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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Third session

Rome, 22-24 June 2015

Report on the financial status of GSP, including the Healthy Soils Facility

Executive Summary

- The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) is based on cost-sharing principles, whereby each partner may contribute with different inputs to the implementation of approved work. As reported below, progress is being made in mobilizing extra-budgetary resources under the Healthy Soils Facility, as well as in obtaining in kind contributions from partners to the implementation of specific activities, in line with the expectations identified in the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the GSP.
- The lack of funds limits the capacity (and flexibility) of the Secretariat in providing support to GSP work and technical assistance to the countries, especially during the current phase of growing operational complexity and expansion of GSP work at all levels, including the two major awareness-building platforms constituted by the World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils - 2015.
- FAO's contribution from its Regular Budget is specified in the ToRs approved by the FAO Council, i.e. through hosting the GSP Secretariat at headquarters, and is mostly restricted to core support staff. The Organization has sought, nevertheless, to provide additional funds in cases of pressing requirements. However, in view of other priority needs in a large number of substantive areas, it is very difficult for the Organization to meet recurring requests for financial support to the GSP from the Regular Budget.
- A clear case of funding requirement of a continuing nature (not factored in the ToRs, as originally formulated), relates to the cost of organizing annual meetings of the Plenary Assembly. Another case relates to the cost of ITPS sessions which was possible to meet in the last two instances only via contributions from key partners.
- Hence, the present document seeks to:
 - i. address potential resource mobilization (i.e. of extra budgetary resources)
 - ii. describe more precisely the implications of resource limitations, including the use of languages in the GSP Plenary Assembly; and
 - iii. invite members to consider a change in periodicity of sessions of the Plenary Assembly.

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Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
 - invite all partners and especially resource partners to support the GSP implementation by contributing funds to the Healthy Soils Facility and provide in kind contributions to specific activities in substantial volumes;
 - review the use of languages in the Plenary Assembly, depending on resources available;
 - agree to the proposed change in periodicity of Plenary Assemblies from annual to once in a biennium.

I. Introduction

1. It is worth recalling that, as emphasized in its Terms of Reference (ToRs), the GSP is based on cost-sharing principles, whereby each partner may contribute with different inputs to the implementation of approved work.

II. Mobilization of extra-budgetary resources

2. In full accordance with expectations in the ToRs, since the inception of the GSP and particularly after the establishment of the Healthy Soils Facility, as endorsed by the last Plenary Assembly, progress is being made in mobilizing extra-budgetary resources, as well as in obtaining in kind contributions from partners to the implementation of specific activities.

3. The first significant example of mobilization of extra-budgetary resources was the project endorsed by the EC towards the end of 2013, to the tune of €1 million. This project is being successfully implemented during the 2014-2015 biennium, under three components of distinct scope, i.e.:

- support to the work of the ITPS, including the organization of its (special) working sessions in the first half of 2014;
- development of detailed Implementation Plans at regional level under the agreed global PoAs for each of the GSP Pillars;
- capacity development on improved soil information (digital soil mapping) in areas of most critical need (Africa).

4. Discussions are underway with the EC authorities towards the approval of more projects and/or the extension of ongoing projects in support of the GSP.

5. In addition, as mentioned under document 7 and as part of GSP Pillar 2, IYS activities are receiving generous contributions from the following resource partners: the Kingdom of Thailand (100,000 USD); Switzerland (100,000 USD); and the International Fertilizer Industry Association (58,000 USD).

6. Funds have also been mobilized from UNEP (~USD95 000) for a study on soil loss to be carried out in Malawi. In addition, the GSP has been partnering successfully with some UN agencies.

7. A myriad of contributions in kind have also been obtained. These range from: 1) relatively large ones, e.g. for the organization of the third meeting of the ITPS and the joint SPI/ITPS meeting in April 2015 (cf. document 2.Add.2) thanks to the assistance from the Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS); to 2) the numerous expert inputs to the SWSR report; through 3) the provision of training facilities by host institutions and the contributions (free of charge) from participants to many working groups.

III. Limitations to the FAO's Regular Budget contribution

8. As the above context makes it clear, there are severe limits to the capacity (and flexibility) of the Secretariat in providing support of various types, especially during the current phase – which is of course to be welcome – of growing operational complexity and expansion of GSP work at all levels, including the two major awareness-building platforms constituted by the World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils.

9. FAO's contribution from its Regular Budget is specified in the ToRs approved by the FAO Council, i.e. through hosting the GSP Secretariat at headquarters, and is mostly restricted to core support staff. The pertinent extract reads as follows: "FAO will lead the GSP implementation process and will provide funds from its Regular Programme, to support the Secretariat by providing a full-time Professional staff member and General Service support, subject to the approval by its Governing Bodies".

10. In that period, FAO has sought to provide additional funds going much beyond what is specified in the ToRs. There are also many other staff contributions from other units (office of the DDG, National resources, NRL division, etc...). However, in view of other priority needs in a large number of substantive areas, it is very difficult for the Organization to meet recurring requests for financial support to the GSP from the Regular Budget.

11. As regards the PA, the pertinent extract of the ToRs reads as follows: "The Plenary Assembly will meet once a year and be in charge of reviewing and prioritizing GSP actions."

12. The Rules of Procedure subsequently approved by the first PA specify that: "Languages of the GSP will be FAO languages. FAO Members may decide to hold specific meetings or carry out specific activities in a selected number of agreed languages on an ad hoc basis."

13. While the first session of the PA used only three FAO languages, in view of the above, a special Regular Budget contribution was made to organize the second session in 2014 using all six languages. However, it is not possible to continue this practice for the current session. For ease of reference, the additional cost of using 3 languages for two sessions in a biennium is approximately USD 55,000, while for all FAO languages; the cost for two sessions in a biennium is approximately USD 110,000. In any event, the funds for the 3 languages should be covered by voluntary contributions.

IV. Change in periodicity of Plenary Assemblies – options for consideration

14. In order to ease the above budgetary pressures, partners may consider changing the periodicity of PA sessions from annual to once in a biennium.

15. In fact, besides the cost aspect, this formula may have the following advantages:

- it would be a more practical proposition as regards substance, since the most intense phase of GSP establishment (e.g. approval of Rules of Procedure, approval of PoAs under the five Pillars, launch of the new SWSR report, support to the IYS, etc..) may be felt to be over by now;
- it would also reduce financial pressures on partner themselves, particularly the smaller countries and institutions which may have difficulties in bearing the cost of attending too many meetings;
- it would match establish practice for the parent technical body, the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) which has a much larger spectrum of mandated activities.

16. Subject to the reactions of the PA, a straightforward amendment to the ToRs may be submitted soonest to the FAO Council. As an essential task for the PA is to appoint members of the ITPS for two year terms, the PA sessions could be held only in odd years, i.e. the next one taking place in 2017.

17. This would not preclude the possibility of convening extraordinary sessions of the PA, as foreseen in Rule III of the RoP, should circumstances so warrant.