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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

Twelfth session

Hybrid, 3–5 June 2024

Status about Global Symposia

(GSPPA: XII/2024/7)

Executive summary

- Since 2017, annual global soil symposia have been organized addressing the ten threats to soils identified in the Status of the World's Soil Resources (SWSR) report.
- The Global Symposium on Soils and Water was successfully held from 2 to 5 October 2023 in a hybrid format with over 2 540 participants connecting remotely from various countries. The symposium defined a series of priority actions to address integrated soil and water management.
- The Global Symposium on Soil Information and Data (GSID'24), to be convened from 25 to 28 September 2024 in Nanjing, China, will be a collaborative effort under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), its Global Soil Partnership (GSP) and the Institute of Soil Science, Chinese Academy of Sciences (ISSCAS).
- GSID'24 will highlight the crucial role of sound, reliable, and harmonized soil information and data in tackling climate change, sustainable agriculture, and food security. The GSID'24 will serve as a key platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and innovation in the use of soil data.

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Suggested actions by the GSP Plenary Assembly

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- express appreciation for the efforts made in organizing global symposia thus far and in the implementation of the recommendations as outlined in the related outcome documents;
- encourage FAO Members and other partners to join efforts of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, the GSP Secretariat and co-organizers to implement the actions indicated in the outcome documents of all symposia;
- commend the resource partners who have financially supported the organization of these symposia, and encourage new resource partners to fund the forthcoming ones;
- encourage relevant national institutions and stakeholders to actively participate in the upcoming GSID'24;
- invite FAO Members and other partners to host and co-organize upcoming symposia; and
- propose additional topics beyond 2027 and a way forward for the GSP's global symposia.

Background

1. Since 2017, the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) has supported the organization of global symposia addressing the ten threats to soils identified in the Status of the World's Soil Resources (SWSR) report.
2. The topics covered so far are Soil Organic Carbon (2017), Soil Pollution (2018), Soil Erosion (2019), Soil Biodiversity (2020), Soil Salinity (2021), Soils for Nutrition (2022) and Soils and Water (2023). These symposia have been successful in bringing together the science and policy dimensions under each theme, involving substantial numbers of participants who contributed to action-oriented outcome documents.
3. Each outcome document has set out a comprehensive agenda for action addressing a pertinent soil threat. Under the scientific advice of the ITPS, the GSP Secretariat has then facilitated the implementation process, involving all co-organizers, FAO Members, and GSP partners.
4. To date, all outcome documents have been conducive to the active implementation of recommended actions making use of available resources (financial and in-kind). Hence, the symposia have been able to catalyze action at national, regional, and global levels, as appropriate.
5. At the 11th session, the Plenary Assembly endorsed the ITPS suggestion to hold the Global Symposium on Soil Sealing and Urban Soils in 2025, on Soil Compaction and Physical Degradation in 2026, and on Soil Acidification in 2027.
6. No additional proposals have been received, nor are there any topics available beyond 2027. The Plenary Assembly may wish to consider proposing additional topics, requesting the ITPS to suggest new topics, or suggesting another outlet for the GSP's global symposia.

7.1 Report on the Global Symposium on Soils and Water 2023

7. The [Global Symposium on Soils and Water](#) (GSOWA23) - "Soil and water, a source of life" was held in a hybrid format from 2 to 5 October 2023. The symposium brought science and policy together to review the relationship between soil and water in achieving sustainable and resilient agrifood systems. The GSOWA23 was attended by over 2 540 participants from around the world, 55 percent male and 45 percent female.
8. The GSOWA23 was organized along four themes namely, theme 1: Soil and water management in rainfed agriculture, theme 2: Soil and water management in irrigated agriculture; theme 3: Soil and water management under the One Health framework, and theme 4: Integrated soil and water management and effective governance.
9. The [agenda](#) of the Symposium included four renowned key note speakers, four thematic interactive panel discussions, held in hybrid mode, and 20 hours of presentations and interactive discussions held in virtual sessions over the four themes of the Symposium. [Presentations and recordings](#) of the Symposium are available on the GSP website.
10. [Social media cards](#) with dedicated awareness materials were also created. A press release ([English version](#)) was published widely on FAO media.
11. The outcome document of the GSOWA23 summarized the latest research findings and discussions around integrated soil and water management to achieve sustainable and resilient agrifood systems. These findings and conclusions were translated into five recommendations for the GSP:

- i) Build a training programme on soil moisture assessment and monitoring for GSP members in line with the Global Soil Information System (GloSIS);
- ii) Include soil moisture management and integrated soil and water management within the Global Soil Doctors Programme;
- iii) Coordinate actions among GSP technical networks to prevent soil degradation and water quality loss in rainfed and irrigated agriculture;
- iv) Assist FAO Members to develop and strengthen legal frameworks and institutions to ensure integrated and sustainable soil and water management; and
- v) Coordinate actions with other FAO tools, initiatives and projects to support integrated and sustainable soil and water management.

7.2 Preparations for the Global Symposium on Soil Data and Information 2024

12. The Global Symposium on Soil Information and Data (GSID'24), to be convened from 25 to 28 September 2024, in Nanjing, China, will be a collaborative effort under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), its Global Soil Partnership and the Institute of Soil Science, Chinese Academy of Sciences (ISSCAS).
13. The Symposium will serve as a critical forum for deliberation among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners on global challenges, including food security, climate change, and the management of agriculture in a sustainable manner. It aims to underscore the crucial role of consistent and reliable soil data and information in supporting informed policies that strengthen sustainable development and enhance climate resilience.
14. GSID'24 will aim to showcase innovations and address knowledge gaps in soil data collection and analysis harmonization. It will highlight successful implementation of soil information systems that adhere to FAIR data principles (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reusability), emphasizing the importance of leveraging quality soil data for informed decision-making across various scales. Furthermore, the Symposium will explore ethical considerations and data ownership in soil science, prioritizing capacity building and open data initiatives.
15. Structured to include plenary sessions, parallel sessions, side events, and an art exhibition, GSID'24 aims to engage a diverse audience, including over 1 000 in-person participants and more than 5 000 online attendees. The Symposium will be organized as a hybrid event to ensure representation from across the spectrum of stakeholders in soil science, including researchers, policymakers, international organizations, and the private sector. GSID'24 will be a significant milestone in addressing pressing global challenges and advancing collective efforts towards a better data-driven and informed policy making.

7.3 Preparations for the Global Symposium on Soil Sealing and Urban Soils 2025

16. Although urbanized land occupies a small area, with estimates ranging from 0.2 to 2.4 percent of the terrestrial land surface in 2000, their distribution is uneven. Urbanization has been increasing rapidly in many regions, and the conversion of agricultural land, forest and grassland to urban/artificial land uses has grown about 23 percent between 2000 and 2014. By 2030, the expansion will be more prominent, with a potential increase of 185 percent in the global urban extent compared to 2000, affecting particularly fast-growing economies, or countries with a high demographic pressure. A sealed soil is no longer available for any other function/service beyond providing physical support and a place for belowground infrastructures (cables, pipes,

tunnels, etc.). The more evident impacts are on food and biomass provision, water regulation, biodiversity, and potential of carbon sequestration¹.

17. The Global Symposium on Soil Sealing and Urban Soils 2025 will therefore address the impact of urbanization on land use and soil productivity, as well as on ecosystem services. The impact on food availability and biodiversity loss will also be considered.
18. At the same time, the Symposium will review opportunities and look at the potential benefits of green spaces in cities, the growth of urban gardening and its contribution to food security, and policy mechanisms and actions to ensure soil health, including integrated land use planning that can help preserve the most fertile soils from sealing. Nature and ecosystem-based solutions for restoring and reclaiming sealed soils and greening cities will also be explored.
19. The Global Symposium on Soil Sealing and Urban Soils 2025 will be a platform for all stakeholders, including policymakers, farmers, researchers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to collaborate, exchange ideas and share best practices towards improving soil health and productivity.
20. The slogan of the Symposium will be discussed and agreed at this Plenary Assembly according to the following proposal: “*Healthy soils for healthy cities.*” The selected slogan will also be used as the 2024 World Soil Day (WSD) theme (see GSPPA: XII/2024/10).
21. Following the organization modality of the symposium in 2024, the GSP Secretariat is looking for potential FAO Members and GSP partners interested to co-organize the symposium in 2025, preferably outside FAO headquarters.

¹ FAO. 2022. ITSP Soil Letters #5 - Urbanization and soil sealing. Rome, Italy.
<https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/6c4c8abb-1c89-43c5-8e94-ce02a5c5523e/>