

June 2020

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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Eighth session

Virtual, 03-05 June 2020

Status of Global Symposia (GSPPA:VIII/2020/6)

Executive Summary

- Since 2017, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) has decided to organize Global Symposia addressing the ten soil threats identified in the Status of the World Soils Resources report.
- The topics covered so far are: Soil Organic Carbon (2017), Soil Pollution (2018) and Soil Erosion (2019). These symposia were successful in bringing together large numbers of participants: decision makers, scientists, NGOs, the private sector, representatives from GSP partners and other UN panels and institutions.
- As now an established practice, an outcome document of each Symposium is developed where a comprehensive agenda for action is presented. Follow-up is ensured by all co-organizing partners under the leadership of the ITPS and the Secretariat playing the role of facilitator. Global Symposia on Soil Biodiversity and Salt-Affected Soils were planned to be organized during 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to be postponed to 2021 – see new dates below - while the ITPS and the Secretariat had all arrangements in place for their fulsome implementation.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- Express appreciation for the efforts made in organizing global symposia so far and the active implementation of the related outcome documents.
- Endorse the postponement of the Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity “Keep soil alive, protect soil biodiversity” to 2-4 February 2021 and encourage participation of experts and decision makers from member countries and other partners.
- Likewise, endorse the postponement of the Global Symposium on Salt-Affected Soils “*Halt soil salinity, boost soil productivity*” to be held on 13-16 September 2021 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and call for strong participation of interested parties.

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- Endorse the convening of the Global Symposium on Soil Fertility to be held in March 2022 at FAO HQ.
- Urge countries and other partners to join in the efforts of the ITPS, the Secretariat and co-organizers to implement the actions indicated in the outcome documents of all past symposia.

Brief highlights connected with the Symposia

1. Substantial progress was made in implementing the “unlocking the potential of soil organic carbon”, as called for the pertinent outcome document. Examples of the main activities are:
 - the development of the Recarbonization of Global Soils (RECSOIL) initiative to be rolled out in 2021;
 - the preparation of the GSOC-MRV;
 - the preparation of the Global Soil Organic Carbon sequestration potential map;
 - the issuance of the Technical Manual of best practices for SOC maintenance and sequestration;

2. Follow up to the “be the solution to pollution” outcome document was distinguished by the following actions:
 - the Global Assessment of Soil Pollution (GASP) - in particular the regional chapters, has been supported by an extensive network of national experts who have reviewed the information provided by countries in response to the questionnaire sent in 2019. The report is currently under finalization and will be issued in February 2021;
 - ad hoc expert working groups were established, composed of over 60 international experts, who have actively contributed to the development of Technical Guidelines for assessing, mapping, monitoring and reporting on soil pollution and the compilation of a database on best available techniques for the management and remediation of point-source and diffuse soil pollution.

3. The “Stop soil erosion, save our future” outcome document led to the following activities:
 - a scientific working group tasked to concretize the symposium recommendations into practical steps for country-driven information update on soil erosion;
 - the practical steps outlined by the special working group are being converted into country guidelines and technical specifications for generating information updates. This process is spearheaded by the Pillar 4 Working Group and the ITPS. The GSP Secretariat and Pillar 4 Working Group are also developing tools for data collection and harmonization, which will be shared with countries via capacity development.

4. As mentioned above, the preparations for the Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity initially planned for 10-12 March 2020, had been fully carried out before the postponement decision. In effect, there was a record in terms of registered participants (627 participants from 95 countries), 258 abstracts received (160 selected by the scientific committee, 40 for poster and 120 for oral presentations), 6 side events confirmed and all speakers available. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the symposium was postponed initially to 1-3 June 2020 and

subsequently to 2-4 February 2021. The Secretariat will seek to ensure that this momentum of interest on the issue of soil biodiversity and the symposium itself will continue, with a campaign linked to the World Soil Day 2020 celebration and until February 2021.

5. The Global Symposium on Salt-Affected Soils (GSSAS20) initially planned for 12-16 October 2020 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan was also under active preparation. The Symposium concept note was fully prepared and endorsed by the ITPS. After the endorsement of the new dates of 13-16 September 2021, a Symposium webpage will be launched, coupled with a vigorous awareness-raising campaign.