkey. The aim is the review and endorsement of the RIP.

E. NENA Soil Partnership (NENASP)

9. The main actions undertaken by the NENASP were:
- An email-based consultation process to identify regional priorities as an input for developing the RIP; a consultant is also assisting with this.
 - Jointly with the FAO regional office, a workshop was organized on 1-3 June 2015 in Amman, Jordan to consolidate the partnership by bringing together the newly appointed focal points and discussing RIP development.

F. South America Soil Partnership (SASP)

10. The main achievements of the SASP were:
- A meeting held during the Latin America Soil Congress in Cuzco, Peru on 9-15 November 2015 to inform partners about the status of activities and especially to involve them in the RIP drafting process.
 - The Secretariat organized the SASP workshop in Santiago, Chile on 2-5 March 2015 with participation of the focal points from countries in the region and the presidents of the national soil science societies. Other soil connected initiatives and organizations were invited in order to generate potential synergies.
 - The main outcomes of the workshop were the establishment of a Steering Committee, the selection of a Chair, the appointment of working groups and the identification of regional priorities. The RIP has been finalized most recently.

G. Central America, Caribbean and Mexico Soil Partnership

11. The main actions undertaken by this partnership were:

- A steering committee meeting in Managua, Nicaragua to review the draft implementation plan.
- Continued electronic exchanges since then so that a final draft RIP was available for consideration at the regional workshop that took place on 1-2 June 2015 in La Havana, Cuba.
- This regional partnership also organized a number of events and produced publications as part of the celebration of World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils.

H. Pacific Soil Partnership

- The launch of the Pacific Soil Partnership took place on 13th October 2014 at Suva, Fiji with representatives from 12 Pacific countries as well as from universities, research institutes and other partners.
- Discussions are under way on the process for developing the RIP.

I. North American Soil Partnership

- A GSP dedicated session was organized at the Soil Science Society Congress of America in Longbeach, California, in November 2014. During the session, representatives from USA and Canada agreed about the willingness to establish a regional soil partnership in the near future.
- In December 2014, a letter of agreement between the Soil Science of America and the Canadian Soil Science Society was signed, thereby constituting the North American Soil Partnership.