



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations



Call for Proposals

Soil Research Projects

Introduction

The FAO's Global Soil Partnership and the Eurasian Soil Partnership (EASP), in collaboration with the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS), are pleased to announce a call for short-term soil research projects.

This initiative responds to the implementation of the activity 3.1.2. *Promote and support soil salinity studies in selected topics to close identified gaps in knowledge* of the Eurasian Soil Partnership Implementation Plan. After the success of the first call in 2017, which funded research projects on remediation of and adaptation to soil salinity in five Central Asian countries, a second call is being launched to cover new topics and to address in more detail the previous ones. An FAO publication with the promising results of the first set of projects is under preparation.

Salt-affected soils (both saline and sodic soils) includes soils containing soluble salts or their ions in at least one of their horizons in quantities that are above the threshold of toxicity – the maximal permissible concentration of salts that does not suppress plant growth. Eurasian region characterizes for having salt-affected soils in most countries, which occupy a total area of about 242 million hectares (Khitrov et al., 2008). Salinization and alkalinization are known to reduce crop yields, and above certain thresholds, to inhibit crop production. It is therefore necessary to tackle and minimize the effects of this important soil threat that affects the region to guarantee food security and to achieve the 2030 sustainable agenda. There are many possible solutions to adapt to or to remediate soil salinity and to rationally use salt-affected soils, but there are also innovative solutions that need to be tested or adapted to local conditions.

In addition, some Eurasian countries, such as Ukraine, Moldova and Kazakhstan are rich in high-organic carbon black soils. In contrast, many soils in South Caucasus and Central Asia have low SOC stocks, which is reducing due to intensive management of soils and to climate warming. Soil organic matter (SOM) is a key element of soil health because it regulates many soil functions, including carbon storage as soil organic carbon (SOC); the storage, availability and cycling of plant nutrients; soil biodiversity; soil porosity, aeration, water-holding capacity and hydraulic conductivity; thermal properties; and mechanical strength. The link between SOM and soil fertility has been known for more than a century. The role of soils and SOC in the climate system and in the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation has also been recognized. Managing SOM is one of the key strategies for achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN). The conservation and monitoring of SOC stocks at the national to global levels is a complex challenge requiring locally adapted policies to ensure the effective implementation of relevant practices. Due to the importance of soil organic carbon in Eurasian soils, topics covering sustainable soil management practices to enhance and sequester SOC will also be considered.

The aim of this initiative is to facilitate targeted research and partnerships between scientists and local/national beneficiaries that would form a stable basis for long-term collaborative engagement to scale up the implementation of sustainable soil management (SSM) practices to adapt to or to mitigate soil salinity and climate change.

Applications will be accepted until 31st May 2019.

Thematic areas

Applications should be focused on the following thematic areas:

- ♣ Assessment of soil salinity and sustainable soil management practices to reduce anthropogenic salinization and alkalization;
- ♣ Sustainable soil management practices to retain and/or increase soil organic carbon with an emphasis in carbon rich black soils.

Assessment criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- ♣ Scientific excellence and technical merit;
- ♣ Innovation potential;
- ♣ Capacity and competencies of the project team;
- ♣ Project design, objectives and measurement of research impacts;
- ♣ Application perspectives and sustainability of impact;
- ♣ Targeted research (addressing practical issues from users); and
- ♣ Potential use of the research outputs.

Gender criteria will be consider when evaluating the proposals.

Who can apply?

- Eurasian Soil Partnership partners with long-standing experience in soil salinity and soil organic carbon;
- Other institutions (universities, research centers) with experience in soil salinity and soil organic carbon (they would have to become a GSP partner prior to applying);
- Each research team should have at least one student/postdoctoral researcher who will make substantial contributions to the SRP outputs, and having at least one female scientist/investigator will be an asset;
- Only proposal from institutions or individuals from EASP partner countries, namely: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, will be considered. Turkey and Russian Federation has been excluded from this call.

How to submit your proposal?

To receive full consideration, proposals shall be submitted in English and in accordance with the above guidelines using the template provided.

- Individual proposals must be submitted under one thematic area only. More than one proposal by the same team or group may be submitted under different thematic areas.

- Proposals shall be submitted in MS Word or Adobe Acrobat format and shall be sent to the GSPSecretariat@fao.org by 31st May 2019 COB.

Budget

The call will support research projects ranging from 10 000 to 15 000 USD in total for a maximum duration of 18 months.

The proposals will be evaluated according to the assessment criteria listed above. Following the evaluation process, only successful applicants will be contacted by the Global Soil Partnership Secretariat.

For further information, please contact us via email at GSP-Secretariat@fao.org.