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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Third session

Rome, 22-24 June 2015

Endorsement of the Status of the World's Soil Resources Report (SWSR)

Executive Summary

- In July 2013, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) decided that one of the major outputs stemming from its work, and more generally under the umbrella of the GSP, should be the issuance at periodic intervals of a new state-of-art global assessment, called the "Status of the World's Soil Resources (SWSR) Report".
- A broad-based process for preparation of the first version of the SWSR took place since then (ensuring both geographical and gender balance of a large number of contributors, as well as independent reviews of drafts to guarantee rigorous scientific analysis). The development of the report was a very inclusive process as around 200 top scientists from all regions of the world have contributed to its preparation. It consists of two parts: a Summary for Policy Makers and the full report covering the scientific content (over 600 pages).
- During the third working session of the ITPS, the SWSR (both summary and full report) were reviewed, amended and endorsed in order to facilitate consideration by the Plenary Assembly.
- It is important to note that the PA is expected to focus mainly on the *Summary for Policy Makers* while the full report – as available at that time – would be a supporting document, with the objective of official release of the new report in its final form to coincide with World Soil Day on 5th December 2015, hence constituting a most fitting contribution to the celebrations of the International Year of Soils, 2015.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to review and endorse the SWSR as appropriate and to take note of the way forward, with final release of the first version of the SWSR expected on 5th December 2015.

I. Genesis

1. At its first meeting (Rome, 22-24 July 2013), the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) decided that one of the major outputs stemming from its work, and more generally under the umbrella of the GSP, should be the issuance at periodic intervals of a new state-of-art global assessment report, called the "Status of the World's Soil Resources (SWSR) Report".

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II. Scope of the SWSR and timing of the first version

2. It was also decided that the preparations for the first version would be led by an Editorial Board. The latter group was composed of the following ITPS members, with appropriate regional representation: Luca Montanarella (Chairperson), Victor Chude (Africa), Kazuyuki Yagi (Asia), Pavel Krasilnikov (Europe), Maria Lourdes Mendonca-Santos (Latin America and the Caribbean), Seyed Kazem Alavi (Near East), Dan Pennock (North America), Neil McKenzie (Southwest Pacific).
3. As subsequently agreed by the Editorial Board, arrangements were made so that the first version of the SWSR would be launched on 5 December 2015, as a fitting contribution to the International Year of Soils 2015 celebrations.
4. The scope and main objectives of the report were determined as follows:
 - i. to provide a global, scientifically based assessment of current and projected soil conditions built on regional data analyses and expertise;
 - ii. to explore the implications of these soil conditions for food security, climate change, water quality and quantity, biodiversity, and human health and wellbeing, and
 - iii. to include a policy message with a series of recommendations for action by decision-makers and other stakeholders.
5. As part of a broad collaborative process, internationally recognized soil scientists were invited to contribute to the different chapters of the SWSR, while emphasizing that inputs should be based on rigorous scientific analysis and bearing in mind the needs of a potentially vast target audience of policy makers, scientific and development communities and the general public.
6. The short timeframe set for the first version implied that it would not be possible to reflect comprehensive country-level reporting, but that it would nonetheless set out the basis for future fully-fledged reporting arrangements. In any event, the first report was expected to constitute a main reference point on soils from both a scientific and policy point of view, using published literature since 2001 and available data.

III. Summary of the preparation process

7. The first meeting of the Editorial Board took place in Rome 10-11 February 2014. At that meeting, while confirming the scope of the report as mentioned above, a provisional table of contents was agreed upon. It was decided to recruit a Managing Editor and the various roles of contributors were defined, including Terms of Reference for different positions and assessment of the budgetary implications. A provisional timetable for the various production stages was also set.
8. The Editorial Board held a second meeting on 9 April 2014 (taking advantage of the second ITPS meeting), during which the table of contents and timetable were refined, and an approach for regional assessments adopted that would allow for a mixture of truly regional assessments and the use of country case studies where no thorough regional assessment was feasible. Coordinating Lead Authors, Regional Coordinators, Regional Lead Authors were selected.
9. In the period between April and December 2014 drafts for all 16 Chapters were prepared. These concerned: (1) An introduction; (2) The role of soils in ecosystem processes; (3) Global soil resources; (4) Soils and humans; (5) Drivers of soil change; (6) Global soil status, processes and trends; (7) The impact of soil change on ecosystem services; (8) Soil governance and land users response to soil change; and (9) to (16) Regional assessments of soil change in respectively: Africa South of the Sahara; Asia; Europe and Eurasia; Latin America and the Caribbean; Near East and North Africa; North America; Southwest Pacific; Antarctica.
10. The Editorial Board held another meeting on 2-5 December 2014 to discuss progress, identifying a number of gaps and not yet satisfactory sections. The task of addressing these shortcomings was divided among Editorial Board members, the Editorial Manager and a small number of independent experts. Individuals in charge of review were appointed (mainly ITPS members) in order to assure a high scientific standard for the report as a whole. This intensive phase led to

finalization of a draft report ready for consideration by the ITPS at its third meeting (Potsdam 13-17 April 2015).

11. From the end of January 2015 onwards, a smaller group (Luca Montanarella, Dan Pennock, Neil McKenzie and the Editorial Manager) was active in preparing a summary report for policy makers, based on the findings of the main report and the regional assessments. The draft of this synthesis report was also submitted to the ITPS at the same meeting.

12. The draft of the main report counts more than 600 pages, building on contributions from about 200 top soil scientists. These contributors represent more than 50 different nationalities, ensuring a good geographical spread while a reasonable gender balance (20% of authors were women) was also achieved. The report contains nearly 2000 scientific references, which is a quite unique feature for a publication on soils, and nearly all of them are recent (the median year of publication being 2008).

IV. Outcome of the ITPS meeting and way forward

13. The ITPS endorsed the Status of the World's Soil Resources Report with its two parts: "Summary for Policy Makers" and full report, which are before the Plenary Assembly for consideration.

14. As mentioned above, the final version is due to be released officially on the 5th of December 2015.