

Fifth meeting of the Asian Soil Partnership

Opening of the meeting by Mr. Tomio Shichiri, FAO Representative for India

New Delhi, 26 February 2019

Dr. S.K. Chaudhari, Assistant Director General, Natural Resource Management, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi

Dr. K. Alagusundaram, Deputy Director General (NRM), Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi

Mr. Rapibhat Chandarasrivongs, Assistant Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and **acting Chair of the Asian Soil Partnership**

Distinguished participants from 16 countries in Asia

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to welcome you to the Fifth Asian Soil Partnership workshop, which is kindly hosted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. I wish to express our special gratitude to each of you who are attending this workshop, given recognition to the importance of soil resources and join in our important efforts and undertakings, despite of busy schedule in your own country.

In 2018, Asian countries put great effort to implement the activities agreed upon at the fourth Asian Soil Partnership meeting, which I recall taking place in May 2018 in Beijing, China. Special attention was paid at:

- Harmonizing regional soil laboratory analysis through the Regional Soil Laboratory Network for Asia (SEALNET), which 2nd meeting was also hosted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research in November 2018;
- Second, implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) at the national level. Allow me to acknowledge the government of Thailand on this. Indeed, Thailand was the first country in Asia to organize and self-finance a national multi-stakeholder workshop on the implementation of the VGSSM. This led to the development of four project proposal baselines. It is the hope of the FAO to have more countries investing on this activity, which the GSP is happy to assist organizing.
- And Third but not last, the establishment of the Center of Excellence on Soil Research in Asia (CESRA), which, as you can see from the agenda, is the core topic of discussion at this meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the World Soil Day 2018, CESRA was officially launched to support all ASP member countries in achieving Sustainable Soil Management (SSM). The center is located in Nakhton Ratchasima's Pak Chong district, Thailand, and it is ready to become operative. By launching research and capacity building

programmes, and by establishing the Asian Soil Information System for the free exchange of soil data and information, CESRA will contribute to address key ASP priorities:

1. promoting sustainable soil management (SSM) practices at all levels and in all landuse types,
2. restoring/rehabilitating degraded soils with focus on soil erosion, nutrient imbalance, soil acidification, soil salinity and alkalinity, soil pollution, and loss of organic carbon, and
3. enhancing soil information collection, sharing and transferring by using state of the art methods of digital soil mapping and new technology, and by advocating for having national soil information systems.
4. providing soil information to all those with an interest in the sustainable use of soil and land resources,
5. training new generations of experts in soil science and land management,

The center will also serve to interact with regional soil science societies and other mechanisms established under various conventions, to provide guidance for policy and decision-making, and to catalyze cooperation within the region.

The activities of CESRA will be in line with the principles included in the revised World Soil Charter and the Voluntary Guidelines of Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM), the objectives of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), the Sustainable Development Goals, and other global targets related to the sustainable management of soils. In this context, the GSP will provide CESRA with their technical support and guidance, facilitate the establishment of South-South cooperation agreements and promote technical and scientific cooperation between Asia and the rest of the world. Soil scientists from the region will be able to meet at CESRA in order to share their latest knowledge and experience and contribute to research and development, foster technical cooperation, build their capacities on SSM and much more.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thailand provided the facilities and the basic resources to make of CESRA a milestone. However, it is the responsibility of all Asian countries to define the activities the center will perform. It is up to you all to turn the potential of the center into a reality.

I wish you all for a productive meeting.

Thank you