

ITPS-III/15/Report

Report of the Third Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils

Potsdam, Germany, 13-17 April 2015



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

itps
INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL
PANEL ON SOILS

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**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
Rome, 2015**

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CONTENTS

1.	Opening of the session	1
2.	Adoption of the Agenda, Timetable and election of Rapporteur	1
3.	Review and endorsement (as appropriate) of Pillar 3 Plan of Action and progress report on Pillars 1, 2, 4 and 5	1
	Presentation of Draft Plan of Action for Pillar 3.....	1
	Progress Report on Pillars 1, 2, 4 and 5.....	2
4.	Endorsement of the “Status of World Soil Resources Report” and way forward	3
5.	Draft concept note on “Sustainable management of soil resources” (as requested by the 24th session of the Committee on Agriculture).....	4
6.	Status of collaboration between ITPS and IPBES, IPCC and the SPI of UNCCD (with special focus on the upcoming joint meeting with the SPI of the UNCCD)	5
7.	Report about Soils and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Post-2015 agenda.5	
8.	Report on the implementation of the International Year of Soils 2015	6
9.	ITPS representation at the next GSP Plenary Assembly	6
10.	Date and venue of the next meeting	7
11.	Any Other Business	7
	Extended discussion on the process for renewing the ITPS.....	7
	Status of the World’s Soil Resources.....	7
	Governance and regional matters.....	7
12.	Closing session	8
	ANNEX I: List of Participants	9

1. Opening of the session

- The Third Working Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) of the Global Soil Partnership was held at the Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Potsdam, Germany from the 13th to the 17th of April, 2015.
- The meeting was opened by the ITPS Chair (Dr Luca Montanarella). Dr Jes Weigelt (IASS, Co-Lead Sustainability Governance Programme) welcomed members and provided an overview of IASS and preparations for Global Soil Week in Berlin (19th to the 23rd April, 2015).
- On Tuesday 14th afternoon, Mr Alexander Müller (Secretary General IASS) also welcomed ITPS members. In recalling that Mr Müller had played a key role in the establishment of the GSP, the Panel thanked him for his great achievements. Mr Müller emphasized the importance of the International Year of Soils and the work of the ITPS, especially in providing a fundamental scientific input into the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) process.

2. Adoption of the Agenda, Timetable and election of Rapporteur

- Two additional items were proposed and scheduled for the Friday morning session: a final review of the Summary for Policy Makers; and a discussion of the nomination process for the next ITPS.
- Dr Neil McKenzie, Dr Jon Hempel and Dr Abdullah AlShankiti agreed to be rapporteurs for the session.

3. Review and endorsement (as appropriate) of Pillar 3 Plan of Action and progress report on Pillars 1, 2, 4 and 5

Presentation of Draft Plan of Action for Pillar 3

The ITPS was joined by the chair of the working group for Pillar Three, Dr Aracely Castro (formerly CIAT and now FAO, Rome). Mr Ronald Vargas (GSP Secretariat) provided introductory comments, noting that this was the most challenging of all the Pillar plans for a variety of reasons, and explaining the revision process since the second session of the ITPS in 2014, as follows:

- At its second session, the ITPS had nominated a Working Group consisting of members who were attending the 20th World Congress of Soil Science held in Jeju, Korea (June 8-13, 2014).
- This Working Group noted improvements to the preliminary draft but acknowledged its shortcomings. They agreed to appoint a sub-group of three expert members of the Pillar Three Working Group (Bernd Bussian, Olegario Muñiz and Charles Rice) to develop an improved document. The resulting third version of the Pillar Three Plan of Action was shared with the full Working Group for review in December 2014 and then submitted to the GSP-Secretariat in January 2015.
- In February, two external reviewers (Rattan Lal and Johan Bouma) made additional recommendations.
- The Working Group amended the draft plan in response to the external review prior to submission to this session of the ITPS.

The following issues were raised during the discussions:

- The recommendations needed to clearly define the agents responsible for proposed actions.

- The format and style of the plan needed to be consistent with the other four pillar plans. Likewise, definitions and terminology needed to be consistent.
- In the interests of transparency, each step in the preparation of the plan needed to be clear. The chair noted that this should include the original 29 regional representatives involved in the process.

ITPS members provided suggestions for changes to both the recommendations and text. In conclusion, Members noted that the plan was not perfect but a significant improvement was made from previous versions.

Summary outcomes:

- a) The ITPS endorsed the Pillar Three Plan of Action for submission to the GSP Plenary.

Progress Report on Pillars 1, 2, 4 and 5

The Panel received an update on progress with the implementation of the Plans of Action for Pillars 1, 2, 4 and 5. It was recalled that:

- The Plans of Action approved by the previous sessions of the ITPS were submitted to and endorsed – after amendment – by the Second Session of the Global Soil Partnership Plenary of 22-24th July 2014.
- The GSP Rules and Procedures specified that the endorsed plans move to implementation under the coordination of the Secretariat
- In view of the focus of Pillars 1 and 2 on regional and national activities, the Regional Partnerships were the prime vehicles for implementation. Regional workshops were being organized and Regional Implementation Plans were being prepared.
- Given Pillar 4's essentially global focus, a working group with regional representation had been established. The ITPS Chair and the Chair of the working group for Pillar 4 had been invited to be part of the working group. A facilitator had been appointed by the GSP Secretariat to help guide the implementation process.
- The second version of the Pillar 4 Implementation Plan was currently being circulated for comment (see discussion below)
- As regards Pillar 5, also global in nature, a facilitator from Germany would soon take on the task of preparing the implementation plan.

Clarification was sought on the role of the ITPS in the implementation process. The GSP Secretariat explained that the ITPS had a role of providing guidance and commentary on the implementation process whereas the GSP Secretariat had a role in the operational components. As an example, the Chair was responsible for distributing the revised implementation plan for Pillar 4.

- Members discussed a range of concerns about the implementation process, including more transparency in the involvement of the ITPS, bearing in mind dispositions in the Rules of Procedure of the GSP.

It was noted that the decision by the GSP Plenary to have a system of country focal points was a significant step to ensure more efficient communication and work processes. Focal points were being appointed by at least 108 countries .

ITPS members suggested that each ITPS member should act as an alternate for their country's focal point as the need arose. It was noted that several current ITPS members were also country focal points.

The Secretariat emphasized the constraints in resourcing implementation activities. The major cash donor at this stage was the European Commission, with supporting contributions coming from the Netherlands, Switzerland, the International Fertilizer Association and Thailand. Many other countries were making smaller contributions through in-kind resources.

The need of ensuring support through the Regional FAO Offices was raised. It was agreed that the International Year of Soils was important for increasing visibility of the GSP. However, there was still a lot to be done and most Regional Offices had a wide range of competing priorities.

The broader issue of communication in relation to the implementation of the pillars was raised. Members emphasized the need for the ITPS and GSP to have clearer key messages and an agenda for action. The Chair confirmed a request for a written note on the processes for implementation of pillar plans which would be prepared by the Secretariat.

On the basis of the initial discussions, the chair proposed a separate consideration of the implementation process for Pillar Four. Members noted a range of issues including.

- The initial draft of the implementation plan was not consistent with the Pillar Four Plan of Action and this had caused some confusion. This issue was being resolved and the final version would be consistent with the recommendations and text of the endorsed plan of action.

A key issue was the specification of delivery dates for major products. Members considered that some of the proposed activities had timelines that were too aggressive and that some were not feasible (e.g. the monitoring activities relating to SoilSTAT). Hence, the Chair asked Jon Hempel to prepare a summary to be forwarded to David Rossiter (consultant to the FAO and responsible for preparing the implementation document). The Secretariat clarified that change of dates in the current plans of action would require approval from the GSP Plenary Assembly.

Summary outcomes:

- a) The GSP Secretariat would prepare and distribute a written summary of the implementation process to provide the ITSP, GSP partners and other stakeholders with a clear statement that encourage transparency and efficiency.
- b) A summary of feedback on Pillar Four would be provided to David Rossiter (consultant preparing the implementation document) by Monday 20th April.
- c) The Chair of the ITPS with support from the GSP Secretariat would keep members informed of developments in the implementation process for each pillar.

4. Endorsement of the “Status of World Soil Resources Report” and way forward

The Chair provided an overview of the process for preparing the ‘Status of the World’s Soil Resources’ (SWSR), noting that the *Summary for policy makers* was destined to the GSP Plenary. The full report of 680+ pages would be published in English only.

The Chair thanked Freddy Nachtergaele for his outstanding contribution as Managing Editor and welcomed him to the meeting. The Chair also thanked the GSP Secretariat for its excellent support and Dan Pennock and Neil McKenzie for their contributions particularly in relation to the *Summary for Policymakers*.

The Managing Editor gave a comprehensive presentation on the production process, authors, and content. Dan Pennock outlined the process of preparation of the *Summary for Policy Makers* and stressed the following.

- All statements must have a factual basis
- The key messages were critical and needed to be refined
- The opening page (subsequently named the 'Key messages from the ITPS') would not be edited by the Plenary .

Members then discussed a range of issues and suggested changes to the *Summary for Policy Makers*. Members went through a group process to rank the importance of threats to soil function and these were used to restructure text and tables. At the end, the ITPS endorsed the *Summary for Policy Makers*, to be submitted to the GSP Plenary in June 2015.

The ITPS also reviewed the main report and discussed various aspects. All members were asked to check the full manuscript and make suggestions for change while recognizing the constraints of the production process.

Summary outcomes:

- a) The ITPS endorsed the *Summary for Policy Makers* for submission to the GSP Plenary in June 2015.
- b) All ITPS members should check the main report and make suggestions for change. These comments needed to be submitted by the end of May 2015.

5. Draft concept note on “Sustainable management of soil resources” (as requested by the 24th session of the Committee on Agriculture)

The ITPS considered a draft of the concept prepared by the GSP Secretariat, while being appraised of additional context including the related “*Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*.”

ITPS members sought clarification on a range of matters including the purpose of the voluntary guidelines, the extent of stakeholder engagement required during preparation, and the best process for developing the proposed guidelines. ITPS members were strongly supportive of the proposal and noted that it would complement existing key documents (e.g. World Soil Charter, Status of the World’s Soil Resources) and provide a natural focus for ITPS/GSP activities in the coming years. The linkage to the proposed indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals (Item 7 below) was seen as being very important.

Summary outcomes:

- a) The revised concept note on sustainable management of soil resources was endorsed by the ITPS and would be submitted to the Plenary Assembly for approval

6. Status of collaboration between ITPS and IPBES, IPCC and the SPI of UNCCD (with special focus on the upcoming joint meeting with the SPI of the UNCCD)

ITPS members welcomed the forthcoming meeting with the Science Policy Interface of the UNCCD at Global Soil Week on the 20th of April, 2015. Members reviewed the agenda for the joint meeting and considered the ITPS presentations at that meeting. Several topics of likely common interest were discussed including:

- finding a way to operationalize the concepts relating to land degradation neutrality
- developing a clear definition of soil and land that promote a systems view while at the same time retaining the focus on key components of terrestrial systems.

It was recognized that this first meeting was essentially about familiarization, consultation and establishing the relationship. Members returned to this Agenda Item during general discussions on Item 11. It was agreed that the meeting between the ITPS and SPI was a significant and historical event. Finally, a key issue facing everyone involved in the development of SDGs was how to ensure the scientific basis and credibility of the concepts behind a Land Degradation Neutral World and the proposed indicators. These were difficult and complex topics and they needed to be closely scrutinized because of their economic and political significance.

Summary outcomes:

- a) All ITPS members attending Global Soil Week were to participate in the joint meeting with the UNCCD SPI on Monday 20th April, 2015.

7. Report about Soils and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Post-2015 agenda

The chair illustrated the soil-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets. He proposed a draft set of indicators for the ITPS to consider. The relevant targets for SDGs 2, 3 and 15 were:

Target 2.4: By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

Target 3.9: By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination.

Target 15.3: By 2020, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world

Members discussed the many factors at play in defining soil indicators. However, a clear consensus emerged that focused on the adoption rates of sustainable soil management. In proposing the indicators, the ITPS members noted the importance of the proposed Voluntary Guidelines on Sustainable Soil Management. This publication was essential for the implementation of the indicators.

It was noted that estimation of the area under sustainable soil management practices would allow estimation of the rate of adoption of sustainable soil management practices and estimation of the net change in the area of degraded versus restored soils.

Summary outcomes:

The ITPS proposed the following soil indicators:

- a) **Target 2.4:** 'Area under sustainable soil management practices'
- b) **Target 3.9:** 'Concentration levels of pollutants in air, water, soil.'
- c) **Target 15.3:** 'Area under sustainable soil management practices' OR 'Net change in the area of degraded versus restored soils'

8. Report on the implementation of the International Year of Soils 2015

The Panel noted the following key facts:

- Funding to the GSP for the IYS was primarily from Thailand (100K), Switzerland (100K) and the International Fertilizer Association (58K). However, much greater funding was feeding into the national activities for the IYS around the world.
- The GSP was responsible for much of the IYS as outlined in the plan of action approved by the GSP Plenary in 2014.
- Most resources were being directed towards the communication activities including the production of high quality graphical material and media related activities. An animation on the IYS would be launched at Global Soil Week.
- The highest profile outputs for the IYS would be the report on the State of the World's Soil Resources, the World Soil Charter and a special issue of National Geographic scheduled for World Soil Day.
- The calendar was very full with lots of activities in many countries. These included workshops, conferences with summer schools, the announcement of the IYS Ambassadors and Expo Milano.
- The final event would be on Friday 4th of December in Rome with the launch of the SWSR and other products. The message on that occasion would be that 'the IYS is coming to an end but it is the launch pad for action.'

Members warmly endorsed the excellent work of the GSP Secretariat and highlighted the impact that the National Geographic issue would have. Members agreed that the main challenge was to maintain the momentum.

9. ITPS representation at the next GSP Plenary Assembly

The chair sought input for his presentation at the Plenary on the work of the ITPS .

The Secretariat advised about a series of significant administrative matters relating to the next GSP Plenary.

- The agenda had normally to be completed 90 days ahead of the meeting. However, the GSP Secretariat was still waiting for clearance to release the agenda due to the financial implications for translation (the Plenary required ~\$100K for full translation services). Information on the GSP Plenary would be distributed through three channels: via the official diplomatic channel (ambassadors); via country focal points; and via the GSP Newsletter.
- It was acknowledged that the process for nominating members to the ITPS may have to be revised if there were further delays (applications are due on or before the 10th of May).

10. Date and venue of the next meeting

It was recognized that it was not possible to pre-empt the outcomes of the next GSP Plenary. Should there be a large turnover of members (including the chair), then a meeting of the new ITPS would be needed very soon after the Plenary.

11. Any Other Business

Extended discussion on the process for renewing the ITPS

Several members raised the issue of continuity within the ITPS. It was agreed that a very large turnover would not be good for the work programme of the ITPS and the GSP more generally. Several solutions to the problem were proposed.

- The Plenary Assembly could choose to reappoint the existing members who would still be available. This may be difficult for regions where current negotiations on new appointees were well-advanced.
- The GSP Secretariat would remind partners that appointment for a second term was permitted under the Rules and Procedures.
- It was suggested to change to the Rules and Procedures so that no more than a 70% turnover of members for each region at any one time would be permitted. If a change to the Rules and Procedures was not possible, the principle could be followed in a voluntary way by regions.

Status of the World's Soil Resources

It was proposed that the ITPS should produce a summary paper for either Science or Nature on the SWSR. Synchronized publication for World Soil Day would be essential. The proposal was supported by ITPS members. Several members would take responsibility for the initial draft, while the Chair would negotiate with the journals. .

Governance and regional matters

The chair reminded members on the need for the ITPS to be closely involved in the implementation process for the Plans of Action for each Pillar. Developments in the regions were also briefly addressed.

Summary outcomes:

- a) The chair was to consult with the GSP Secretariat and prepare a set of options for ensuring continuity within the ITSP for the GSP Plenary to consider
- b) A short paper on the SWSR would be prepared with a view to publication in the journal *Science* or *Nature* on or soon after World Soil Day, 2015.

12. Closing session

After the usual round of thanks, the ITPS members were then joined by Professor Dr. Klaus Töpfer (founding Director and current Executive Director of the IASS) and Mr Alexander Müller (Secretary General IASS). The Chair thanked them for hosting the meeting and for providing such good hospitality.

ANNEX I: List of Participants

ITPS Members

Africa

Prof. Dr. Victor Chude – Nigeria
 Dr. Martin Yemefack – Cameroon
 Dr. Isaurinda Baptista – Cape Verde
 Prof. Dr. Tekalign Mamo – Ethiopia

Near East and North Africa

Prof. Dr. Seyed Kazem Alavi Panah – Iran
 Prof. Dr. Elsiddig A. E. ElSheikh – Sudan
 Dr. Abdullah Alshankiti – Saudi Arabia

Latin America and Caribbean

Dr. Julio Alegre – Peru
 Dr. Carlos Roberto Henríquez – Costa Rica
 Dr. David Espinosa Victoria – Mexico
 Dr. Miguel Taboada – Argentina

North America

Prof. Daniel Pennock – Canada
 Dr. Jon Hempel – United States of America

Observers

Dr. Freddy Nachtergaele (Member of the GSP Secretariat)
 Dr. Aracely Castro (Member of the GSP Secretariat)

Asia

Prof. Dr. Milkha Singh Aulakh – India
 Dr. Kazuyuki Yagi – Japan
 Dr. Suk Young Hong – Republic of Korea

Europe

Dr. Pavel Krasilnikov – Russia
 Dr. Jaroslava Sobocká – Slovak Republic
 Dr. Luca Montanarella – Italy
 Dr. Dominique Arrouays – France

South West Pacific

Dr. Marta Camps Arbestain – New Zealand
 Dr. Neil McKenzie – Australia

Apologies and absentees

Dr. Mohamed Badraoui – Morocco
 Dr. Maria de Lourdes Mendonca Santos – Brazil
 Dr. Pisoot Vijarnsorn – Thailand
 Dr. Helaina Black – United Kingdom
 Prof. Dr. Gan Lin Zhang – China