



Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

Tenth extraordinary session

Virtual, 30 June 2022

Assessment of the implications of an eventual institutionalization of the Global Soil Partnership (GSPPA: X-ex/2022/2)

Executive Summary

- In response to the request from the 27th session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), reports on the legal¹ and financial² implications of a proposed institutionalization of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) were prepared. Five options were identified: (1) status quo (GSP remains as it is); (2) a commission or committee under Article VI of the Constitution (an Article VI Body); (3) a commission or committee under Article XIV of the Constitution (an Article XIV Body); (4) a subsidiary body of COAG (a COAG Sub-Committee) and; (5) a COAG Sub-Committee and maintaining the GSP with all its components.
- After considering the institutional and financial implications included in this analysis, the 10th GSP Plenary Assembly³ manifested its full support to maintain the GSP with all its components, and requested further detailed information on the option 5 (establishing a COAG Sub-Committee on Soils and maintaining the GSP with all its components) and its implications.
- The Plenary Assembly further recommended the organization of an Extraordinary Session of the GSP prior to the COAG 28th Session (18-22 July 2022), to review the detailed implications of option 5 and provide a recommendation to be discussed at the 28th Session of COAG.

Suggested actions by the GSP Plenary Assembly

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- provide recommendations regarding the institutionalization of the GSP into a statutory body for the attention of the 28th Session of the COAG.

¹ www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/tenth_PA/Annex_2_Legal_implications.pdf

² www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/tenth_PA/Annex_3_Financial_Implications.pdf

³ www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/tenth_PA/GSPPA_X_Report2022.pdf

2.1 Assessment of the implications of an eventual institutionalization of the GSP

1. The [8th Plenary Assembly, in principle](#), supported the institutional repositioning of the GSP as an FAO statutory body. However, it appealed to the Secretariat to perform a sound assessment of the legal and financial implications, including the impact on the participation of non-state stakeholders. This request was submitted to the 27th session of the COAG (2020) for consideration.
2. The [27th session of the COAG](#) acknowledged the findings of the evaluation of the GSP and called on the Secretariat to carry out a detailed analysis of the legal and financial implications of this eventual institutionalization, including on the involvement of non-state stakeholders, the decision-making process, the roles of the Regional Soil Partnerships and focal points. The Committee asked that the findings of the assessment be submitted to its 28th Session.
3. The Secretariat performed the requested analysis of the implications of an eventual institutionalization of the GSP for the consideration of the 10th GSP Plenary Assembly. The analysis provided four options: (1) status quo (GSP remains as it is); (2) a commission or committee under Article VI of the Constitution (an Article VI Body); (3) a commission or committee under Article XIV of the Constitution (an Article XIV Body); (4) a subsidiary body of COAG (a COAG Sub-Committee). and; (5) a COAG Sub-Committee and maintaining the GSP with all its components.
4. Taking note of the provided legal and financial analysis of implications of an eventual formalization of the GSP, and considering the five options (though the fifth option did not include detailed analysis), the Plenary Assembly manifested its full support to maintain the GSP with all its component.
5. While there was some support towards the fifth option, the Plenary Assembly did not reach consensus regarding the establishment of a Sub-Committee on soils under COAG while maintaining the GSP with all its components.
6. Many questions were asked regarding this option, particularly in regards to the need for further clarification on the potential overlap between the GSP and the new Sub-Committee in terms of financial resources, workplan, reporting lines, coordination, roles and responsibilities.
7. To obtain clarity on the detailed implications of this option, reach a consensus between GSP Members and partners, and provide a clear recommendation to the 28th session of COAG, the Plenary Assembly recommended the organization of an extraordinary session of the GSP prior to the 28th Session of COAG.
8. Annex 1 includes responses to the main questions raised by GSP members during the 10th Plenary Assembly to serve as an input for the extraordinary session of the GSP.

Annex 1

1. What will be the concrete benefits of creating another body and maintaining the GSP?

In ten years of existence, the GSP was able to position soils in the global agenda. The GSP became the mechanism to promote sustainable soil management at all levels. Its voluntary nature allowing the participation of non-state stakeholders constitutes a very important added value, while being hosted in FAO under an intergovernmental platform gives the Partnership a unique comparative advantage.

Because of the importance of soils for food security and the provision of ecosystem services, the soil agenda will benefit from the full engagement of FAO Members into the topic, recognizing that sustainable soil management should not be an option but a responsibility.

The GSP will benefit by focusing on the technical matters involving non-state stakeholders, while a COAG Sub-Committee on Soils will focus on the institutional and policy aspects around sustainable soil management. The Sub-Committee would benefit from the science and technical work of the GSP. Together, the GSP and the Sub-Committee could ensure a concrete science-policy interface.

2. If option 5 is chosen, how would the new body and the GSP coordinate? Who would report to whom and how? Would the Plenary Assembly still exist if option 5 is maintained? Wouldn't it be a duplication in reporting to COAG?

The proposed Sub-Committee on Soils under FAO's Committee on Agriculture (COAG) would guide the Organization in soil related matters. The GSP will remain in its current status – a global voluntary platform composed of both FAO Members and non-state stakeholders to promote sustainable soil management, for which FAO hosts the Secretariat.

Considering the roles of both bodies, the GSP would liaise, through the GSP Secretariat, with the Sub-Committee on Soils, while the latter would report directly to COAG.

The GSP work would be guided by the just endorsed Action Framework 2022-2030 and would focus on technical matters. The Sub-Committee on Soils would focus on institutional and policy aspects of soils benefiting from and supported by the work of the GSP. All activities that require decision making by FAO Members would be firstly discussed by the Sub-Committee on Soils (one session every two years).

The GSP would continue organizing its Plenary Assembly but would have one session every two years (not coinciding with the session of the Sub-committee)⁴.

3. What would be the governance of the GSP if another body is created? Who would be the secretary/secretariat?

The GSP would continue to be governed by its Plenary Assembly, but would report and provide technical support through the GSP Secretariat to the Sub-Committee on Soils.

As mentioned above, the GSP and the proposed Sub-Committee on Soils would convene alternately one session every two years. It is proposed that the current GSP Secretariat would provide secretariat services to both of them. This dual Secretariat support will not put additional strains on the GSP budget, but lead to greater efficiency of recourses, complementarity of tasks and help avoid overlaps.

4. How will the independence of the GSP be guaranteed if option 5 is chosen?

⁴ The Rules of Procedure provide that “The Plenary Assembly shall hold one regular session every year”. This rule may have to be amended if the GSP members agree to hold a Plenary Assembly every 2 years.

The GSP would maintain its independence and existing components, governed by the Plenary Assembly, and would link through GSP Secretariat to the proposed COAG Sub-Committee on Soils (currently GSP reports to COAG through the GSP Secretariat).

5. Would option 5 (GSP and Sub-Committee on Soils) restrict the current activities of GSP (including technical networks) and the new Action Framework in any sense? What would be the role of technical networks?

If option 5 is considered (GSP and Sub-Committee on Soils) the current and future activities under the new Action Framework will not be affected as they will continue, focusing on the technical aspects of soils. All Technical Networks, including the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS), would continue their activities and they will provide technical support through the GSP to the Sub-Committee on Soils in their respective fields of expertise.

6. How to ensure financial sustainability? How would voluntary contributions be divided between the new body and the GSP? Concerns are raised about funds being diverted only to maintain the new body and not invested in the field.

The GSP relies on voluntary contributions by resource partners. Efforts for resource mobilization will continue via the Healthy Soils Facility in order to continue the implementation of activities under the new GSP Action Framework. These would include activities of the Sub-Committee on Soils, which financial implications are mainly related to the organization of its session every two years (interpretation and translation services currently estimated at USD 100 000 per year). Basically, the GSP Plenary Assembly would be held in one year and the Sub-Committee on Soils in another year, which would not imply any financial increase as these services are usually ensured for the plenary anyway.

Financial sustainability will depend on the resource mobilization efforts and certainly the resources would be addressing the activities of the GSP and the organization of the session of the Sub-Committee on soils.

Maintaining the GSP and establishing a Sub-Committee on Soils under COAG funded from voluntary contributions, has no budgetary implications for the regular programme budget of the Organization.

7. What would be the role of non-state stakeholders? The role of non-state stakeholders would be diminished?

If options 2, 3 and 4 are considered, non-state stakeholders would have limited or no role in the new committee, commission or Sub-Committee, as they are all FAO statutory bodies.

If option 5 is considered (GSP and a Sub-Committee on Soils) non-state stakeholders involvement in the GSP would remain the same, however they would not be able to join the new Sub-Committee.

8. What would be the role of Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) and National Soil Partnerships (NSPs)?

If option 5 is considered (GSP and a Sub-Committee on Soils), national and regional soil partnerships would continue functioning in the GSP and previous efforts would not be lost.