



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



# Report on the revised World Soil Charter's online survey

Rome, Italy 25 April 2018

# **REPORT ON THE REVISED WORLD SOIL CHARTER'S ONLINE SURVEY**

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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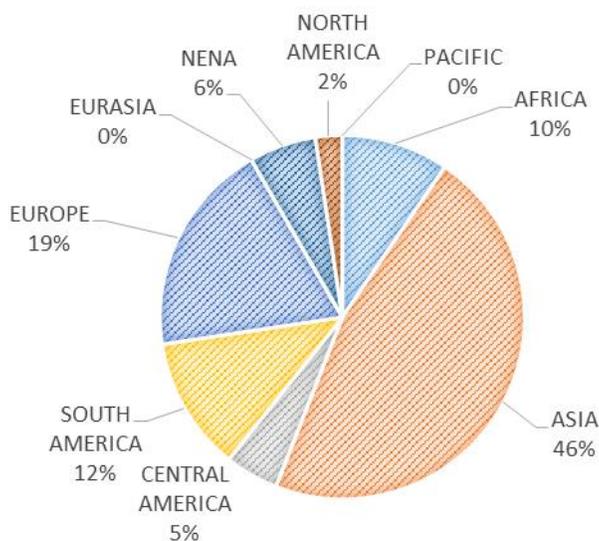
## Introduction

Under the aegis of the GSP and its scientific advisory body, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, the revision of the World Soil Charter (WSC), a policy instrument adopted by the FAO Conference as far back as November 1981 was carried out. Indeed, 30 years is a long period of time in a fast evolving world. Therefore, it was particularly opportune to update the vision and guiding principles as spelled out in the original WSC, especially with respect to new issues that emerged or were exacerbated during the last decades, like soil pollution and its consequences for the environment, climate change adaptation and mitigation and urban sprawl impacts on soil availability and functions. The reformulation process involved extensive consultations and culminated in the unanimous endorsement of the revised World Soil Charter by the FAO Conference at its 39th session in June 2015, the International Year of Soils. The Charter contains a number of key principles and general guidelines for the benefit of major stakeholder groups so as to chart the required policy measures and action programmes to guarantee sustainable management of soils in all regions and countries.

For the purpose of assessing activities by and within GSP partners in support of the principles of the revised World Soil Charter, an online survey was launched by the GSP Secretariat in March 2018 (see Annex I). On 22 April 2018, the survey closed with 87 complete responses submitted, which are herewith analysed. Ultimately, the outcomes of the survey will be presented to the 6th GSP Plenary Assembly on 11 June 2018, and will be used to assess the impact of GSP initiatives and plan future activities.

## Survey results

As reported in Graph 1, inputs were mainly submitted by Asian countries (46%) followed by Europe (19%), South America (12%), Africa South of the Sahara (10%), Central America and the Caribbean (5), the Near East and North Africa (6%) and North America (2%). No inputs were received from Eurasia and the Pacific regions.



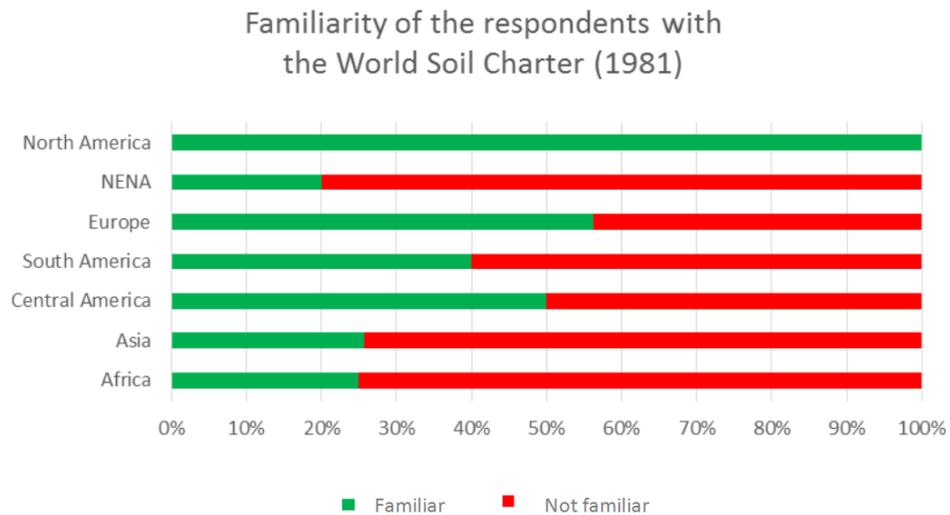
Graph 1. Regional response to the survey

Responding countries to the survey were:

- for Asia: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam;
- for Europe: Spain, Italy, Netherlands, France, Israel, Bulgaria, Belgium, Finland, Portugal, Turkey and Hungary;
- for South America: Brasil, Peru, Paraguay, Ecuador, Honduras, Ecuador, Chile and Colombia
- for Africa: Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Oman, Niger, Swaziland, Democratic Republic of Congo and Lesotho;
- for Central America: Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Bahamas;
- for the Near East and North Africa (NENA): Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arabic Republic and Morocco; and
- for North America: United States of America.

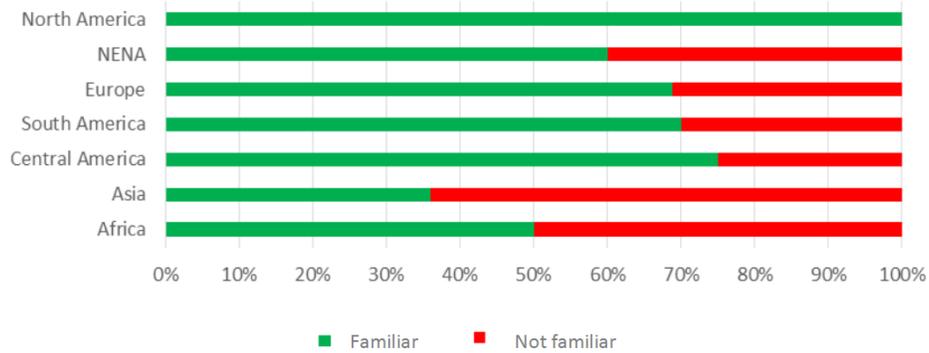
Participants in the survey were mainly partners to the GSP Secretariat (63%) followed by national focal points to the GSP (31%) and others (6%).

While 36% of the respondents declared to be familiar with the original World Soil Charter (1981), their familiarity with the revised World Soil Charter was 52%. The breakdown of these data in the different GSP region is presented in Graphs 2 and 3.



Graph 2. Familiarity of the respondents with the World Soil Charter (1981)

### Familiarity of the respondents with the revised World Soil Charter (2015)

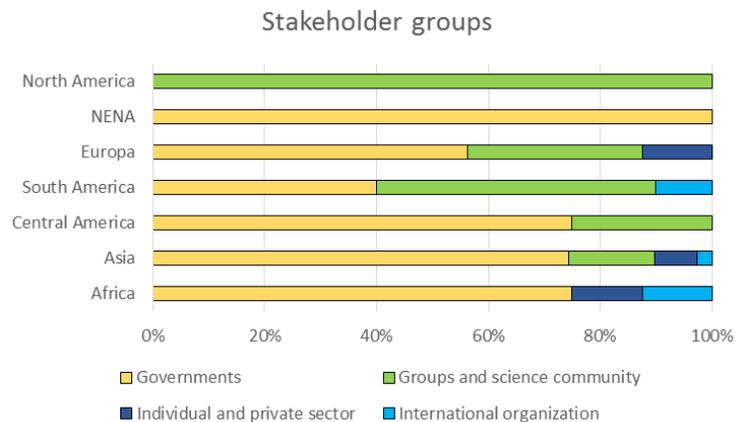


Graph 3. Familiarity of the respondents with the revised World Soil Charter (2015)

Overall, respondents declared to have learnt about the revised World Soil Charter:

- By participating in GSP activities, including the writing of GSP documents and the participation in the GSP Plenary Assembly;
- Through GSP/FAO channels like FAO country offices, official webpages and GSP awareness raising campaigns;
- By attending international workshops and events;
- By using the revised World Soil Charter for job-related purposes;
- By doing a literature review for research purposes; and
- By networking

Participants in the survey, were also asked to identify themselves with one of the stakeholder groups in the revised World Soil Charter and to provide information on the status of implementation of activities for their group in their country. Globally, 67% of the respondents worked for the government, 23% belonged to groups and the science community, 7% were individuals or worked for the private sector, and 4% of them represented international organizations. The breakdown of this data in the different GSP region is presented in Graph 4.

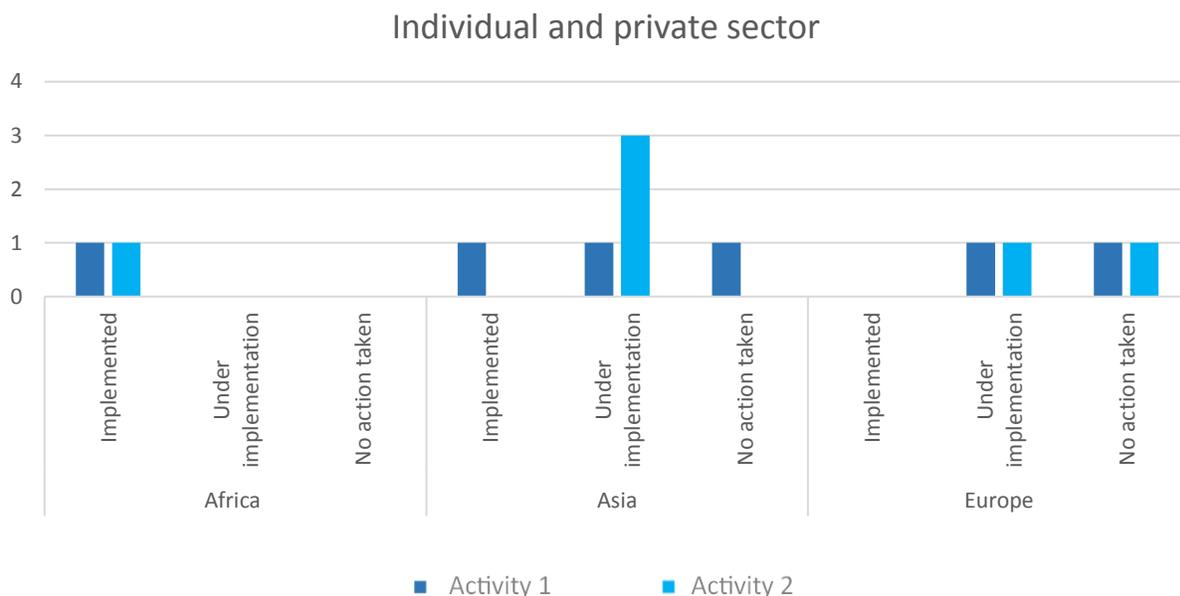


Graph 4. Organization of the respondents to the survey into the stakeholder groups identified in the revised World Soil Charter

**Individuals and representatives from the private sector** were asked to provide information on the implementation of the following activities in their country:

- ACTIVITY 1: All individuals using or managing soil must act as stewards of the soil to ensure that this essential natural resource is managed sustainably to safeguard it for future generations; and
- ACTIVITY 2: Undertake sustainable soil management in the production of goods and services.

Overall, activities for this stakeholder group were mainly under implementation (50%). Respondents also reported that 25% of the activities were implemented and that no action was taken to implement the remaining 25% of the activities. The breakdown of the responses provided by respondents in Africa, Asia and Europe, the regions respondents for this stakeholders’ category came from, is presented in Graph 5.

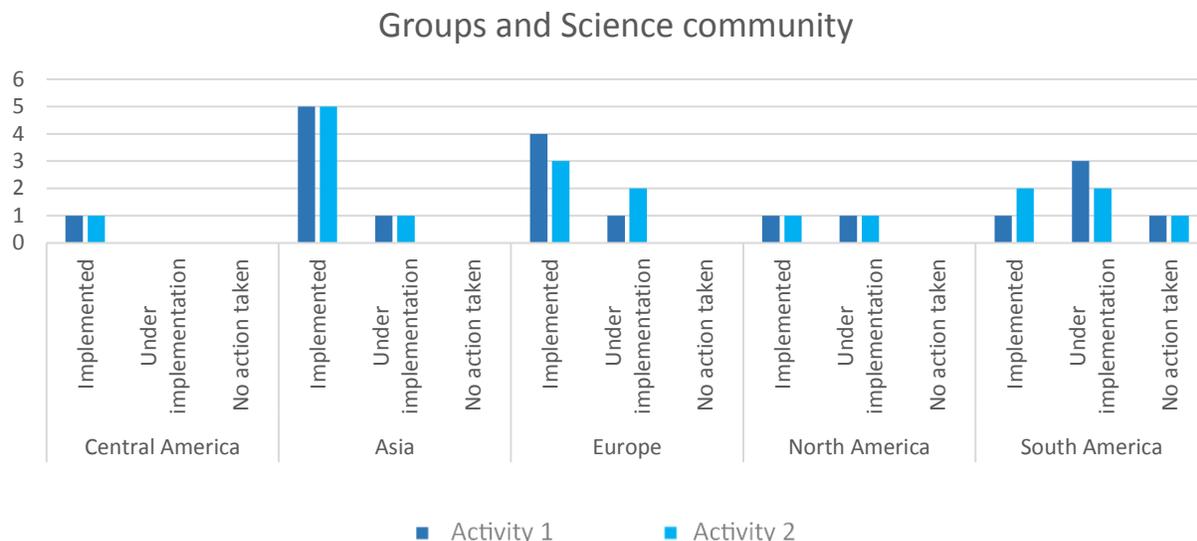


*Graph 5. Status of implementation of the activities identified in the revised World Soil Charter for individuals and the private sector*

**Representatives from groups and the science community** were asked to provide information on the implementation of the following activities in their country:

- ACTIVITY 1: Disseminate information and knowledge on soils; and
- ACTIVITY 2: Emphasize the importance of sustainable soil management to avoid impairing key soil functions.

Overall, activities for this stakeholder groups were implemented (63%). Respondents also reported that 32% of the activities were under implementation and that no action was taken to implement the remaining 5% of the activities. The breakdown of the responses provided by respondents in Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, Europe, North America and South America, the regions respondents for this stakeholders’ category came from, is presented in Graph 6.



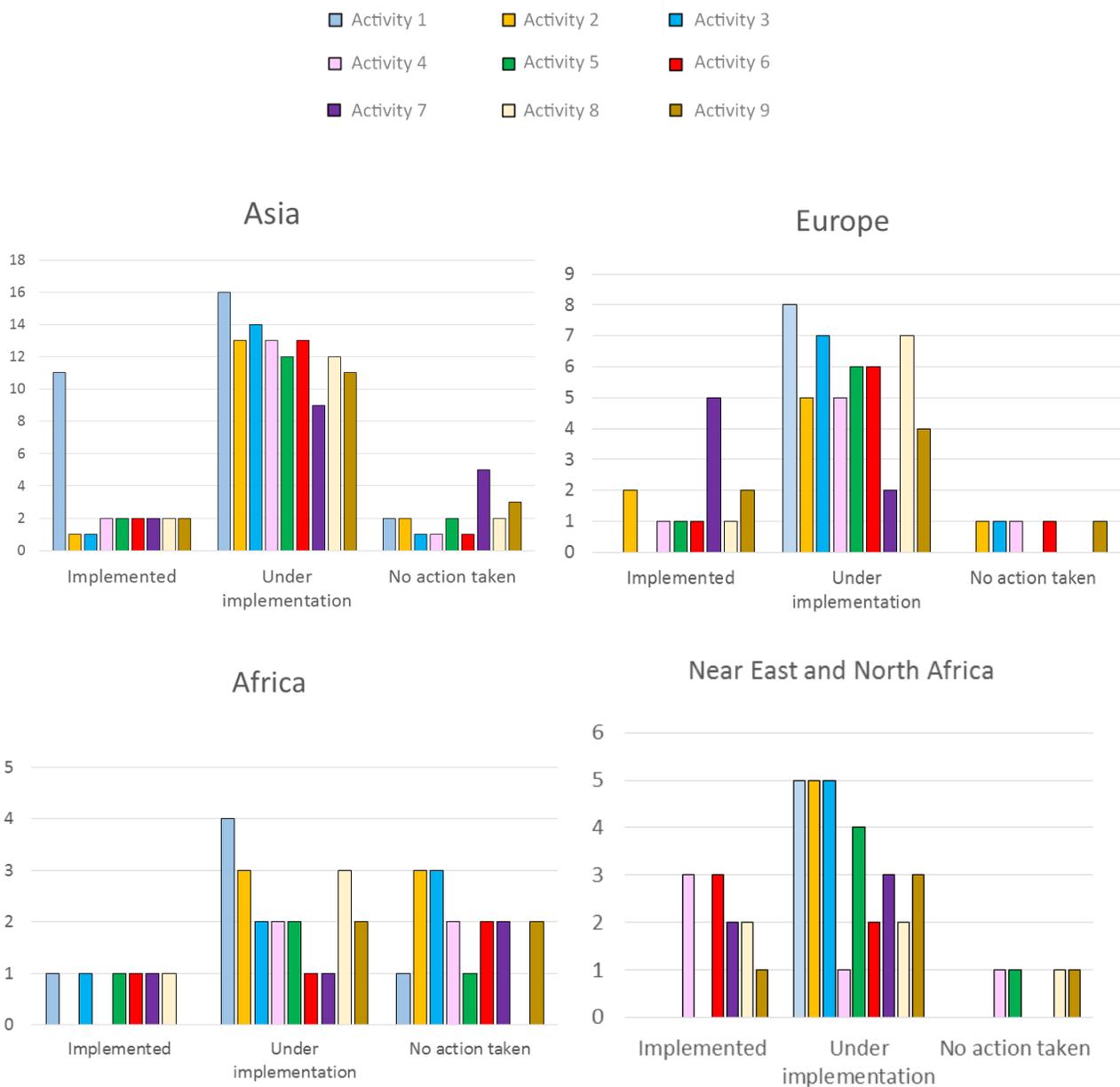
Graph 6. Status of implementation of the activities identified in the revised World Soil Charter for groups and the science community

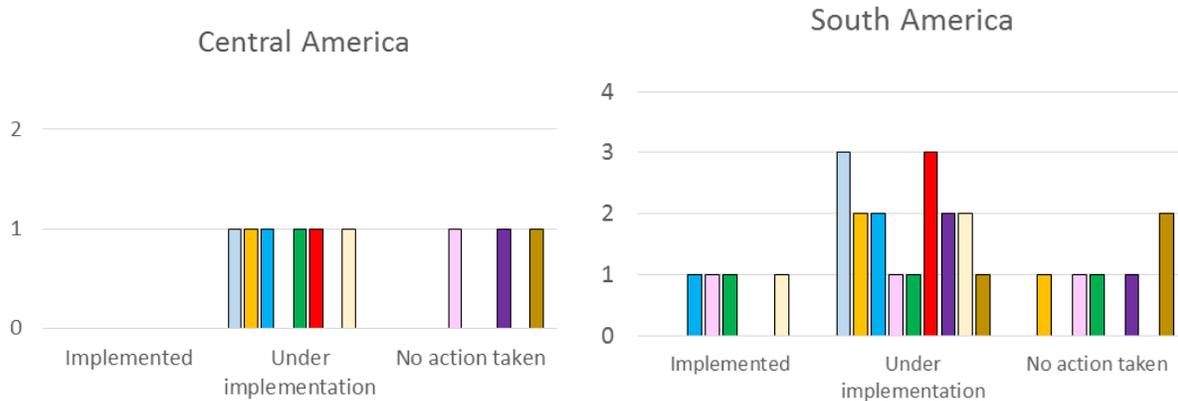
**Representatives from the government** were asked to provide information on the implementation of the following activities in their country:

- ACTIVITY 1: Promote sustainable soil management that is relevant to the range of soils present and the needs of the country;
- ACTIVITY 2: Strive to create socio-economic and institutional conditions favorable to sustainable soil management by removal of obstacles. Ways and means should be pursued to overcome obstacles to the adoption of sustainable soil management associated with land tenure, the rights of users, access to financial services and educational programmes. Reference is made to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries in the context of national food security adopted by the Committee on World Food Security in May 2012;
- ACTIVITY 3: Participate in the development of multi-level, interdisciplinary educational and capacity-building initiatives that promote the adoption of sustainable soil management by land users;
- ACTIVITY 4: Support research programmes that will provide sound scientific backing for development and implementation of sustainable soil management relevant to end-users;
- ACTIVITY 5: Incorporate the principles and practices of sustainable soil management into policy guidance and legislation at all levels of government, ideally leading to the development of a national soil policy;
- ACTIVITY 6: Explicitly consider the role of soil management practices in planning or adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and maintaining biodiversity;
- ACTIVITY 7: Establish and implement regulations to limit the accumulation of contaminants beyond established level to safeguard human health and wellbeing and facilitate remediation of contaminated soils that exceed these levels where they pose a threat to humans, plants, and animals;

- ACTIVITY 8: Develop and maintain a national soil information system and contribute to the development of a global soil information system; and
- ACTIVITY 9: Develop a national institutional framework for monitoring implementation of sustainable soil management and overall state of soil resources.

Overall, activities for this stakeholder group were under implementation (68%). Respondents also reported that 17% of the activities were implemented and that no action was taken to implement the remaining 15% of the activities. The breakdown of the responses provided by respondents in Africa, Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, Europe, the Near East and North Africa, and South America, the regions respondents for this stakeholders' category came from, is presented in Graph 7.





Graph 7. Status of implementation of the activities identified in the revised World Soil Charter for the government

**Representatives from international organizations** were asked to provide information on the implementation of the following activities in their country:

- **ACTIVITY 1:** Facilitate the compilation and dissemination of authoritative reports on the state of the global soil resources and sustainable soil management protocols;
- **ACTIVITY 2:** Coordinate efforts to develop an accurate, high-resolution global soil information system and ensure its integration with other global earth observing systems; and
- **ACTIVITY 3:** Assist governments, on request, to establish appropriate legislation, institutions, and processes to enable them to mount, implement, and monitor appropriate sustainable soil management practices

Overall, activities were under implementation (89%). Respondents also reported that the remaining 11% of the activities were implemented. The breakdown of the responses provided by respondents in Africa, Asia and South America, the regions respondents for this stakeholders' category came from, is presented in Graph 8.



Graph 8. Status of implementation of the activities identified in the revised World Soil Charter for international organizations

The survey was successful in highlighting the barriers to the implementation of the principles in the revised WSC. The availability of funds (14%), the lack of dissemination and awareness of the revised World Soil Charter (13%), the absence of policies on soil protection or inadequate policies on soil protection (12%), and the absence of a monitoring system (e.g. on the use of subsidies for soil protection, on soil status, etc.), were the top four barriers identified by the respondents. Attention was also raised on the fact that the benefits of sustainable soil management are not visible in the short term and that there is an overall weakness of the extension services at the national/local level. Barriers raising less than 5% concern were the negative attitude of those managing the soil resources towards a change in their practices, the absence of extension services at the national/local level, the mistrust in scientific findings from the academia, policy makers and public sector tools, and the perception that these policies are not workable/implementable at the field level. A note was also made on the preference of land users for their profit (economic benefits) over the application of sustainable soil management practices.

An opinion was asked on how to promote, disseminate and implement the revised WSC at the national/local level. Herewith a summary of the proposed actions to take:

- Invest in awareness raising activities (e.g. roadshows, media campaigns, promotional events, official celebrations like the World Soil Day, stakeholder consultations, etc.) to bring the topic of soil health preservation in the top priority list of national governments and land users. In this regard, the suggestion to link the revised WSC to research/development programmes and to collaborate with public services, research institutions and the private sector was made;
- Tight the collaboration with the academia for the dissemination of the revised WSC and related material;
- Improve the communication with the private sectors (cooperatives, agricultural credit banks, technical assistance agencies, etc.);
- Improve the communication with national governments and support them in updating/establishing policies on soil and in implementing the proposed actions. In this regard, the organization of high level inception meetings and the involvement of the government in large scale sustainable soil management projects was recommended. Additionally, the revised WSC and other relevant documents on soil should be presented to the head of State and relevant Ministers through preferential communication channels;
- Promote the establishment of a rewarding/sanction systems on the implementation of the proposed actions and the practice of sustainable soil management by national governments;
- Provide policy makers and land users with tools to easily implement the principles in the revised WSC (e.g. decision analysis and support tools, and better information for targeting interventions);
- Promote knowledge sharing at the regional and international level;
- Establish demonstration sites and provide practical examples on how to implement the principles in the revised WSC;
- Strengthen national extension services;
- Cooperate more with non-governmental organizations;
- Invest in capacity building (trainings to extension services, farmers and decision makers in soil);
- Enquire on community needs in relation to soil to report to policy makers for action. In this regard, the suggestion is make use of national wide complaints to trigger action;
- Implement activities on education in the Pillar 2 implementation plan;
- Make a study on the economic benefits of sustainable soil management;
- Rectify a UN declaration on soil like the Paris agreement;

- Integrate the revised WSC into policy-making, research programmes (also focusing on the long term co-benefits for society) and multi-stakeholder cooperation programmes;
- Introducing to the revised WSC to interdisciplinary meetings (food production, climate change, energy);
- Create national soil management and research centres;
- Translate principles into action monitored through indicators;
- Set targets and standards to the implementation of principles in the revised WSC
- Improve the communication with donors in order to increase the mobilization of financial resources at the national, regional and global level. Financial resources availability is considered pivotal to trigger actions on soil preservation and restoration.

Ultimately, issues related to soils that are missing or were omitted in the revised WSC were identified. It was the opinion of respondents that the revised WSC is lacking to:

- Propose actions to manage and restore salt-affected soils, which are covering a large surface area globally;
- Highlight the role of soils and soil organic carbon in climate change adaptation and mitigation. In this regard, a note was made on the importance of managing peatlands;
- Include actions for managing anthropogenic soils;
- Stress the issues of urban expansion, mining, land use change policies and land tax systems;
- Stress the importance of building capacity and investing in research and education activities;
- Include educational institutions as a stakeholder group;
- Be more specific on how to monitor the implementation of activities in the revised WSC and eventually propose deadlines for their implementation. In this regard, the need to improve integrated monitoring, have strong indicators to follow, and improve intervention on the ground was stressed;
- Highlight the importance of the principles in the revised WSC by telling how these link and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and major social challenges; and
- Include an Annex to the document in which to report successful case studies on the implementation of the proposed actions at the bioclimatic regional level;

## Conclusions

Despite the extensive advertising done, there was little participation in the survey. This was true for Eurasia and the Pacific regions especially. Ultimately, the survey revealed the need to (1) increase stakeholders' commitment towards the implementation of the revised World Soil Charter and other GSP activities, (2) increase stakeholders' awareness about the existence of the revised World Soil Charter, and (3) reinforce the tools to advocate for its implementation.

Although the different stakeholder groups reported that most of the activities proposed in the Charter were either under implementation or implemented at the national level, efforts should be made to overcome those barriers to the implementation of principles in the revised World Soil Charter. In this regard, special attention should be paid to mobilize financial resources for practicing sustainable soil management and establish or review policies on soil protection. Of critical importance is also the establishment of soil monitoring systems to (1) check on the achievement of national and international targets (e.g. policies and the Sustainable Development Goals), (2) check on the use of subsidies for soil protection, and (3) feed National Soil Information Systems.

## Annex I. Revised World Soil Charter Survey

Under the aegis of the GSP and its scientific advisory body, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, the revision of the World Soil Charter (WSC), a policy instrument adopted by the FAO Conference as far back as November 1981 was carried out. Indeed, 30 years is a long period of time in a fast evolving world. Therefore, it was particularly opportune to update the vision and guiding principles as spelled out in the original WSC, especially with respect to new issues that emerged or were exacerbated during the last decades, like soil pollution and its consequences for the environment, climate change adaptation and mitigation and urban sprawl impacts on soil availability and functions. The reformulation process involved extensive consultations and culminated in the unanimous endorsement of the revised World Soil Charter by the FAO Conference at its 39th session in June 2015, the International Year of Soils.

The Charter contains a number of key principles and general guidelines for the benefit of major stakeholder groups so as to chart the required policy measures and action programmes to guarantee sustainable management of soils in all regions and countries. This survey aims to assess activities by and within GSP partners in support of the principles of the revised World Soil Charter.

The outcomes of the survey will be presented to the 6th GSP Plenary Assembly (June 2018) and will be used to assess the impact of GSP initiatives and plan future activities. The survey is composed of three sections and will not take more than 10 minutes to complete.

The revised World Soil Charter document is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/e60df30b-0269-4247-a15f-db564161fee0/>

### \* Required

1. Email address \*
2. Name \*
3. Surname

4. Country \*
5. Involvement in the work of the GSP \*  
*Mark only one oval.*

- GSP partner institution
- Focal point to GSP
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. How did you hear about this survey? \*  
*Mark only one oval.*

- I received an email
- I found it on the internet
- Networking (friends/colleagues)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Were you familiar with the World Soil Charter (1981)? \*  
*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

8. Are you familiar with the revised World Soil Charter (2015)? \*  
*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

9. If you are familiar with the World Soil Charter, please specify how: \_\_\_\_\_

**Even if you are not familiar with the revised World Soil Charter, please answer the following questions addressing the actions undertaken to promote Sustainable Soil Management**

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10. Please select the stakeholder group you represent: \*  
Mark only one oval.

- Individual and private sector      *Skip to question 11.*
- Groups and science community      *Skip to question 12.*
- Governments      *Skip to question 13.*
- International organization      *Skip to question 14.*

### 11. Individual and private sector

Please assess activities of individuals and the private sector in support of the principles of the revised World Soil Charter

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Implemented	Under implementation	No action taken
ACTIVITY 1: All individuals using or managing soil must act as stewards of the soil to ensure that this essential natural resource is managed sustainably to safeguard it for future generations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 2: Undertake sustainable soil management in the production of goods and services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Skip to question 15.*

### 12. Groups and science community

Please assess activities of Groups and science community in support of the principles of the revised World Soil Charter

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Implemented	Under implementation	No action taken
ACTIVITY 1: Disseminate information and knowledge on soils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 2: Emphasize the importance of sustainable soil management to avoid impairing key soil functions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Skip to question 15.*

### 13. Governments

Please assess activities of governments in support of the principles of the revised World Soil Charter.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Implemented	Under implementation	No action taken
ACTIVITY 1: Promote sustainable soil management that is relevant to the range of soils present and the needs of the country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 2: Strive to create socio-economic and institutional conditions favorable to sustainable soil management by removal of obstacles. Ways and means should be pursued to overcome obstacles to the adoption of sustainable soil management associated with land tenure, the rights of users, access to financial services and educational programmes. Reference is made to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries in the context of national food security adopted by the Committee on World Food Security in May 2012	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 3: Participate in the development of multi-level, interdisciplinary educational and capacity-building initiatives that promote the adoption of sustainable soil management by land users	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 4: Support research programmes that will provide sound scientific backing for development and implementation of sustainable soil management relevant to end-users	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 5: Incorporate the principles and practices of sustainable soil management into policy guidance and legislation at all levels of government, ideally leading to the development of a national soil policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 6: Explicitly consider the role of soil management practices in planning or adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and maintaining biodiversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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ACTIVITY 7: Establish and implement regulations to limit the accumulation of contaminants beyond established level to safeguard human health and wellbeing and facilitate remediation of contaminated soils that exceed these levels where they pose a threat to humans, plants, and animals

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ACTIVITY 8: Develop and maintain a national soil information system and contribute to the development of a global soil information system

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ACTIVITY 9: Develop a national institutional framework for monitoring implementation of sustainable soil management and overall state of soil resources

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*Skip to question 15*

## 14. International Organizations

Please assess activities of International Organizations in support of the principles of the revised World Soil Charter

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Implemented	Under implementation	No action taken
ACTIVITY 1: Facilitate the compilation and dissemination of authoritative reports on the state of the global soil resources and sustainable soil management protocols	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 2: Coordinate efforts to develop an accurate, high resolution global soil information system and ensure its integration with other global earth observing systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTIVITY 3: Assist governments, on request, to establish appropriate legislation, institutions, and processes to enable them to mount, implement, and monitor appropriate sustainable soil management practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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*Skip to question 15.*

15. What are the main barriers to the implementation of the principles in the revised World Soil Charter? (Tick all that apply) \*  
*Check all that apply.*

- Lack of dissemination and awareness of the revised World Soil Charter
- The benefits of sustainable soil management are not visible in the short term
- Availability of funds
- Negative attitude of those managing the soil resource towards a change in their practices
- Absence of policies on soil protection or inadequate policies on soil protection
- Absence of a monitoring system (e.g. on the use of subsidies for soil protection, on soil status, etc.)
- Absence of extension services at the national/local level
- Weakness of extension services at the national/local level
- Mistrust in scientific findings from academia
- Mistrust in policy makers
- Mistrust in public sector tools
- These policies are not workable/implementable at the field level
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

16. How can the revised WSC be promoted, disseminated and implemented (in your country), while taking into account any existing policies? \* \_\_\_\_\_

17. Are there any issues related to soils that are missing or were omitted in the revised WSC? If so, please elaborate. \* \_\_\_\_\_

18. Please use this space to write any further comments that you have on the revised WSC and/or on its implementation: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information on the Global Soil Partnership, please visit <http://www.fao.org/global-soilpartnership/about/why-the-partnership/en/>

Please address your questions to [GSP-Secretariat@fao.org](mailto:GSP-Secretariat@fao.org)

The GSP Secretariat is very grateful for the time you spend filling up this important survey.