



Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Seventh session

Rome, June 2019

Overall performance of the Global Soil Partnership

Executive Summary

- While further progress was made in the execution of global and regional implementation plans, the GSP continues to address global threats and emerging soil topics, as well as requests from other organizations. There is still the need for more active engagement by partners, especially focal points. The GSP was designed as a voluntary initiative but with an ambitious agenda for action. This requires constancy, efficiency and visibility in order to demonstrate tangible impact.
- A number of challenges must be addressed in order to continue promoting Sustainable Soil Management (SSM) at all levels, which is at the heart of the GSP mandate. Action and impact on the ground are key priorities moving forward. Valuable achievements have been made in mobilizing resources in support of GSP plans of action and regional implementation plans through the Healthy Soils Multi-partner Platform. However, more substantial donor support must materialize to meet growing demands for technical assistance towards Sustainable Soil Management in all regions.
- At the same time, numerous stakeholders and partners have continued to provide in-kind and small financial contributions for specific activities, for instance through organizing meetings, providing training facilities, technical inputs and data inputs into key reports or policy instruments developed under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS). These encouraging efforts should be echoed by a growing number of stakeholders, institutions and countries to strengthen the limited capacity of the Secretariat and catalyze action.
- As was done at previous Plenary Assembly (PA) sessions, a financial report is presented in this document on an annual basis, i.e. referring to the past year (2018) and the likely available budget for 2019 and beyond (cf. tables below).
- It is important to highlight an emerging development, i.e., the establishment of National Soil Partnerships (NSPs) stemming entirely from national initiatives by key stakeholders in some countries. This has a demonstrated potential to ensure a more consolidated approach towards Sustainable Soil Management and facilitate international contacts under the auspices of the

GSP.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
- welcome the achievements made by the GSP during the reporting period, urging for a more active engagement by countries through focal points and technical staff.
 - invite countries to support and recognize the role played by experts from their ministries, academia, and research institutions, who freely provide inputs to various working groups under the umbrella of the GSP and the ITPS. This could stimulate engagement by a broader range of stakeholders with different expertise which is very much needed.
 - note the efforts made to mobilize additional resources for implementing a number of actions and commend the resource partners who have contributed so far to the Healthy Soils Multi-partner Platform.
 - renew its call to all partners, and especially resource partners, to support the implementation of the Global and Regional Implementation Plans and contribute additional funds, making use in particular of the Healthy Soils Multi-partner Platform, and providing in-kind contributions to specific activities in substantially higher volumes.
 - address the issue of interpretation and translation of documents for the GSP Plenary Assembly, as financial resources are not normally available for these services from the Regular Budget of FAO. Therefore, there is the need to identify solutions starting with the plenary meeting in 2020.
 - welcome the spontaneous establishment of National Soil Partnerships and encourage other countries to follow suit using the guidelines formulated by the Secretariat to guide the process.

2.1 Main achievements and challenges 2018-2019

Achievements

- 1 The GSP has been actively advancing the Sustainable Soil Management agenda during 2018-2019. The main achievements are:
 - a. Implementing the outcome document of the Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon (GSOC17) “Unlocking the potential of soil organic carbon”, mainly through: finalizing the technical manual for Soil Organic Carbon management, the improvement of the GSOCmap, the preparation of the GSOC sequestration potential study and contributing to the implementation of the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (a submission by FAO and another jointly with the “4 per mille” initiative) focusing on soils, and participation at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP24. The International Network on Black Soils (INBS) held its first workshop and is currently implementing its work plan.
 - b. Implementing the outcome document of the Global Symposium on Soil Pollution (GSOP18) “Be the solution to soil pollution”, mainly focused on the global assessment of soil pollution and the preparation of guidelines for mapping and monitoring soil pollution, and a database on the best available techniques to manage and remediate soil pollution.
 - c. Active presence in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP24 where a mandate was obtained for preparing a report on the state of knowledge on soil biodiversity covering current status, challenges and opportunities. The organization of the Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity is under way; this event will take place on 10-12 March 2020.

- d. Successful organization of the Global Symposium on Soil Erosion (GSER19), with an outcome document ready for implementation including the preparation of the Global Soil Erosion map.
- e. The full establishment of the Global Soil Information System (GLOSIS) GLOSIS is going forward, and more institutions are joining the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII). Aside from soil erosion and SOC sequestration potential, a global soil salinity map is under preparation during the current year.
- f. Preparation of the International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilizers. After a further consultation process, the Fertilizer Code was finalized and agreed by the COAG Bureau and is submitted for the endorsement by the FAO Conference in June 2019.
- g. As regards resource mobilization, new projects are being supported by the Russian Federation, the European Commission, the Republic of Germany, the Swiss Confederation, the Netherlands and PhosAgro. Prospects with the Republic of Korea and The People's Republic of China are under discussion. It is important to mention that the contribution of developing countries in organizing and partially funding workshops and other activities is increasing.
- h. The new ITPS membership is working on a challenging agenda. ITPS members agreed to be more active in terms of publishing articles/comments with a science-policy format in important global journals.
- i. The Global Soil Laboratory Network (GLOSOLAN) and its regional networks (the Asian Laboratory Network [SEALNET], the Latin American Network of Soil Laboratories [LATSOLAN] and the African Soil Laboratory Network [AFRILAB]) have been formally established and are rapidly advancing with global and regional activities including inter-laboratory comparison exercises. Regional networks in Europe, Eurasia, the Near East and North Africa, and the Pacific are also to be launched. Enhancing capacities in this area is much needed, as this is where soil data is generated.
- j. Awareness raising continues to be a major activity for the GSP. World Soil Day is having a growing impact with more countries joining the official celebration on 5 December every year. A new King Bhumibol World Soil Day award was established last year, while the Glinka World Soil Prize was given to its third winner.
- k. The Regional Soil Partnerships are fully established but some are performing more satisfactorily than others. While impetus is there, in several cases the lack of financial resources and commitment delays implementation of agreed activities. Annual meetings were held in Asia, Near East and North Africa, Latin America and Europe (including Eurasia). Most notably, the Centre of Excellence for Soil Research was established in Asia, thanks to the commitment of the Kingdom of Thailand.
- l. New developments on soil governance through the establishment of (SoilLEX) and the GSP e-learning platform (EduSoils).
- m. Collaboration with other initiatives is steadily increasing and new partners are joining the GSP.

Challenges

2 The GSP as an action-oriented initiative has faced the following challenges during the reporting period:

- n. Soils are currently firmly positioned on the Global Agenda offering a significant opportunity, especially thanks to the attention given to climate change, the sustainable development goals (SDGs), soil pollution and biodiversity. The challenge remains how to transform this favourable political context into growing investment in sustainable soil management practices on the ground.

o. The role of GSP focal points in countries remains essential and the active engagement of the majority is much appreciated. However, there are significant cases where the focal point is not performing his/her role as expected, impairing the country's participation in the different GSP activities. However, in some cases academia and research scientists in those countries are interested to take on the role. Thus, there is a need for nominating active focal points and also for reporting back to countries where the focal point is not performing up to the expected standard.

p. Furthermore, the Secretariat faces serious problems when working group members or pillar chairs are not performing their functions, thus delaying the implementation of core activities.

q. At regional level, keeping active communication between the GSP Secretariat and the RSPs remains a key challenge. Moreover, the alignment between global and regional activities should be strengthened.

r. As mentioned above, resource mobilization constitutes a major priority of the Secretariat as the volume of GSP activities has increased dramatically, given the favourable soil momentum. All countries are encouraged to find a way to contribute to the implementation of activities, at least at national level. For instance, participation in the regional workshops or in the Plenary Assembly should be firmly included into national budgets.

s. The organization of the GSP Plenary Assembly includes expenses for simultaneous interpretation and translation of documents in the UN languages, which is not supported by FAO's Regular Programme or by donors. To date, the Secretariat has sought to meet the costs through different *ad hoc* solutions (resources from technical support services and staff from the Secretariat translating the documents). This is clearly not a sustainable approach, and the Plenary Assembly should address this issue to guarantee availability of both services in the future.

2.2 Report on financial status of GSP

- 3 The GSP is based on cost-sharing principles, whereby each partner may contribute with different inputs to the implementation of approved work.
- 4 The PA may recall that FAO's contribution from its Regular Budget, as specified in the Terms of Reference approved by the FAO Council, is limited to hosting the GSP Secretariat at FAO headquarters, and only in terms of core support staff. This clearly hampers the capacity and flexibility of the Secretariat in providing support to GSP implementation, especially in terms of technical assistance to countries. This situation is in deep contrast with the growing operational complexity and expansion of GSP-related work at all levels.
- 5 However, as shown in the table below, another contribution from the Regular Budget came *via* the implementation of a number of TCP projects (FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme) which are of direct relevance to the GSP.
- 6 Since the inception of the GSP and particularly after the establishment of the Healthy Soils Facility and successor Healthy Soils Multi-partner Platform, some progress has been made in mobilizing extra-budgetary resources.
- 7 The first significant example was the project endorsed by the European Commission (EC) towards the end of 2013, to the tune of EUR 1 million. This project has been successfully implemented during the 2014-2015 biennium. Further to that initial contribution, the EC has provided additional funding of EUR 1.5 million for the period 2016-2018. Overall, the EC has provided EUR 2.5 million to date. There have been discussions mostly with two EC entities, on the one side DG Environment (for the support to the GSP Secretariat) and on the other side DEVCO (for field activities in countries and regions). At present, a project of EUR1 million is being negotiated with DG Environment with high probability to be opened in mid-year 2019.

- 8 The Russian Federation has provided funding *via* two subsequent projects over the period 2015-2020 amounting to USD 3 million and it is at present the top ranking country donor to the GSP. This contribution has been of paramount relevance, for instance in facilitating the preparation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM), the establishment of the Glinka World Soil Prize and to execute the implementation plan of the Eurasian Soil Partnership.
- 9 The Swiss Confederation has supported the GSP with an overall contribution of USD 780 000. An initial contribution was made for the implementation of the International Year of Soils (2015) to the tune of USD 100 000 and a further contribution of USD 30 000 was used for organizing the Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon (GSOC17). A direct contribution of USD 650 000 was made to GSP multi-donor projects for the support of the implementation of the GSP work plan. FAO fully appreciates contributions to the multi-donor projects as they are cost effective and this example should be emulated by other donors. The Federal Republic of Germany has recently provided USD 1 500 000 for an important new project which is related to Sustainable Soil Management for nutrition-sensitive agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia. It is to be implemented in the Republic of Malawi, Burkina Faso and the People's Republic of Bangladesh and is mainly focused on improving the micronutrient content of food through SSM.
- 10 The Netherlands provided funds to a multi donor project of USD150 000 which ended in 2018 and renewed its support for an amount of USD 450 000 to another newly opened multi-donor project for the period 2019-2020.
- 11 Considering the call from the Plenary Assembly to diversify resource partners, the private sector may be an important stakeholder in supporting Global Soil Partnership operations. In fact, it is essential to cooperate constructively with the private sector, which is an important input provider. In view of that, PhosAgro has contributed USD 150 000 to the organization of the Global Symposium on Soil Pollution and the campaign "Be the solution to soil pollution" in 2018. Furthermore, they have confirmed a contribution of USD 1 200000 to GLOSOLAN and the Soil Doctor programme during 2019-2020. The International Fertilizer Association (IFA) has donated USD 40 000 in support of the GSP work plan in 2018.
- 12 The current picture shows that the budget available for 2019 and 2020 has increased in comparison to 2018 and more financial contributions are expected to materialize. The Secretariat is of course most grateful for this increased trust in the Global Soil Partnership. Due attention has been paid to regular reporting (in both narrative and financial form) to the current donors, stressing the good results achieved and thus demonstrating that further support would be worthwhile.
- 13 It is also important to recognize the financial and in-kind contribution made by other partners in organizing GSP meetings and seconding staff to the Secretariat. The following countries have organized and co-financed GSP meetings: the Republic of Indonesia, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of India, Republic of Korea and the Kingdom of Thailand. The University of Basel seconded an expert to the Secretariat for several months.
- 14 The People's Republic of China has provided an Associated Professional officer to the Secretariat for a few years.
- 15 A more complete account of all financial contributions, including from TCP resources, is given in the following tables. For extra-budgetary resources, distinction is made between closed and ongoing projects.

Total spent in Year 2018	
Voluntary Contributions	Expenditures in 2018
GCP/GLO/663/EC	\$705,808
GCP/GLO/650/RUS	\$65,361
GCP/GLO/671/MUL	\$358,129
GCP /GLO/676/EC	\$24,010
Total	\$1,153,308
TCP projects	
TCP/CMB/3602	\$79,895
TCP/LES/3602	\$221,838
TCP/TOG/3602	\$210,722
TCP/STP/3604	\$240,025
TCP/RLA/3613	\$74,873
Total	\$827,353
Regular Programme	
GSP Secretary	\$192,000
GSP Support staff	\$70,000
Plenary Assembly of GSP and other Regular Programme costs	\$200,000
Total	\$462,000
Overall Expenditures 2018	\$2,442,661

17 Overview of resources to support GSP work

Previous years (up to 2015): USD 2 878 274

Year 2016: USD 1 950 701

Year 2017: USD 2 759 788

Year 2018: USD 2 442 661

Years 2019 and 2020: USD 6 759 628 (out of which USD5,529,268 are directly managed by the GSP Secretariat)

Overall: USD16 791 052

Years 2019 and 2020	
Voluntary Contributions	Budget Available
MTF/GLO/962/PHO	\$1,200,000
GCP/GLO/961/MUL	\$750,000
GCP/GLO/853/RUS	\$2,000,000
GCP /GLO/730/GER	\$1,500,000
GCP /GLO/676/EC	\$79,268
Total	\$5,529,268
TCP projects	
TCP/CMB/3602	\$29,175
TCP/LES/3602	\$152,430
TCP/STP/3604	\$47,803
TCP/RLA/3613	\$15,219
TCP/TUR/3603	\$61,733
Total	\$306,360
Regular Programme	
GSP Secretary	\$384,000
GSP Support staff	\$140,000
Plenary Assembly of GSP	\$400,000
Total	\$924,000
Overall Budget for 2018 and 2019	\$6,759,628

2.3 New developments: National Soil Partnerships

- 18 Given the success of the Regional Soil Partnerships, several GSP partners decided to apply the concept of a consolidated soil-related network also at the national level, i.e. by establishing National Soil Partnerships (NSPs). The expectation is to bring a range of national soil stakeholders formally together and ensure a consolidated approach to the actions of the GSP and other major initiatives related to Sustainable Soil Management.
- 19 To date, nine countries have established such National Soil Partnerships, namely Brazil, Italy, Portugal, Syria, Thailand, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Malawi and Mongolia; other countries are planning the establishment of such a partnership, i.e. Ukraine.
- 20 NSPs can indeed be effective in coordinating efforts at the national level TO tackle soil-related problems and create a shared space to develop joint programs.
- 21 The NSPs also aim to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and technology, and to pool the necessary resources to proactively promote Sustainable Soil Management.
- 22 Due to the lack of guidelines or rules for the establishment of National Soil Partnerships, interested countries have sought different approaches to engage relevant actors within their

countries. They have acknowledged the need for guidance from the GSP Secretariat on the creation and consolidation of such networks. In fact, while most countries do not yet have a National Soil Partnership, national soil science societies may exist

- 23 Given the success of existing NSPs in raising awareness and implementing soil-related projects and activities, the GSP Secretariat actively encourages countries to establish their own NSPs.
- 24 To facilitate the creation and consolidation of NSPs, the GSP Secretariat has prepared some guidelines that are presented in Annex 1.

2.4 Report by countries and partners

- 25 Under the same item, countries and partners will be able to report at the Plenary Assembly about their achievements and challenges in order to implement Sustainable Soil Management under the GSP framework.

Annex 1: Guidelines for the establishment and consolidation of National Soil Partnerships

1. Definition

A National Soil Partnership (NSP) should comprise all interested and active partners in a country willing to contribute to the achievement of sustainable soil management under the framework of the Global Soil Partnership (see section 4 of the GSP Terms of Reference).

2. Structural and governance arrangements

NSPs may not necessarily mirror the more elaborate arrangements applying to the GSP as a whole. However, it is expected that the National Soil Partnership would actively interact with the Regional Soil Partnership (RSP) that corresponds to it geopolitically, and ultimately with the Global Soil Partnership, and should therefore align its action and implementation plans with those operating at the higher level.

In light of the experience accrued so far in several countries, a recommended approach – at least at the initial stages – could include the following elements:

- Selection of a **Secretariat** of the NSP (governmental entity or institution) to provide a modicum of secretariat support services. Partners participating in the NSP may agree on an eventual rotation formula for such functions, with well-defined timeframes; the chosen partner would of course need to designate an official who could devote sufficient time to deal with NSP matters in coordination with the GSP Secretariat;
- Appointment of a **Steering Committee** and Chairperson. The Steering Committee would be tasked to provide strategic direction to the NSP, advise the Chairperson in connection with decision-making on important operational steps (calls for meetings, e-mail consultations, formulation of cooperation agreements on specific tasks, finding sources of financing, etc.), and actively work on the mobilization of financial resources for the partnership. The Chairperson could belong to one of the most representative national institutions with interest in soils. Members of the Steering Committee should normally be those institutions having an important role at national level keeping balanced representation of different stakeholders and gender. The Chairperson should be ready to participate at sessions of the RSP to which the NSP belongs to and if at all possible at sessions of the GSP Plenary Assembly to report on national activities.
- **Working groups** related to the five GSP Pillars, may be set up to develop and implement the National Implementation Plan (IP), and contribute to the regional and global IPs.
- **Plenary Meetings** embracing all NSP partners can be organized on a regular basis or as needed. Plenary meetings should focus on significant NSP developments, needs, challenges and opportunities. If possible, they should be organized “back-to-back” with other important national meetings directly or indirectly related to soils, in order to justify their cost and work pressure. Plenary meetings should be organized and held only if a minimum number of participants is reached. Otherwise, e-mail based consultation methods should be preferred and conversation records should be kept. Possible venues for meetings and logistical requirements should be taken into account carefully.

3. Main functions and operational tasks of the NSPs

- To catalyze cooperation within the country and in the region. This includes facilitating interactive consultative processes involving a range of national entities and stakeholders like national authorities and programmes in charge of soil management, soil survey institutions, scientific societies, groups of soil scientists working on important issues related to e.g. food security, climate change and

ecosystem services, the private sector, farmers associations, consumer associations, etc. Still, the interaction with national and regional Soil Science Societies and other mechanisms established under various conventions should be maintained;

- To discuss and provide guidance on national goals and priorities as regards soils, and the required implementation mechanisms, including regular reviews of progress in reaching common objectives and targets;
- To facilitate the development and implementation of the National Implementation Plan in line with the Implementation Plan for the five Pillars of Action of the corresponding RSP and the GSP;
- To promote the launch of education and awareness raising campaigns on soil;
- To promote the establishment and implementation of legal frameworks on soil in the country;
- To facilitate communication on soil at the national level. This may include the development and maintenance of a NSP website;
- To facilitate the organization of capacity building events from a financial, technical and logistic point of view;
- To advocate for the implementation of the revised World Soil Charter and Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, as well as other policy instruments promoted by the GSP;
- To mobilize financial resources to implement National Implementation Plans and
- to provide technical and financial support to the implementation of the activities at country level;
- To broaden participation of potential GSP partners in the country;
- To monitor outcomes and effectiveness of the activities in the implementation plans;
- To maintain the RSP and GSP Secretariats informed on national activities on soil.

4. **Steps to establish a NSP**

1. Conduct an inventory of all relevant stakeholders in the country
2. Organize a meeting of key stakeholders for:
 - a. Identifying national priority actions considering those identified on the RSP and the GSP Plan of Actions and IPs
 - b. Agreeing on the establishment and structure of the NSP: selection of the Secretariat, steering committee, chairperson and pillar chairs and working groups
 - c. Drafting NSP implementation plan (IP)
3. Jointly finalize the IP
4. Implement the IP.