

**OPENING ADDRESS PRESENTED BY PROF. VICTOR O. CHUDE CHAIR OF
THE AfSP AT THE THIRD AFRICAN SOIL PARTNERSHIP MEETING 13TH JUNE,
2018 FAO ROME, ITALY.**

The Director, Land and Water Division, Mr. Eduardo Mansur, The Secretary to the GSP, Mr. Ronald Vargas, Mr. Valere Nzeyimana, of the AfSP Secretariat, FAO RAF, Consultant to the GSP Secretariat, Liesl Wiese and All GSP/AfSP Focal Points.

I am pleased to be here with you today on the 3rd African Soil Partnership Meeting to listen to feedbacks from Focal Points on Soil-related activities implemented in the period 2015 -2017, identify gaps towards the development of work plans, develop a budget that will span from 2018 – 2019 and together with you all identify ways of making the partnership active and lively. I have seen on the programme of events that the Afrisoils Side Events will hold later in the afternoon. We are all expected to participate fully and actively to ensure that the Side Event records huge success.

The current African Soil Partnership (AfSP) emerged from the consolidation of two earlier sub-regional partnerships in May 2015 at Elmina, Ghana. These are the Western and Central soil partnership (WCASP) launched in February 2013 in Accra, Ghana, and the Eastern and Southern soil partnership (ESASP) launched in March 2013 in Nairobi, Kenya. The consolidation brought together interested and active stakeholders within sub-Sahara Africa has a Secretariat at the FAO Regional Office for Africa, Accra.

The aim of the AfSP was to establish an interactive consultative process with national soils entities (soil survey institutions, soil management institutions, scientific soil societies, and soil scientists working on land resources, climate change and biodiversity institutions/programmes, etc), as well as with regional Soil Science Societies and other relevant regional mechanisms under the various related conventions to discuss and promote issues related to sustainable management and use of soil and natural resources on the continent.

The African Soil Partnership consists of 38 Sub-Saharan countries out of which about 30 have been consistent and active in support of various activities. Sustainable soil management (SSM) identified by members include

- Addressing soil degradation as a major factor in food insecurity and making country and region-wide efforts to rehabilitate degraded lands and change them to productive assets through community participation (Related to Pillar 1).

- Guiding and enabling the implementation of sound and sustainable soil management practices and the restoration of soil health at all levels towards food security (Related to Pillar 1).
- Developing, updating and disseminating updated and harmonized national and regional soil resource information addressing all user needs including soil fertility information and making the best use of science available to increase soil productivity (Related to Pillars 4 and 5).
- Addressing climate change and developing resilience towards climate change adaptation (Related to Pillars 1 and 3).
- Developing and implementing training and capacity building programmes in all soil applications for existing and new generations of experts in soil science and land management, taking into account the gender balance (Related to Pillar 2).
- Establishing linkages and networks with other national, regional and global initiatives that impact soil health (Related to Pillars 1 and 2).

Events after the 4th GSP Plenary Assembly

- African representatives on the ITPS have been very active and supportive of the various activities and works of the group since 2015.
- Some AfSP members participated in the 7th International Conference of the African Soil Science Society held in Ouagadougou from 29 May-5 June 2016 during which a presentation was given by the chair on the AfSP and RIPs.
- AfSP Secretariat in partnership with the GSP Secretariat organised a Side Event at the 7th International Conference of the ASSS on 1 June 2016 aimed at giving visibility to the activities of the AfSP and GSP in relation to promoting soil issues and also to introduce the RIPs of Africa to the larger group for buy-in and support especially during implementation.
- AfSP members who were part of the **International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII)** participated in the meeting held on 24 and 25 November 2016 to look at the development of the Global Soil Organic Carbon map.
- Some members supported the development of the **Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM)** which was approved during the 25th session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG25) and endorsed by the FAO Council in December 2016.

- Focal points were encouraged to partner their national soil science societies and relevant government agencies in their respective countries to organize and celebrate the 2016 World Soil Day on December 5 under the theme: **“soils and pulses: a symbiosis for life”**.
- Participants from 5 african countries benefitted from a 2-week training in digital training leading to the production of digital Soil Organic Carbon Map at ISRIC in June 2017.
- Further 30 participants from other countries received support in the form of capacity development for preparation of national Soil Organic Carbon Maps as a contribution to the Global Soil Organic Carbon from 3-7 July 2017 at Nairobi, Kenya.
- Countries that successfully completed the production of their maps submitted them to the GSP for consideration and inclusion in the first publication of the SOCMaP.
- Celebration of the 2017 World Soil Day was promoted among members’
- Members were encouraged to contribute and support very important events such as the first ever Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon (GSOC) held in 2017 and the recently held Global Symposium on Soil Pollution (GSOP).
- Continuous encouragement of countries to promote the sustainable management of soil and natural resources while finding creative ways of highlighting the importance of soils in achieving continental and global nutrition, food security and environmental goals.

Challenges

- Inadequate capacity, knowledge and experience to plan and implement SSM and optimally manage, mitigate and monitor the productive and degradation status of the soils; especially under intensive cultivation.
- Where regional and national SSM policies exist, financing is often not a priority and/or implementation can be ineffective due to a lack of political will or a lack of implementation capacity. In many countries policies regulating soil use are lacking.
- Soil information/data at national level is often inadequate, outdated, not in digital format and not geo-referenced. Data availability is further restricted by intellectual property often held by private institutions that are not willing to share data for national use, or data needs to be paid for prior to use. Also, Weak linkages between researchers, farmers and extension services to optimize information exchange.
- Limited access of farmers to new sustainable soil management technologies.

- Absence of strong national or umbrella organizations leading the campaign for promoting and raising awareness on SSM.
- Under investment in research and development and infrastructure.
- Lack of functional competitive markets
- Predominance of customary land tenure
- Stagnating agricultural productivity, low fertilizer use and high population growth.

Looking into the future

- To hold a meeting of the AfSP among country focal points to deliberate on issues of concern to the Partnership especially making it vibrant and more involved in national, regional and global initiatives and programmes (which would take place today).
- Explore the possibility of organising a capacity building training on the implementation of the VGSSM at country level.
- Count on the expertise of the GSP and FAO RAF in the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management at country level. This includes Diffusion events and local level training among various stakeholders.
- To encourage the organisation of in-country sensitization workshops with assistance from GSP and FAO RAF (where feasible) for Policy makers, Development Partners and Civil Society Organizations on the concept of AfSP and the RIPs with a view to advocating the mainstreaming of relevant AfSP activities into country programmes for national budget funding.
- To continue to explore the possibility of organising a Regional capacity building training on the Soil Doctor Programme while building on on the existing capacities of experts trained last year on the digital SOCMAP production.
- Appropriate recognition of the paramount role of soils and Soil Science in ensuring food security and providing key ecosystem services.

Recommendations

- Actions towards healthy/fertile soils should be rapidly implemented to successfully combat the challenge of food security, sustainable intensification of food production and poverty reduction in Africa. This is to ensure the Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) achieve **SDG 2** (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture), **SDG 13** (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) and **SDG 15** (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial

ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss).

- Execution of the AfSP implementation Plan should be funded by GSP partners so as to reverse soil degradation in Africa and promote sustainable soil management and enhance food and nutrition security in the region.

Acknowledgement

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Thank you.