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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Fourth session
Rome, 23-25 May 2016
Report on Regional Soil Partnerships

Executive Summary

- The establishment of effective Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) is key to the achievement of the GSP mandate and objectives as specified in its Terms of Reference. To date, all regions and in some cases sub-regions, have established RSPs, while a few of these still require a firmer consolidation phase. In effect, the willingness of all the concerned partners to express formal engagement and commit sufficient resources is a pre-requisite to a successful RSP.
- The Secretariat has continued to make use of all available funds to support the establishment of viable RSPs (including steering committees and working groups as appropriate) and the development of Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs).
- When well formulated RIPs are in place, including identification of the main priorities in the region and concrete activities to promote sustainable soil management and reverse soil degradation, it is imperative to initiate execution of these RIPs. This requires adequate resources (in-kind and financial) to be provided, while it is clear that some regions need more external support than others.
- For ease of understanding, the document includes a recapitulative table on the status of RIPs in all geographical areas covered by RSPs.
- While the present document provides some information in telegraphic form, the Chairpersons of, or representatives from the various RSPs are to provide oral reports on major achievements, especially with regard to RIPs and the way forward.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
 - renew its call to all partners to actively participate in, and support the RSPs, in particular empowering these RSPs to finalize and execute Regional Implementation Plans.

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I. Background

1. Section 5.4 of the GSP Terms of Reference stipulates that: “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. Hence, the Secretariat has given due priority to assisting partners in establishing RSPs. To date, all regions have established RSPs, while some may need further consolidation. The GSP Focal Points appointed in many countries have proved to be very instrumental to promoting these regional cooperation processes.

3. 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.

II. Overall progress report

4. A summary of recent (or planned) achievements in the geographical areas covered by RSPs is provided below.

A. African Soil Partnership (AfSP)

5. The main actions undertaken (and planned) by the AfSP are:

- After a very inclusive process, the African RIP was finalized and the AfSP is now promoting its execution.
- AfSP focal persons contributed articles on soil management on a country basis to the 2015 special edition of Nature and Faune - an FAO Africa Regional Office Journal.
- National Soil Science Societies of countries participating in the AfSP organized seminars, workshops and conferences in connection with celebrations of the International Year of Soils and the 2015 World Soil Day.
- A side event on follow-up to the 2006 Abuja declaration on fertilizers was organized under the aegis of the 29th Session of the FAO African Regional Conference (Abidjan - April 2016). The Chairperson of the AfSP, Prof. Chude, facilitated this high level discussion. Participants agreed to organize a High-level conference to strengthen the follow-up process and broaden its scope to encompass sustainable soil management.
- Capacity development on digital soil mapping was successfully implemented and benefited representatives from 43 African countries to make use of this highly technical approach.
- AfSP will organize a meeting during the 7th International Conference of the African Soil Science Society to be held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (29 May-7 June 2016), which will receive a presentation on the AfSP and the RIP.
- In country sensitization workshops on the AfSP and the RIP are to be organized for the benefit of policy makers, development partners and Civil Society Organizations, with a view to mainstreaming AfSP activities into country programmes for funding.
- Focal points are to support national soil science societies and pertinent government agencies in the celebration of the 2016 World Soil Day.
- A training session on the Soil Doctors programme is scheduled to take place in 2016.

B. Asian Soil Partnership (ASP)

6. The main achievements of the ASP are:
- While the ASP Chair is still to be nominated, the GSP Secretariat with support from the FAO office for Asia and the Pacific is facilitating some activities in the region.
 - The RIP is under development, being facilitated by the Secretariat through an inclusive approach.
 - Members of the ASP have been very active in organizing events and other activities in connection with the International Year of Soils and World Soil Day 2015.
 - Together with SEALNET (South-East Asia Laboratory NETwork) a workshop on harmonization of soil measurements was organized in December 2015. Four workshop sessions are planned for 2016 which are very important for implementation under Pillar5.

C. European Soil Partnership (ESP)

7. The main achievements of the ESP are:
- The ESP organized its third workshop in March 2016 (report available here: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bl121e.pdf>) during which a new chair, steering committee and secretariat were appointed. Terms of Reference of this partnership were also developed.
 - ESP members have actively contributed to a number of activities during the IYS implementation. The European Network on Soil Awareness organized an important event during the ExpoMilano 2015 which gave visibility to soils.
 - The main activity in 2016 is the development of the RIP. A meeting of the steering committee is planned in May immediately after the GSP Plenary Assembly.

D. Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP)

8. The main actions connected to the EASP are:
- A second Plenary meeting was held at the International Agricultural Research and Training Center (IARTC), Izmir on 15-18 June 2015, with prime focus on implementation of the RIP (e.g. road map, next steps in the RIP process and additional actions required).
 - A third Plenary meeting was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic (29 February-2 March 2016). The barriers to wider adoption of SSM practices by Eurasian countries were discussed and subsequently included in a Bishkek Communiqué. A 2016-2017 workplan was also adopted and included in this Communiqué.
 - Execution of the workplan is underway, which includes the following activities: a call for small research grants on soil salinity; two capacity building workshops on soil salinity (Kharkiv, Ukraine) and soil information management (Almaty, Kazakhstan) respectively; establishment of the EaSP portal; publishing of the book “Land resources and food security of Central Asia and South Caucasus”; establishment of the Eurasian Soil Information System and celebrations of the World Soil Day 2016.

E. Near East and North Africa Soil Partnership (NENASP)

9. The main actions undertaken by the NENASP are:
- Finalization of the RIP by national focal points.
 - A steering committee and provisional secretary was nominated for the purpose of following up on various NENA activities on soil management.
 - Chairpersons and workgroups were assigned in relation to each GSP pillar.

- A draft NENA Soil Information System was established, containing soil legacy data from the following countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Syria.
- Training on Digital Soil Mapping implemented in December 2015 with 22 experts from 15 countries.
- Execution of the RIP is planned, depending on availability of resources. The FAO Office in the Near East will support training activities on soil information and sustainable soil management and the further development of the NENA system.

F. South America Soil Partnership (SSP)

10. The main achievements of the SASP are:

- The RIP was finalized with a very inclusive process and was endorsed during the second meeting of the SSP (report available here: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bl205s.pdf>) held under the aegis of an international conference organized by Uruguay (October 2015). During this meeting nominations were made of pillar chairs; and a working group was established for developing the terms of reference of the partnership;
- The next meeting of the SSP will take place during the Latin-American Soil Congress (Quito, Ecuador, 2016).
- SSP members organized various activities during the International Year of Soils.
- Together with the Central American Soil Partnership a workshop on soil legal and institutional frameworks will be organized in Colombia (June 2016).
- Training course on digital soil mapping will also be organized during the Latin-American soil congress.
- The Latin American Soil Information System (SISLAC) will be strengthened (including its transfer to the FAO office in Chile) and member countries will be invited to ensure the release of the data accordingly.

G. Central America, Caribbean and Mexico Soil Partnership

11. The main achievements are (including actions connected with the IYS and World Soil Day):

- A workshop held in Havana in June 2015, with the participation of focal points from 17 countries of the sub-region, as well as NGOs and institutions. The final RIP was approved for 2015-2019. Five Working Groups were established corresponding to the GSP Pillars.
- National congresses dedicated to Soil Sustainable Management (SSM) and the IYS in Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, and Santo Domingo.
- Radio and TV programs were aired in most countries about soil degradation and SSM.
- Promotion of IYS via more than 50 Articles in newspapers and magazines.
- Realization of a documentary film: “The Conquest of Soil” in Cuba (transmitted on December 5th by national TV).
- Demonstration areas in Central American countries, Mexico and Cuba, for sensitization of students and stakeholders.
- The execution of the RIP is underway, though it depends on availability of resources. With the support of the Secretariat, two workshops are planned for 2016: one, together with the South American Soil Partnership on soil related legal and institutional frameworks and other one on soil management.
- During the Latin-American Soil Congress (October 2016) a meeting of the partnership will take place and other activities will be implemented.

H. Pacific Soil Partnership (PSP)

12. The main achievements include:

- Since the launch on 13th October 2014 in Suva, Fiji (with representatives from 12 Pacific countries as well as from universities, research institutes and other partners), there has been active support (in the context of the IYS) to ensure awareness on the importance of healthy soils.
- One awareness event included: dissemination of information on current soil health projects and a presentation titled: 'The secret life of soil and what organic farmers know'
- Public debate organised on the topic: 'Organics can feed the Pacific' at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji.
- National symposium and field events in Fiji, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Soil learning exchanges organized in collaboration with the Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON) and under the theme of 'Healthy Soils for a Healthy Life'.
- Email consultation process in relation to the GSP Pillar 4 Implementation plan.
- The second PSP workshop was recently held from 18-21 April 2016, leading to an agreement to finalize the RIP with focus on strengthening soil research and soil management.

I. North America Soil Partnership (NSP)

13. The main achievements are:

- Canada hosted a Globalsoilmap consortium meeting, during which relationships with the GSP were discussed.
- A consultative process was implemented to nominate representatives to Pillars 1, 2, 3, and 5 implementation plan work groups.
- Support to 2015 IYS events.

III. Status of RIPs

14. The current situation regarding RIPs both in terms of formulation/endorsement and execution is summarized in the following table.

RSP	RIP formulation	RIP execution
African Soil Partnership (AfSP)	Completed	Initiated
Asian Soil Partnership (ASP)	Underway	Not yet initiated
European Soil Partnership (ESP)	Underway	Not yet initiated
Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP)	Completed	Strongly under way

RSP	RIP formulation	RIP execution
Near East and North Africa Soil Partnership (NENASP)	Completed	Initiated
South America Soil Partnership (SASP)	Completed	Initiated
Central America, Caribbean and Mexico Soil Partnership	Completed	Strongly under way
Pacific Soil Partnership	Underway	Not yet initiated
North American Soil Partnership	Not yet initiated	Not yet initiated