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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-third Session

Rome, 21 - 25 May 2012

Progress on the Global Soil Partnership

I. Background

1. Following the request from the 22nd Session of COAG to explore the possibility of establishing a global soil partnership and after six months of preparatory activities, a meeting was convened by FAO at its headquarters in Rome from 7 to 9 September 2011. The meeting was organized in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission (EC). Its main purpose was to present to FAO member countries and key stakeholders the proposal of the establishment of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) and to obtain reactions and recommendations on the way forward.

2. The meeting fully endorsed the importance and timeliness of the partnership and agreed:

- to establish a Technical Working Group, composed of soil scientists from a large number of national and international institutions, for preparing the Zero draft version of the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Global Soil Partnership;
- to organize the review of a draft version of the ToR by an Open-Ended Working Group composed of Permanent Representatives to FAO; and
- to submit the proposed ToR of the Global Soil Partnership for consideration of the Programme Committee.

II. Progress to date

3. **The Technical Working Group** was established on 17th October 2011 to prepare the draft of the Terms of Reference for the establishment of the GSP. The 76 voluntary members worldwide were invited to review the working version of the ToR and some 40 members contributed with a range of valuable comments and suggestions. **The GSP Open Ended Working Group** is being established to review the ToR of the GSP with special attention to institutional and policy implications and to prepare the final version for endorsement by the Programme Committee. A number of meetings and exchanges with the Permanent Representatives to FAO, in particular with the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), were conducted in order to establish the GSP Open Ended Working Group.

4. **Advocacy:** The GSP was presented and discussed in several international events and meetings with the support of JRC and as requested by interested partner institutions, notably at the Globalsoilmap.net meeting in Ispra, Italy, June 2011; the Soil Carbon meeting organized by the Coordination Action Carbon Observation System Project in Leuven, Belgium, July 2011; the Soil Science in a Changing World conference at Wageningen University in September 2011; as well as at the side event organized with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat at its COP-10 in Korea, October 2011, and the Global Soil Week meeting in Potsdam, Germany, December 2011.

5. **Technical soils issues:** While working on the establishment of the GSP, it is also important to work on priority soils issues in the different regions. In that regard, FAO has engaged in Letters of Agreement with the Chinese Institute of Soil Science, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), the International Centre on Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and the Ministry of Agriculture of Jordan, for setting up regional networks of soil science institutions in Asia, Latin America and the Near East. This process will also support the steps towards the development of Regional Soil Information Systems.

6. **Internal Collaboration within FAO:** The FAO Land and Water Division has been liaising with other technical divisions dealing with various aspects of soils to ensure a crosscutting GSP process across FAO, in particular with the Plant Production and Protection Division, the joint FAO Division in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Secretariat of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA), the Climate, Energy and Tenure Division, the Animal Production and Health Division and the Forestry Department.

7. **Collaboration with other soil processes:** Discussions with both UNCCD and the Global Soil Forum Initiative have been initiated in order to explore synergies and determine how they could contribute respectively to the GSP and vice versa.

8. A technical meeting focusing on Global Soil information was organized by FAO in collaboration with the e-SOTER project coordinated by the International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC) in March 2012 at FAO, Rome, in order to prepare a plan of action for the future GSP pillar related to Soil Data and Information.

9. A session on GSP is included in the programme of the International Symposium on Managing Soils for Food Security and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation organized by the Joint FAO/IAEA Division from 23 to 26 July 2012 in Vienna. This meeting aims at the global scientific community (National Agricultural Research Systems, International Union of Soil Sciences, JRC, etc.) to exchange scientific and technical developments in soil management through the use of isotopic and nuclear techniques and to discuss ways in which soils can be better managed to meet today's challenges.

10. **Towards RIO+20:** Mentioning of the GSP was retained in the zero draft of the final Rio+20 document to be approved at Rio+20 in June 2012. On the request of the EU, a side event on the GSP is planned during the conference, in collaboration with the EC, UNCCD and other partners.

11. **Funding:** FAO is identifying potential funding sources to support the work of the GSP and its Secretariat which is initially intended to be hosted by FAO.

12. **Other Initiatives under GSP:** A Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative has been established by a group of scientific institutions led by Colorado University, USA, potentially as part of the GSP process and aiming to integrate and strengthen soil biodiversity dimensions in ongoing soils and ecosystem processes (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, etc.).