

**NENA-V/19/Report**



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**



# **Report of the Fifth Near East and North Africa Soil Partnership Plenary Meeting**

**Cairo, Egypt, 1-2 April 2019**

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**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**Cairo, 2019**

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## 1. Opening of the meeting

The fifth Plenary Meeting of the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Soil Partnership was held in Cairo, Egypt on 1-2 April 2019. The meeting was opened by Ms. Iman Sahib Salman (Chair of the NENA Soil Partnership) and Mr. Abdessalam Ould Ahmed (Assistant Director General, FAO-RNE). In order to promote the partnership within the region and highlight the multi-faced role of soil in the ecosystem, the meeting was organized as part of the Land and Water Days 2019.

During the opening, the achievements of the partnership since their last meeting were recalled. Since June 2018, (i) national focal points to the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) were updated, (ii) regional working groups for the five GSP Pillars of Action were formed, (iii) the whole governance of the Partnership was revised; and (iv) 2018-2019 national and regional work plans were developed. Additionally, “The multi-faced role of soil in the Near East and North Africa” was launched at the Land and Water Days 2019. This publication, represents the first of a series of regional policy briefs to be produced and launched under the NENA Soil Partnership.

Thus, the objectives of the Fifth NENA Soil Partnership Plenary Meeting were recalled: (i) to consolidate and enlarge the NENA Soil Partnership, (ii) to review the NENA Soil Partnership work plan, (iii) to organize activities on the establishment of National Soil Information Systems; and (iv) to agree on the launch of the Regional Soil Laboratory Network (RESOLAN) for NENA.

Ultimately, the workshop agenda was approved with a few amendments to allow some participants to present in other sessions at the Land and Water Days 2019.

## 2. GSP Developments of regional interest

Ms. Lucrezia Caon (GSP Secretariat, FAO) introduced participants to the activities the Global Soil Partnership will be promoting in the region throughout the year 2019.

Under **Pillar 1**, the GSP will put great effort to the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) at the national level. In this regard, countries were invited to implement the guidelines by organizing national or regional multi-stakeholder workshops following the example of Iran and the Maghreb region. Suggestions on other ways to implement the guidelines were collected. The VGSSM could be implemented by:

- Sharing experience through forums and platforms or by organizing dedicated events;
- Develop a strategy to ensure the sustainability of projects once these are completed. In this regard, the results of successfully implemented projects should be extended and the results of failing projects should be exploited (link to the database under development in Pillar 3);
- Review the management of projects, which should include a component on knowledge transfer to farmers;
- Mainstream SSM in the national plans (link to the need for countries to receive more support in achieving their Nationally Determined Contributions – NDCs); and
- Invest more in raising the awareness of policy makers on soil especially. In this regard, the NENA Soil Partnership should keep on publishing policy briefs of 2-4 pages maximum. However, the first policy brief of the year should be more consistent so be launched as an FAO publication. Each

policy brief should contain key messages and scenarios, which are easier for policy makers to understand. Mr. Muhammad Manhal Alzoubi (NENA Chair for Pillar 2) volunteered to take the leadership in the production of these publications. Still, the need to include a statement on soil in the Land and Water Days 2019 Declaration was stressed. Mr. Bahram Taheri (Iran), Mr. Abdelmagid Ali Elmobarak (Sudan), Mr. Rachid Moussadek (Morocco) and Mr. Saud Al Farsi (Oman) volunteered to draft the statement, which would be brought to the attention of the Ministries in the Land and Water Days by their advisors attending the NENA Soil Partnership meeting.

Building on the definitions in the “Protocol for the assessment of Sustainable Soil Management”, which will be presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> GSP Plenary Assembly (June 2019) for endorsement, the GSP will also start developing integrated regional maps of successful SSM case studies. The maps aim at scaling up successful case studies so as to promote the practice of SSM. All countries are invited to identify case studies to feed the map and to communicate them to Ms. Zineb Bazza (GSP Chair for Pillar 1).

Ms. Caon recalled that the GSP Secretariat launched an International Network of Black Soils (INBS) for all those countries having soil:

- High organic carbon content as per the follow:
  - More than 1.2% for cold and temperate
  - More than 0.6% for tropical and subtropical regions
- Dark to black coloured surface horizons
- Thickness of dark to black soil surface horizons not less than 25 cm

With the following complementary characteristics:

- A high base saturation of more than 50%
- Strong aggregate stability
- High level of nutrient content

The objectives of the network and its work plan are finalized in September 2018 and made available in the [Harbin Declaration](#). All countries interested in joining the network can send an email to Mr. Yuxin Tong at [Yuxin.tong@fao.org](mailto:Yuxin.tong@fao.org). At present, only Iraq and Syria joined the network. In 2019, countries joining the INBS should:

- Participate in training sessions on mapping for the purpose of producing the Black Soil Distribution map. To be launched in October 2019 at the 2<sup>nd</sup> INBS workshop
- Participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> INBS workshop where the writing of the report on the Status of Black Soils will be discussed. The report is to be launched in December 2019.

NENA countries raised the issue of black soil availability in the region and highlighted the need to establish an international network to deal with specific soil issues in drylands. Mr. Mahmoud Hasan Alfraihah (national focal point for Jordan) volunteered to present this proposal to the 7<sup>th</sup> GSP Plenary Assembly. The identification of the area of work of the network should be based on a preliminary assessment of the dominant soil type in NENA.

Under **Pillar 2**, Ms. Caon updated participants on the development of the Global Soil Doctors Programme. In this regard, countries were invited to assist the Secretariat in developing regionally specific educational material and the soil testing kit (STK) for farmers to use when implementing the programme. Still,

countries could further assist implementing the programme by (1) training of Soil Doctors' trainers, (2) training countries in developing their own reagents for the STK, and (3) provide overall support as needed. The suggestion to develop a set of soil testing kit aimed at considering different soil specificities was taken.

Another activity to be promoted by the GSP Secretariat in 2019 is SoiLex, an online platform aiming to:

- Review the national soil legislation of each United Nations state members;
- Consolidate the information about soil management policies collected;
- Elaborate a conceptual model of legal and thematic elements for soil management and conservation;
- Publicize the profile information at the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) website;
- Address policymakers to adopt measures to preserve and enhance soil conditions.

The first draft of SoiLex will be circulated by the end of April 2019. National focal points are kindly asked to review the database and update it as needed. As a follow up to the establishment of the platform, Ms. Caon invited participants to spread the voice on the existence of this tool and its use for promoting the endorsement/review of soil related national legal frameworks.

In conclusion, participants were reminded about and invited to apply for the Glinka World Soil Prize and the World Soil Day Award.

Under **Pillar 3**, reference was made to the establishment of a global soil research platform (ReSoil) to allow all significant research and development projects and initiatives to be identified and foster future cooperation once information is shared and easily accessible. This activity should give impetus to the development of cooperation and stimulate the financing of applied soil research. All countries were invited to assist the GSP Secretariat in developing the platform and to start compiling data to feed it. Linking to the suggestions made on Pillar 1, the platform should also include information and results from failing projects. All information should allow to be filtered by region and country.

Linking to the outcomes of the Global Symposium on Soil Pollution, participants were invited to contribute to the assessment of the global status and regional trends of soil pollution. This assessment will help to better understand the problem of soil pollution on a global scale and identify the main knowledge and legal gaps. In order to collect national inputs on soil pollution, national focal points were asked to complete an online survey to be circulated by Ms. Natalia Rodriguez (GSP Secretariat). Deadline for the completion of this assignment: May 2019. Questionnaire results and the actions that should be taken at the national and regional level will be discussed at regional workshops to be organized in September/October 2019. Ultimately, the assessment will be presented at UNEA5 in March 2021. First draft to be ready by the beginning of 2020.

GSP activities on **Pillar 4** will be focusing on the establishment of National and Regional Soil Information Systems and mapping. After reporting the results of the Country Soil Information Survey, Ms. Caon informed on the procedure to establish National Soil Information Systems:

1. Overcome fragmentation of national data. All participants were asked to complete the "Overcoming data fragmentation" survey available in Annex 3
2. Ask all data holders identified at point 1 to complete the Country Soil Information Survey
3. Make a country specific analysis:
  - a. What are the barriers, limitations, gaps, etc. to data exchange?

- b. Study how to bring those data together and ultimately get these institutions to work together?
4. Harmonize national databases (link to GLOSOLAN and RESOLAN-NENA)
5. Produce websites, maps, etc. Only at this stage it is possible to talk about National Soil Information Systems

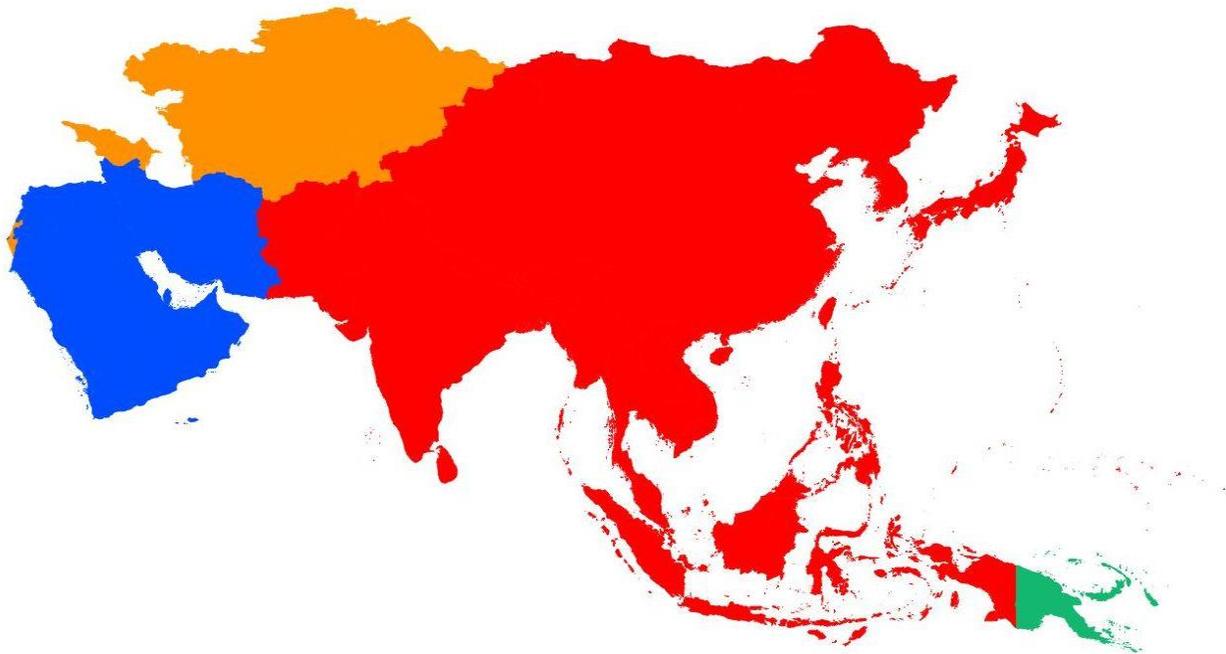
National databases will be hosted by each country. The GSP Secretariat will provide countries with rules, procedures, tools, etc. In this regard, the need for countries to be more active in the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII), the body developing technical documents on Pillar 4, was stressed. Three levels of participation are planned: *ad hoc* implementation, reference implementation, and support implementation. Mr. Yusuf Yigini ([Yusuf.yigini@fao.org](mailto:Yusuf.yigini@fao.org)) from the GSP Secretariat will share technical documents on the establishment of the Soil Information Systems to guide and assist countries in the process by the end of 2019.

Activities on mapping are summarized in Table 1. All countries were invited to start identifying national experts to attend the trainings (May 2019) and develop the different maps. Additionally, countries were invited to keep on working on the update of their soil organic carbon maps. In this regard, the updated version of the GSOC map will be published in December 2019.

Table 1. GSP mapping activities in 2019

Type of map	Material	To be launched in
Erosion	Technical spec. ready by the end of March Concept Note under development	December 2019
Salinity	Concept Note ready Technical spec. under development	December 2019
OC sequestration potential	Technical spec. and Concept Note ready	December 2019
Black Soils distribution	Concept Note and strategy document for mapping ready	October 2019

A call for laboratories to contribute to the writing of the Soil Atlas of Asia, which comprehend part of the NENA region (see Figure 1), was made. The GSP Secretariat will shortly send an email asking national focal points to revise the Table of Content of the Atlas and to provide data, information, pictures and text as needed. Substantial contributors will be invited to join Editorial Board's meetings.



*Figure 1. Geographic coverage of the Soil Atlas of Asia. The area in blue refers to the surface area of pertinence of the NENA Soil Partnership. The area in orange refers to the Eurasian Soil Partnership. The area in red refers to the Asian Soil Partnership, and the area in green refers to the Pacific Soil Partnership.*

For information, a portal (SoilSTAT) aimed at supporting countries in monitoring and reporting is under development. This will deal with indicators and will link to the Global Soil Information System (GLOSIS). The concept note of SoilSTAT will be presented to the 7<sup>th</sup> GSP Plenary Assembly for endorsement. The GSP Secretariat will establish a country reporting procedure. The first indicators countries will be asked to work on (2019-2020) are those on soil erosion by water and wind, soil organic matter decline and soil salinization. [Link to ongoing mapping activities.](#)

The working areas for **Pillar 5** were recalled: (1) soil profiles, (2) soil classification, (3) soil mapping, (4) soil analysis, (5) data exchange, and (6) indicators and evaluation. The GSP Secretariat currently took action on points 4 and 5 with the establishment of the Global Soil Laboratory Network (GLOSOLAN) and the development of the SoilML exchange standard. However, the need to have more active regional Pillar 5 working group to coordinate and implement global and regional actions was highlighted. In the framework of implementing GLOSOLAN activities, actions to establish the RESOLAN-NENA should be taken. Mr. Mahmoud Hasan Alfraihah expressed the availability of Jordan to host the launch meeting of the network at the end of June 2019. Other suitable venues were Iran and Lebanon. Egypt and Syria volunteered to host the second RESOLAN-NENA meeting. When looking at the possibility to link RESOLAN-NENA to other existing soil laboratory networks (if any), the proposal to consult with the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA).

### 3. NENA implementation strategy

Ms. Caon invited Pillar's Chairs to report on the experience in their role and to highlight needs for and future activities in their Pillar.

- **Pillar 1:** Ms. Rafla Attia (Tunisia) asked national focal points to provide information on the status of soil degradation in their country since these information were scarce in "The multi-faced role of soil in the Near East and North Africa Soil Partnership". A survey to collect the needed information will be circulated. In order for Pillar 1 to work well, a list of tools and methodologies for the assessment of SSM practices should be compiled and a database on national SSM strategies should be developed.
- **Pillar 2:** Mr. Muhammad Manhal Alzoubi (Syria) asked countries for inputs to feed the NENA Soil Partnership Facebook page, which existence should be advertised. National events, projects and problems on soil would fit the purpose. Mr. Alzoubi also asked for help translating Facebook posts and other NENA Soil Partnership material in French. Mr. Moussadek volunteered to help with the French translation.
- **Pillar 3:** Mr. Bahram Taheri (Iran) invited national focal points and the working group for Pillars 2 and 3 to review the concept note on EduSoil keeping into consideration its purpose and final use. A note was made on the possibility to link EduSoil to GLOSOLAN. Once ready, these experts should also be invited to review the concept note for ReSoil.
- **Pillar 4:** Mr. Rachid Moussadek (Morocco) stressed the need for this pillar to be coordinated at the global level. In order to increase efficiency, a database of available maps and training needs should be created at first.
- **Pillar 5:** Mr. Imad Ghanma (Palestine) also stressed the need for this pillar to be coordinated at the global level. Indeed, the efforts he did to start harmonizing the soil classification system of NENA countries was held back because other regions did not take action on this yet. Thus, the NENA region should focus on GLOSOLAN at present. Further harmonization activities will be launched as appropriate.

Ms. Caon raised the issue of (1) having regional experts taking the leadership on the implementation of specific partnership's activities but then missing the delivery, and (2) having poorly established and not active regional working groups per each of the five GSP Pillars of Action. In order to address these issues, each national focal point committed to revise their representative(s) in each working group and to appoint one person to serve in INSII. In this context, Ms. Caon reminded participants that INSII is the strategic decision making body of Pillar 4. INSII is where decisions on mapping, information systems, indicators, etc. are made, and where related technical documents are produced. In this regard, it is important for each country to be represented in it so to have a word in global decision making.

Ultimately, Pillar's Chairs will make sure to involve the regional working groups when making regional decisions and representing the region at global discussions and meetings. Although participants made a commitment to respect deadlines when taking an assignment, they raised the issue of not being sufficiently considered in their role of national focal point in their country. To overcome this problem, the GSP Secretariat and Ms. Salman will work on raising the awareness of each country's government on the existence of the GSP and the role of its national focal points. They will operate through the Permanent Representation of Iraq to the FAO, who will be asked to report on this at the regular meetings of the NENA

countries in Rome. It is the hope of the partnership that this exercise will also help national governments to make an official commitment to implement GSP activities.

At the purpose of facilitating regional discussions, a WhatsApp group was established and the decision to have Pillar's Chairs to regularly talk on Skype was made.

#### 4. Resource mobilization

Participants decided to create a task-force of people experienced in fund raising to write co-benefit project proposals linking soils to water and climate issues. Considering the large amount of financial resources currently invested on the water and climate change topics, members of the task-force should have attended at least one UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties (COP) or being able to get the support of any colleague that have attended such a meeting. Mr. Bahram Taheri (Iran) was appointed as leader of the task-force. Other members are: Mr. Rachid Moussadek (Morocco) and Mr. Muhammad Manhal Alzoubi (Syria). Ms. Caon will support the task-force on behalf of the GSP Secretariat, FAO.

Acknowledging the interest of FAO-RNE on soil, the task-force will be assigned to write a regional TCP at first. Thereafter, the possibility to mobilize financial resources for the region through other donors like the European Commission (link to the availability of funds for H2020 projects) will be explored.

#### 5. Time and venue of the next NENA meeting

The venue and time of the Sixth NENA Soil Partnership Plenary Meeting will be decided later on during the year according to the Partnership's workload and need for meeting.

## Annex 1: Agenda

<b>1 APRIL</b>	
14:30 – 14:45	<i>Welcome and Opening Remarks</i> <b>MR. ABDESSALAM OULD AHMED</b> , Assistant Director General, FAO-RNE <b>Ms. IMAN SAHIB SALMAN</b> , NENA Chair
14:45 – 14:50	<i>Approval of the agenda and objectives of the meeting</i> <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON</b> , GSP Secretariat
14:50 – 15:10	<i>Item 1. GSP developments of regional interest</i> <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON</b> , GSP Secretariat

### National Soil Information Systems

15:10 – 15:30	<i>Item 2. Introduction to the Global Soil Information System (GLOSIS) and the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII)</i> <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON</b> , FAO
15:30 – 15:50	<i>Item 3. The National Soil Information System of Sudan</i> <b>MR. ABDELMAGID ALI ELMOBARAK</b> , Sudan
15:50 – 16:00	<i>Item 4. Strategy development on the establishment of National Soil Information Systems in NENA</i> Moderator: <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON</b> , FAO
16:00 – 16:30	<i>Coffee/tea break</i>
16:30 – 17:00	<i>Item 4. Strategy development on the establishment of National Soil Information Systems in NENA continuation</i>

## Regional Soil Laboratory Network for NENA

17:00 – 17:20	Item 5. Introduction to the Global Soil Laboratory Network (GLOSOLAN) <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON, FAO</b>
17:20 – 18:00	Item 6. Establishment of the Regional Soil Laboratory Network for NENA Moderator: <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON, FAO</b>
18:00	Group picture

## 2 APRIL

### The Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM)

14:30 – 14:50	Item 7. Introduction to the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON, FAO</b>
14:50 – 15:10	Item 8. The implementation of the VGSSM in the Maghreb region <b>Ms. ATTIA RAFLA, Tunisia</b>
15:10 – 15:30	Item 9. The implementation of the VGSSM in the Islamic Republic of Iran <b>MR. BAHRAM TAHERI, Iran</b>
15:30 – 16:00	Q&A. Set up of other national workshops Moderator: <b>Ms. LUCREZIA CAON, FAO</b>
16:00 – 16:30	Coffee/tea break

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## Annex 2: List of Participants

Mr. Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director General, FAO-RNE

Ms. Lucrezia Caon, GSP Secretariat, FAO

Mr. Mohamed Abdel Monem, FAO-RNE

Ms. Fatma El Zahraa, FAO Egypt

Mr. Medjahed Saddek, National Institute of Soil, Irrigation and Drainage, Algeria

Mr. Yousif Kotb Al Ghonemy Mohammed, Soil, Water and Environment Research Institute, Egypt

Mr. Bahram Taheri, Ministry of Jihad-e-agriculture (MOJA), Iran

Mr. Alireza Esmaeili Falak, Ministry of Agriculture, Iran

Ms. Iman Sahib Salman, Soil and Water Management Department, Iraq

Mr. Mahmoud Hasan Alfraihat, Ministry of Agriculture, Jordan

Mr. Rachid Moussadek, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Morocco

Mr. Saud Ali Al-Farsi, Ministry of Agriculture, Oman

Mr. Imad Ghanma, Ministry of Agriculture, Palestine

Mr. Muhammad Manhal Alzoubi, General Commission for Scientific Agriculture Research, Syria

Mme. Leila Ben Daya, Direction Générale de l'Aménagement et de la Conservation des Terres Agricoles, Tunisia

Mme. Rafla Attia, Direction Générale de l'Aménagement et de la Conservation des Terres Agricoles, Tunisia

Mr. Mohammed Hezam Al-Mashreki, Agricultural Research and Extension Authority, Yemen

Mr. Abdelmagid Ali Elmobarak, Agricultural Research Corporation, Sudan

Annex 3. “Overcoming data fragmentation” survey

**National Soil Information System**

**- Overcoming data fragmentation –**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list as many national data holder as you are aware of, specifying if you have any contact with them or not. Please include information on the institution you work for if this is also a data holder or provider.

Name of the data holder	Do you know anyone working there? YES/NO	Are they contributing to your database already? YES/NO	Notes, please include information on the type of data held by the data holder