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Report on Regional Soil Partnerships

Executive Summary

- The establishment of an effective network of Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) is key to the achievement of the GSP mandate and objectives, as specified in its Terms of Reference. To date, all regions and in some cases sub-regions, have established RSPs and have developed their own Regional Implementation Plans. However, they may still require a firmer consolidation phase. As always, there is a need for sustained and balanced institutional backup and commitment behind the RSPs as the willingness of a few individuals from some countries would not guarantee further growth or their full recognition at regional level.
- The Secretariat has continued to make use of all available funds to support the functioning of viable RSPs, and especially the execution of Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs). Yet, these resources are limited if compared with the range of desirable activities listed in these plans, particularly in some regions where much external support is needed.
- While the present document provides some information in telegraphic form, the Chairpersons of, or representatives from the various RSPs are to provide oral reports on major achievements, especially with regard to RIPs and the way forward.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
 - renew its call to all partners to actively participate in, and support the RSPs, including empowering these RSPs to execute Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs).
 - invite resource partners to support the RSPs, and especially the execution of RIPs. Similarly, member countries from the different RSPs may be urged to align their programmes to the substantive thrust of the RIPs in order to advance sustainable soil management within the region.

I. Background

1. Section 5.4 of the GSP Terms of Reference stipulates that: “Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) will be established among interested and active stakeholders in the regions. These RSPs will work in close coordination with FAO Regional Offices and their activities will be supported by the GSP Secretariat. The RSPs will establish an interactive consultative process with national soil entities and relevant regional institutions.”

2. Hence, the Secretariat has continued to give due priority to assisting partners in establishing RSPs. To date, all regions have established RSPs, while some may need further consolidation. The GSP Focal Points appointed in many countries have been very instrumental in promoting these regional cooperation processes.

3. The main priority for all RSPs is clearly the execution of cogent RIPs, subject to availability of sufficient funds, both from within as well as – in most cases – outside the region.

II. Overall progress report

4. A summary of recent (or planned) achievements in the geographical areas covered by RSPs is provided below.

A. African Soil Partnership (AfSP)

5. The main elements in the context of the AfSP are:

- The 7th International Conference of the African Soil Science Society was held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (29 May-7 June 2016), where a presentation on the AfSP and the RIP was given.
- A call to action was made to encourage AfSP members to get their national soil institutions involved in the second meeting of the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII) held on 24-25 November 2016 in Rome, Italy.
- Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) were circulated to focal points in November 2016 for inputs before endorsement by the FAO Council in December 2016.
- Focal points encouraged national soil science societies and pertinent government agencies to support the celebration of the 2016 World Soil Day, and the International Year of Pulses. Both events had wide resonance across Africa.
- With assistance from the GSP Secretariat, a training session of participants from 38 African countries on soil organic carbon mapping will take place in July 2017 to assist countries to prepare their own maps. Similarly, a three-week training event was organised at ISRIC, Wageningen, Netherlands for delegates of selected countries (DRC, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia).
- Projects (under FAO’s TCP) are underway to establish Soil Information Systems in Lesotho and Togo.
- Training sessions and workshops to discuss the implementation of the VGSSM are also scheduled in 2017 (e.g. one workshop to take place in September 2017).
- A training session on the Soil Doctors programme is to be organized in 2017.

B. Asian Soil Partnership (ASP)

6. The main achievements (including planned ones) are:

- The third ASP workshop was organized in December 2016, funded by the FAO/GSP Secretariat and the Land Development Department of Thailand.

- Endorsement of the ASP implementation plan took place at the same workshop. Activities in the plan are ready to be executed by countries, and a call for investment support has been made.
- Under Pillar 1, national initiatives are to be launched to implement the VGSSM.
- Under Pillar 2, the Soil Doctors programme is developing a toolbox, consisting of educational material for farmers-to-farmers as well as a soil testing kit for preliminary analysis. Implementation is to continue at national level.
- Under Pillar 3, the Soil Atlas for Asia is to be developed jointly with the European Commission's Joint Research Center. Preliminary compilation of the contributing authors list was done and the first meeting of the Editorial Board is scheduled.
- As part of Pillar 4 activities, national soil organic carbon maps will be developed by August 2017. Funded by the GSP Secretariat, a regional training event on Digital Soil Organic Carbon mapping was implemented in Bangkok, Thailand (24-29 April 2017) to facilitate countries' progress.
- Mongolia participated in the three-week soil organic carbon mapping training event held at ISRIC in The Netherlands.
- Implementation of the South-East Asia Laboratory Network-SEALNET is being pursued under Pillar 5 activities. The two main linked activities are: (i) identification of a reference laboratory in each country; and (ii) organisation of a laboratory managers' meeting to assess laboratories' quality in Asia and enhance harmonization between them.
- Activities for execution in 2018 were identified by the ASP Secretariat based on the regional implementation plan as follows:
 - Under Pillar 1, focus will be on (1) creating a database on sustainable soil management practices, as well as priority areas of intervention, etc. as indicated in the RIP, and (2) developing sustainable soil management and soil degradation indicators.
 - Under Pillar 2, focus will be on (1) preparing courses for the open source educational platform MOODLE and (2) developing country profiles to upload on the online platform for policy information sharing. Both MOODLE and the policy platform are due for implementation at the global level in 2018.
 - Under Pillar 3, focus will be on identifying key stakeholders and potential donors at the national, regional and global level to address emerging priorities, establishing a network of collaboration, and ultimately writing joint proposals for the mobilization of financial resources.
 - Under Pillar 4, focus will be on selecting benchmark data for soil description and monitoring purposes. This will contribute to SoilSTAT and the creation of National Soil Information Systems.
 - Under Pillar 5, focus will be on (1) collecting reference soil profile databases for the creation of soil museums and training on soil, and (2) further implementing SEALNET by focusing on the performance of the laboratories (PT), building capacity on good laboratory practice and quality control, addressing at least 3 SOP for laboratories as per the ISO system, and creating a database on laboratories' capacity.
 - Efforts will also be made towards the establishment of the Center of Excellence for Soil Research in Asia (CESRA), the governance, terms of reference and structure of which will be discussed at the next ASP meeting.

C. European Soil Partnership (ESP)

7. The main achievements of the ESP are:

- All members of the ESP Steering Committee were nominated and two Steering Committee meetings were held during the 2016-2017 period.
- A specific ESP webpage was developed within the European Soil Data Centre ESDAC (<http://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/networkcooperations/european-soil-partnership>) with relevant information, reports and partners.
- An ESP Facebook page was developed (<https://www.facebook.com/European-Soil-Partnership-332751013792513/>) with publication of relevant information.
- The ESP Steering Committee elaborated a Draft Implementation Plan. For each Pillar, detailed tasks are proposed, with a range of possible outcomes and potential partners. The draft was sent for consultation to the ESP focal points and other relevant institutions and associations.
- The ESP organized its fourth Plenary Meeting in May 2017 where the RIP was finalized and endorsed. During the meeting, the main priorities were the production of the national soil organic carbon maps and the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management.
- Work under the Pillars in Europe needs to be actively pursued by the partners through various networks and dissemination of soil-related information. To ensure a functional ESP and collaboration with existing soil networks, the ESP was presented during several conferences (Soil Stakeholders' Conference, SETAC).
- Preliminary contacts have been made with the project Links4Soil for the potential establishment of an Alpine sub-regional Soil Partnership.

D. Eurasian Soil Partnership (EaSP)

8. The main actions connected to the EASP are:
 - A third Plenary meeting was held during an International Conference on Expansion of Eurasian Food Security Network and Eurasian Soil Partnership (29 February-2 March 2016, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic), with prime focus on addressing the main barriers to the implementation of the RIP and developing a detailed programme of activities.
 - The Eurasian Soil Portal, an extensive catalogue of soil-related resources <http://eurasian-soil-portal.info> has been developed.
 - Training on digital soil mapping and soil information management was organized (31 October–4 November 2016, Almaty, Kazakhstan).
 - The World Soil Day 2016 was celebrated in Moscow and Dushanbe with wide participation of international institutions, specialists and students.
 - Multiple dissemination materials were developed including coloured cartoons, flyers, posters and mass media publications.
 - The book “Land resources and food security of Central Asia and South Caucasus” was published.
 - In 2016, the volume “Food security of Eurasia” was published, covering the results of different research projects (case studies) in several countries across the Eurasian region (Armenia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).
 - A call for small research grants on soil salinity has been opened; five projects have been approved.
 - Another call for small research grants on different soil problems was opened; and seven projects were approved.
 - Three countries from the region (Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) participated in the training event on soil organic carbon mapping held at ISRIC.

E. Near East and North Africa Soil Partnership (NENASP)

9. The main actions undertaken by the NENASP are:
- Training on digital soil mapping and soil organic carbon was conducted in Rabat, Morocco, where 20 professionals from the region participated. Representatives from Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia participated in a training course on soil organic carbon mapping at ISRIC as part of the Global Soil Organic Carbon map development.
 - A project (under FAO's TCP) to establish the Sudanese Soil Information System is underway.
 - Execution of the RIP is to be undertaken, depending on availability of resources. The FAO Office in the Near East is supporting training activities on soil information and sustainable soil management and the further development of the NENA system.

F. South America Soil Partnership (SSP)

10. The main achievements of the SSP are:
- The third ordinary meeting of SSP took place as part of the Latin American Soil Congress held in Quito, Ecuador on 27th October 2016. Important decisions were made for moving forward in the execution of the RIP. As part of this meeting, training on digital soil mapping was provided to participants of the Congress.
 - The transfer of the Latin American Soil Information System to FAO was decided.
 - A regional Technical Cooperation Project (period 2017-2019) was endorsed to strengthen regional capacities on soil organic carbon mapping (as part of the Global Soil Organic Carbon Map initiative), ensure the relaunch of SISLAC and the initiation of discussions on how to implement the VGSSM.
 - Two countries from the region (Paraguay and Bolivia) participated in the training event on soil organic carbon mapping held in ISRIC.
 - A stocktaking exercise on national and regional soil research activities took place.
 - The next regional meeting will take place in Argentina as part of the World Congress on Conservation Agriculture (August 2017).

G. Central America, Caribbean and Mexico Soil Partnership

11. The main achievements are :
- Preparation of national SOC maps is in progress. A regional training event on soil organic carbon mapping funded by the GSP Secretariat will be held in Mexico, June 2017, to assist experts in the preparation of national SOC maps. Two countries from the region (Costa Rica and Cuba) participated in a three-week training course at ISRIC with assistance from the GSP Secretariat.
 - During the Latin-American Soil Congress (Quito, October 2016), a meeting of the partnership took place and strategies for developing the RIP were addressed.
 - With the support of the GSP Secretariat, a seminal workshop was held (Ibague, Colombia, June 2016) together with the South America Soil Partnership on soil governance and soil legal frameworks. Important recommendations were approved.
 - Radio and TV programmes were aired in most countries about soil degradation and SSM.
 - Demonstration areas for the promotion of SSM between policy makers, stakeholders and students within the sub-region were enhanced in terms of numbers and impact.

- In collaboration with numerous regional and local partners, the Catholic Relief Services and GSP continued to implement the programme Water & Soils in five countries in Central America & Mexico.
- Celebration of World Soil Day took place at different levels in many of the countries.

H. Pacific Soil Partnership (PSP)

12. The main achievements include:

- During the meeting in Nadi, Fiji (18-19 April 2016), three areas of focus were agreed for the PSP : (1) Improving nutrient and water management in both high volcanic islands and low lying atolls, (2) Proceeding with the development of the Pacific Soil Portal (originally proposed by the Pacific Community and Landcare Research NZ), incorporating recent developments in information and computing technology, and (3) Promoting capacity building and training with particular attention to extension services for smallholder farmers.
- Establishment of a working group for the preparation of the RIP for the PSP. Draft plan to be circulated prior the GSP Plenary.
- Meeting in Queenstown, New Zealand (12th December 2016) with discussions on 8 key topics: (1) Information access, (2) Capacity building, (3) Soil Information Systems, (4) Fine scale soil functional grid, (5) Indigenous knowledge, (6) Analytical capability, (7) Collaboration and joint learning, and (8) GSP activities.
- Farmer Field Schools have started in some countries based on soil health and crop production.
- A soil doctor programme (with use of soil testing kits) is planned to be launched in May/June 2017.
- Ongoing work to incorporate soil science into some school curricula.
- The PSP has supported the development of National Extension Strategies in the region.
- Successful outcomes may be reported under numerous SSM projects (e.g. in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, or on atolls).
- Pillar 4 implementation plan was endorsed by the PSP.
- Soil tests for organic carbon for atolls and other soils of the region are to be developed.
- Promotion of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management is to be pursued, including endorsement by the conference of Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (HOAFS) meeting (October 2017).
- Launch of the new Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) soil health in June/July 2017.

I. North America Soil Partnership (NSP)

13. The main achievements are:

- The final version of Pillar 2 implementation plan was completed in December, 2016 (available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/c5ecccd4-bf37-4de2-8f3d-9361342067ad/>)
- RIP for Pillar 4 to be developed soon.
- Partner countries are making strides to support preparation of the Global Soil Organic Carbon Map (GSOCMap):
 - Canadian Digital Soil Mapping Working Group established, including members from a wide range of stakeholders. A working group is in operation with the goal of completing the map by the end of 2017;

- Discussions are ongoing in the USA on how best to provide information for the GSOCMap project.
- Chairperson for Pillar 5 Harmonization is now active (for the North American Soil Partnership), being also a member of the writing team for the overarching GSP Pillar 5 Implementation Plan.
- Goals for Pillar 5 in the North American Partnership were elucidated at the IUSS 4th International Soil Classification Congress in Bloemfontein (South Africa, December 2016).
- A meeting on harmonization of soil characterization, classification, and mapping will be organized at the National Cooperative Soil Survey conference in June 2017 and the Soil Science Society of America in October 2017.
- The 2017 edition of the USDA Soil Survey Manual was issued and will be distributed to international colleagues as part of technical material to assist with Pillar 5 implementation.
- Training webinars and YouTube videos on profile descriptions and soil classification have been produced and are available for international viewing.

III. Status of RIPs

14. The current situation regarding RIPs both in terms of formulation/endorsement and execution is summarized in the following table.

RSP	RIP formulation	RIP execution
African Soil Partnership (AfSP)	Completed	Initiated
Asian Soil Partnership (ASP)	Completed	Strongly under way
European Soil Partnership (ESP)	Completed	Initiated
Eurasian Soil Partnership (EaSP)	Completed	Strongly under way
Near East and North Africa Soil Partnership (NENASP)	Completed	Initiated
South America Soil Partnership (SASP)	Completed	Initiated
Central America, Caribbean and Mexico Soil Partnership	Completed	Strongly under way
Pacific Soil Partnership	Underway	Not yet initiated

RSP	RIP formulation	RIP execution
North American Soil Partnership	Underway	Not yet initiated