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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

Eleventh session

Hybrid, 12–14 July 2023

Status on the organization of global symposia (GSPPA: XI/2023/7)

Executive summary

- Since 2017, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) has led the organization of global symposia addressing the ten threats to soils identified in the Status of the World's Soil Resources (SWSR) report.
- The topics covered so far are Soil Organic Carbon (2017), Soil Pollution (2018), Soil Erosion (2019), Soil Biodiversity (2020), Soil Salinity (2021) and Soils for Nutrition (2022). These symposia have been successful in bringing together the science and policy dimensions under each theme, involving substantial numbers of participants who agreed on and committed to an action-oriented outcome document.
- Each outcome document has set out a comprehensive agenda for action addressing the pertinent soil threat. Under the lead of the ITPS, the GSP Secretariat has then facilitated the implementation process, involving all co-organizers, members, and partners.
- To date, all outcome documents have been conducive to the active implementation of recommended actions making use of available resources (financial and in-kind). Hence, the symposia have been able to catalyse action at national, regional, and global levels, as appropriate.
- The [Global Symposium on Soils for Nutrition](#) (GSOIL4N): *Soils, where food begins*, was held on 26–29 July 2022 in a virtual format and was followed by about 9 500 participants from 180 countries. The [outcome document of the Global Symposium on Soils for Nutrition: Soils where food begins](#) collated the latest findings, recommendations for addressing the global challenges that prompted the symposium, and useful information for raising awareness on the importance of soils for nutrition.
- The Global Symposium on Soils and Water will be held on 2–5 October 2023 in a hybrid format. Preparation is ongoing.

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- Preparations for the Global Symposium on Soil Data and Information, to be held in 2024, began at the eighteenth ITPS meeting with the discussion of the topics to be addressed and the definition of timelines.
- At that meeting, the ITPS suggested the themes for the next global symposia: on soil sealing and urban soils in 2025, soil compaction and physical degradation in 2026, and soil acidification in 2027.

Suggested actions by the GSP Plenary Assembly (PA)

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- express appreciation for the efforts made in organizing global symposia thus far and in the implementation of the recommendations as outlined in the related outcome documents;
- encourage countries and other partners to join efforts of the ITPS, the Secretariat and co-organizers to implement the actions indicated in the outcome documents of all symposia;
- commend the resource partners who have financially supported the organization of these symposia, and encourage new resource partners to fund the forthcoming ones;
- recognize the outstanding work undertaken in organizing the [Global Symposium on Soils for Nutrition \(GSOIL4N\)](#) in a virtual format; and
- reaffirm its decision for holding the Global Symposium on Soil and Water to be held in 2023 and the Global Symposium on Soil Data and Information to be held in 2024, and invite all partners to actively contribute to their organization.

7.1 Report on the Global Symposium on Soils for Nutrition

1. The [Global Symposium on Soils for Nutrition](#) (GSOIL4N) addressed sustainable soil management to improve crops, animal and human nutrition while reducing or avoiding pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Over 9 500 participants from 180 countries registered for the GSOIL4N and harnessed the virtual symposium to present scientific and technical knowledge, management practices, field trials and multisectoral perspectives from stakeholders involved in soil fertility, nutritional food quality, nutrient imbalance, environmental pollution, and climate change.
3. The [agenda](#) of the GSOIL4N included eight hours of plenary sessions, and the participation of nine distinguished guests and 21 renowned keynote speakers. More than 300 scientific abstracts were submitted. During the 20 hours of parallel sessions and open discussion, 80 [presentations](#) were delivered and [69 posters](#) were available for virtual visiting and the public.
4. In preparation to the symposium, a communication campaign was launched to raise awareness on the topic, which included the publication of the booklet [Soil for nutrition: state of the art, videos, social media cards](#), a [photo contest](#), and presence in the [press](#).
5. The [outcome document of the GSOIL4N](#) summarizes the latest research findings and discussions on sustainable soil fertility improvement and management. These findings and conclusions were translated into key messages and six recommendations:
 - i) map and monitor soil nutrients and soil fertility and deepen the knowledge about the soil nutrient budget;
 - ii) develop innovative approaches and alternative products to optimize soil nutrient content, enhance fertilizer use efficiency, and reduce externalities associated with soil fertility management;
 - iii) assess the quality and safety of all nutrient sources applied to soils to avoid or reduce environmental contamination and health problems;
 - iv) advocate for the adoption of sustainable soil management practices since it still represents the most cost-effective solution to increase soil nutrient content;
 - v) consider driving forces such as water availability, climate change, poverty and the fertilizer crisis and promote a “soils for nutrition” agenda; and
 - vi) advocate for the inclusion of soil fertility and soil health in the legal framework of countries in relation to the One health approach, linking human nutrition, environmental health, and soil health.
6. As per the first recommendation (i), the International Network on Soil Information Institutions (INSII) is developing the first phase of the Global Soil Nutrient and Nutrient Budget Map (GSNmap), which aims to generate national maps of soil nutrients and associated soil properties at 250 m resolution for agricultural lands based on a country-driven approach. It has launched the [Country Guidelines and Technical Specifications for Global Soil Nutrient and Nutrient Budget Maps](#) GSNmap – Phase I.
7. To implement the second (ii), fourth (iv) and fifth (v) recommendations, one of the crucial actions to be taken is the launch of the International Network on Soil Fertility and Fertilizers (INSOILFER) to address nutrient imbalances and promote the concept of soils for nutrition to achieve healthy and fertile soils by 2030 as a contribution to the transformation of agrifood

systems. INSOILFER aims to support the adoption and implementation of sustainable soil fertility management, avoiding underutilization, misuse and overuse of fertilizers, and reducing the environmental and health impact of fertilizer use.

7.2 Preparations for the Global Symposium on Soils and Water 2023

8. The Global Symposium on Soil and Water (Symposium 2023) to be held on 2–5 October 2023 aims to review the relationship between soil and water in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The symposium also aims to identify knowledge gaps and solutions for integrated management of soil and water resources in a changing environment, and the development of solutions that can preserve soil and water resources for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, and for enhancing human health and wellbeing while protecting the environment.
9. The Symposium 2023 will cover four main themes:
 - i) Theme 1. Soil management and water scarcity;
 - ii) Theme 2. Soil health and water quality;
 - iii) Theme 3. Soil and water management in irrigation and circular economy; and
 - iv) Theme 4. Integrated soil and water management and effective governance.
10. The symposium will be structured in keynote presentations, round tables and parallel sessions with contributions selected from the abstracts received. A poster session will also be organized.
11. The symposium will also contribute to the UN Water Action Decade 2018–2028 and will provide the opportunity to follow upon the outcomes of UN 2023 Water Conference, held on 22-24 March 2023, in New York.

7.3 Preparations for the Global Symposium on Soil Data and Information 2024

12. The Global Symposium on Soil Data and Information 2024 will focus on the critical need for accurate and reliable soil information and data and its importance in promoting sustainable land management at all scales.
13. The Symposium 2024 will be a platform for all stakeholders, including policymakers, farmers, researchers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to collaborate, exchange ideas and share best practices towards improving soil health and productivity.
14. Soil information and data are cross-cutting themes for all the work of the GSP, as soil is a vital natural resource that underpins food security, climate change adaptation and sustainable development. As such, the Symposium 2024 will be an opportunity to showcase how soil information and data can drive policy development, improve agricultural productivity, and protect and sustainably manage soil resources.
15. The Symposium 2024 will explore various themes related to soil information and data, including soil data quality, open data, data-driven policymaking at all scales, and soil information and decision-making systems.
16. The slogan of the symposium will be decided at this Plenary Assembly and the proposals are presented in document (GSPPA: XI/2023/10) under the World Soil Day (WSD) theme.

7.4 Themes for future symposia

17. At the eighteenth meeting, the ITPS considered it important to differentiate between soil compaction by agricultural management and soil consumption or sealing by infrastructure, so it suggested splitting these topics into two different but consecutive symposia. The ITPS thus proposed to address soil sealing and urban soils in 2025 and soil compaction and physical degradation in 2026.
18. At the meeting, the ITPS also highlighted the importance of addressing soil acidification, a problem that affects many agricultural areas in the world, limiting their productivity, and therefore suggested addressing this issue in the global symposium in 2027.