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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

Eleventh session

Hybrid, 12–14 July 2023

**Status of the implementation of the GSP Action Framework 2022-2030
(GSPPA: XI/2023/2)**

Executive summary

- The [Global Soil Partnership \(GSP\) Action Framework 2022-2030 *Healthy Soils for a healthy life and environment: from promotion to consolidation of sustainable soil management*](#) was submitted to and welcomed by the [tenth GSP Plenary Assembly](#), and further endorsed by the 28th session of FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG).
- The Plenary Assembly requested that the Secretariat and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) lead the process to define the key performance indicators (KPIs) and implementation plans for the action framework, involving the Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) and the technical networks.
- The GSP Action Framework 2022-2030 builds on the successful work of the GSP members and partners over the last ten years. It consists of clear actions and targets focused on addressing the different global challenges – food insecurity, climate change, pollution, land degradation and the loss of biodiversity – through the improvement and enhancement of soil health. Robust indicators to be developed and agreed with GSP members and partners will allow for the implementation of such activities to be monitored so that objectives can be achieved. Global Soil Partnership members and partners will be supported in building capacities to report on progress based on indicators when needed.
- The Secretariat established a working group to develop the indicator system of the GSP Action Framework. In addition, the Secretariat developed a guidance document to facilitate the implementation of the action areas and their adaptation at the global, regional, and national levels (Annex I).

Suggested actions by the GSP Plenary Assembly

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- review and comment, as relevant, on the progress made on the implementation of the Action Framework; and

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- welcome the progress made in the preparation of the indicator system of the GSP Action Framework 2022-2030 and recommend the International Network for Soil Information Institutions (INSII) to review and endorse it during its ninth session in November 2023.

2.1 Status of the implementation of the Action Framework 2022-2030

1. The [GSP Action Framework 2022-2030: *healthy soils for a healthy life: from promotion to consolidation of sustainable soil management*](#) was welcomed by the [tenth GSP Plenary Assembly](#), and further endorsed by the [28th session of the FAO Committee on Agriculture \(COAG\)](#).
2. The GSP Action Framework 2022-2030 builds on the successful work of the GSP members and partners over the last ten years. It consists of clear actions and targets focused on addressing the different global challenges – food insecurity, climate change, pollution, land degradation and the loss of biodiversity – through the improvement and enhancement of soil health. Robust indicators to be developed and agreed with GSP members and partners will allow for the implementation of such activities to be monitored so that objectives can be achieved. Global Soil Partnership members and partners will be supported to build capacities to report on progress based on indicators when needed.
3. The Plenary Assembly requested that the Secretariat and the ITPS lead the process to define the key performance indicators (KPIs) and the Global Soil Health Index for the Action Framework 2022-2030, involving the Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) and the technical networks.
4. Since then, the Secretariat has facilitated progress in the implementation of the action areas by members and partners and promoted the migration from pillars to action areas at regional level. However, full adoption by the RSPs, where the pillar structure is well established, remains a challenge. To clarify the role of members and partners in the implementation of the Action Framework 2022-2030 and to facilitate the effective transition from the pillars to the action areas, the Secretariat has prepared a guidance document to orient the implementation of the framework, which is presented in Annex I.
5. The indicator system of the GSP Action Framework (ISAF) working group was established in response to the request of the 10th Plenary Assembly. The [ISAF Working Group](#) assembled through an open call, was mandated to develop the GSP Action Framework KPIs, soil health indicators, and the Global Soil Health Index; the call for the working group and its tasks are included in Annex II.
6. The ISAF working group is expected to complete its task by the end of July 2023, and as of this reporting period, has convened two times, making significant progress towards the objectives (1st Meeting and 2nd Meeting) to discuss the development of the GSP Action Framework and related documents. At the first meeting, the group decided to split the initial draft document into two parts, focusing on GSP Action Framework Key Performance Indicators and the System, as well as Soil Health Indicators and the Global Soil Health Index. The GSP Secretariat reviewed the documents based on feedback and shared the updates for further review. The second meeting delved into the technical aspects of the Action Framework, resulting in decisions to finalize outlines, implementation plans, and revisions for GSP Performance Indicators and Soil Health Indicators. The meeting also addressed the development of a Global Soil Health Index, emphasizing its applicability to agricultural lands and reproducibility at various levels.
7. The comprehensive efforts of this working group, the roadmap for subsequent development of these essential systems – along with the Global Soil Health Index – and the finalization and approval of these initiatives will be sought from the International Network for Soil Information Institutions (INSII) at its forthcoming ninth session in November 2023.

Annex I: Guidance document for the implementation of the Global Soil Partnership Action Framework 2022-2030

1. Roles and responsibilities under the Global Soil Partnership Action Framework

Focal points

The main task of the national focal point is to serve as the bridge between the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) and the country when it comes to soil issues. Furthermore, the focal point is the point of convergence on soils in the country, needing to transfer and facilitate the GSP activities at a national level, so that the country engages and benefits from the different opportunities. The focal point should attend the annual GSP Plenary Assembly and the plenary meetings of the regional (and subregional) soil partnership to which the country belongs and contributes to. The country's focal point shall also facilitate participation from its country in all the calls for different panels, technical networks, working groups and trainings.

The focal point shall identify, if needed, activities under the action areas that are a priority for the country and request the GSP Secretariat and/or the Regional Soil Partnership (RSP) for support to implement them and/or mobilize resources.

In addition, as the GSP Action Framework includes targets and key performance indicators (KPIs), a focal point is responsible for collecting information and reporting to the GSP Secretariat on its country's national progress on key performance indicators (KPIs) where required, or, recognizing that reporting on KPIs is voluntary, he/she is responsible for designating the institution responsible for national reporting.

Non-state stakeholders

Non-state stakeholder partners commit to promote the principles of sustainable soil management as set in the Revised World Soil Charter and the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management. The partners embrace and respect the principles of fairness and stakeholder balance and that the GSP is based on a spirit of mutual trust and open dialogue, as well as on multistakeholder collaboration for the achievement of its objectives.

Partners should identify the action areas and technical networks that are priorities for their stakeholder group and align to the GSP Action Framework. Partners can contribute resources or in-kind support to the implementation of global, regional, national or local activities according to their interests. They may also propose to the Secretariat activities or initiatives of potential interest to the partnership, which will be presented to the Plenary Assembly for adoption when relevant. Partners can also have a very active role in the different activities of the networks, projects, etc.

Regional Soil Partnerships

The RSPs are key elements of the GSP. They have the task of coordinating and implementing actions and activities of the global Action Framework they consider as a priority for the region and in accordance with available funds and in-kind contributions.

The RSPs should have their own governance, including leadership in the areas of action that are of most relevance to the region. The RSPs should also be the voice of the GSP at regional events and support members in building capacities on the six action areas as well as on reporting on the KPIs.

The preparation of the regional implementation plans, when the RSPs were established, involved substantial time and effort from regional experts and stakeholders. Whilst they reflect long-term priorities and objectives very well, they are ambitious and dependent on funding. Therefore, to be more operationally effective, the adoption of biannual work plans focusing on a few specific areas of action

and activities is recommended. The RSPs' work plans would be used by the GSP Secretariat to mobilize resources and facilitate implementation.

National Soil Partnerships

National Soil Partnerships (NSPs) constitute the adoption of the GSP at the national level. The NSPs shall constitute the neutral forum where all stakeholders can come together to set a joint national agenda on soils, and where all technical matters can be addressed from different angles. The NSPs coordinate actions at the national level and support the focal point in collecting information, reporting on GSP KPIs and indicators, and implementing activities at the national level. The NSPs should strengthen their communication with RSPs and the GSP Secretariat to ensure that national activities have sufficient visibility and are integrated into the action areas.

Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils and Technical Networks

The Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) provides scientific and technical advice on global soil issues to the GSP. The experts serve in a personal capacity and provide the best scientific and technical expertise available. They contribute to existing technical networks as well as to new initiatives to the extent possible to ensure the technical quality of the products developed.

Regarding the implementation of the Action Framework 2022-2030, ITPS is responsible for leading the development and adoption of the KPIs and the design of a Global Soil Health Index, supported by experts from technical networks, RSPs and other key stakeholders.

All the technical networks established under the GSP are responsible for facilitating the technical advancement of the specific soil issues and supporting the implementation of the outcome documents of the symposia and the activities of the Action Framework.

GSP Secretariat

The GSP Secretariat facilitates the implementation of activities and technical networks, mobilizes funds to implement GSP actions, and coordinates the implementation of activities at the global level as requested by the Plenary Assembly.

The GSP Secretariat also acts as the initiator for emerging activities to respond to needs and demands arising in the United Nations (UN) system, including strengthening the inclusion of soils in the three Rio conventions.

The GSP Secretariat is responsible for facilitating the development and implementation of the Global Soil Health Index and for preparing training materials and developing tools to facilitate global and national data collection and reporting, including the development of SoilSTAT. The Secretariat is also responsible for reporting to the Plenary Assembly on progress towards the achievement of the targets set and for preparing communication documents to this effect.

2. From pillars to action areas

The Global Soil Partnership's current terms of reference state that the work of the GSP is based on five pillars of action. The stocktaking exercise revealed that progress in executing the global implementation plan has not been the same for all pillars. The current pillars global implementation plans were designed based on an initial estimate of the funding that might become available through the Healthy Soils Facility¹. This initial funding estimate never materialized, and implementation was therefore slow. In addition, changes and new priorities have been introduced over the years according to the outcomes of global symposia and emerging issues. The pillar structure and their implementation plans have proven

¹ <https://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/about/healthy-soils-facility/en/>

to be useful for the instalment of the GSP framework and general objectives but have limited the execution of activities and the mobilization of resources.

The pillars' global implementation plans continue to constitute important background documents and a reference for priorities and potential actions, as they were developed by a large number of GSP members and partners. Currently, almost all pillars are represented by technical networks and initiatives with lighter governance and more active implementation. Therefore, the global implementation plans would not need to be updated in the future, but the priorities they set are to be integrated into the work plans of the technical networks and the RSPs.

Since the approval of the GSP Action Framework, the Secretariat has been pursuing the implementation of activities under each of the six action areas. The five pillars do not differ substantially from the action areas, but the concrete activities are distributed differently. It is important to note that each symposium sets an agenda for action that shall be implemented. There are many other activities that follow a natural flow of evolving activities under the technical networks.

Action areas at the global level

The GSP Secretariat does not aim to develop global implementation plans as was the case with each of the five pillars. Each action area at the global level will include short- to long-term activities according to emerging priorities and requests during the Plenary Assembly, and during the meetings of the RSPs and technical networks. During each Plenary Assembly, the Secretariat will present a biennial workplan per action area.

Action areas at the regional level

It is proposed that RSPs gradually move away from the pillar structure. The RSPs (and NSPs) can start integrating ongoing and planned pillar activities into the action areas directly. It is recommended that action area chairs be appointed at the RSP level, and that biannual work plans be prepared, building on existing regional implementation plans, but focusing on key activities in the six action areas. Other activities not included in the action areas at the global level – but which are of relevance to the region, and which contribute to the overall objective and specific targets of each action area – can also be integrated and reported through the indicator reporting system. The GSP Secretariat could facilitate this process under the guidance of the RSP chairs. These plans can be adopted during the annual RSP meetings. The GSP Secretariat could use these plans for resource mobilization.

Technical networks

In 2015, the ITPS published the first Status of the World's Soil Resources report where the top ten global soil threats were identified. Every year, the ITPS leads the organization of thematic global symposia and outcome documents are produced setting the actions for the given soil threat. In parallel, global data products are developed following a bottom-up approach to collect national data and information and to have a spatial representation of the distribution of different soil threats. These global data products constitute key components of the Global Soil Information System (GloSIS).

The previous implementation process has been strongly influenced by global symposia, and the networks which have been created:

- the International Network of Soil Information Institutions (INSII);
- the Global Soil Laboratory Network (GLOSOLAN), including its regional and national branches and the initiative on soil spectroscopy;
- the International Network on Black Soils (INBS),
- the International Network on Salt-affected Soils (INSAS);

- the International Network on Fertilizer Analysis (INFA);
- the International Network on Soil Biodiversity (NETSOB); and
- the International Network on Soil Pollution (INSOP).

These networks have made it possible to expand the technical capacity of the GSP to more concrete issues, to deepen and fill some knowledge gaps, and to open the network to a wider range of actors not necessarily officially appointed. Thus, the GSP has become a network of networks. These technical networks implement the decisions taken by the GSP Plenary Assembly in their respective fields, facilitated by the GSP Secretariat and in close collaboration with the ITPS.

3. Indicator system of the GSP Action Framework

The ITPS and INSII are leading the development of the Action Framework KPIs, soil indicators and the Global Soil Health Index. Once developed, an indicator system will be put in place to facilitate national, regional, and global reporting. In addition, explanatory documents and a training programme will be developed to facilitate country reporting. The indicator system will be integrated with SoilSTAT, which will enable reporting on the status and trends of soil health and the adoption of sustainable soil management at global, regional, and national levels.

The ITPS should contribute to making the best science-based use of indicators to produce knowledge and awareness products including the preparation of new editions of the Status of the World's Soil Resources report.

Annex II: Call for a working group to develop the indicator system of the GSP Action Framework (ISAF)

1. Background

In May 2022, the 10th GSP Plenary Assembly adopted the new GSP Action Framework 2022-2030 that was endorsed by the 28th session of the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG). In this regard, “COAG encouraged FAO and all GSP members to implement the activities outlined therein, as well as tools and initiatives of the GSP including the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, the International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilizers, among others, as appropriate”.

The overarching principle of the GSP Action Framework is that in a world in which soils are healthy and resilient, the provision of ecosystem functions and services by soils are sustained for all, leaving no one behind. The vision is that the GSP must work to improve and maintain the health of at least 50 percent of the world’s soils by 2030. To further develop the GSP towards a flexible action-oriented approach and meet this objective, pillars of action have been replaced by action areas linked to concrete actions, initiatives, and programmes.

- Action area 1: Manage sustainably and restore soils for the provision of ecosystem services.
- Action area 2: Strengthen soil governance.
- Action area 3: Promote knowledge and literacy on soils.
- Action area 4: Promote awareness raising and advocacy on soil health.
- Action area 5: Assess, map, and monitor soil health in a harmonized way.
- Action area 6: Foster technical cooperation (including gender and youth).

Another novelty of the GSP Action Framework is the inclusion of concrete and quantifiable targets to measure the impact of actions at the global, regional, national and local levels. In this regard, the GSP Action Framework is made up of clear actions and targets focused on addressing the different global challenges – from food insecurity, climate change, pollution, land degradation and the loss of biodiversity – through the improvement and enhancement of soil health. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are to be developed and agreed upon with GSP members and partners to allow monitoring of activities and progress towards these targets.

The Action Framework also proposes the development of a Global Soil Health Index (GSHI), as a composite index including the indicators endorsed in the *Protocol for the assessment of sustainable soil management* (SSM Protocol) to provide a proxy on the soil health status at global level.

The Global Soil Information System (GloSIS), SoilSTAT and the Global Soil Biodiversity Observatory (GLOSOB), will be the main global data platforms to provide soil data and information for the indicator system. GSP members and partners will also be supported to build their capacities to report on progress based on indicators when needed.

2. Establishment of the working group

The GSP Plenary Assembly mandated the ITPS to lead the development of the KPIs and the GSHI in coordination with experts from the different GSP technical networks and focal points. Therefore, a working group should develop the indicator system of the GSP Action Framework to support the ITPS in this task.

The working group will be composed of:

- the ITPS Chair;
- chairs of the Regional Soil Partnerships;
- chairs of the GSP technical networks;
- experts nominated by national focal points; and
- Global Soil Partnership Secretariat (facilitator).

An open call will be sent to all focal points for them to nominate a team member based on the following requisites:

- expertise on soil science;
- experience on soil data and soil information;
- experience on indicator setting;
- knowledge about the GSP and the new GSP Action Framework; and
- working language: English.

3. Modalities of work

Under the facilitation of the GSP Secretariat and the ITPS, a zero draft will be provided to the working group in order to start the work. During virtual meetings and iterations, the working group members will be able to contribute to the development and preparation of the ISAF proposal. The proposal will be submitted to the eleventh GSP Plenary Assembly. The following activities should be tasked to this working group:

- identifying KPIs and metrics outlined in the endorsed GSP Action Framework;
- developing the indicators list and indicators' factsheets;
- developing the proposal of the Global Soil Health Index (GSHI) as outlined in the GSP Action Framework;
- identifying best practices of integrated data collection and its transfer to GSP Secretariat to assist in the development of SoilSTAT integrated statistical system in accordance with the GSP data policy, and its review if appropriate;
- developing data flows among GloSIS, GLOSOB and national soil information systems; and
- designing the reporting modality by countries.

4. Timeline

The call was sent to focal points on 10 March and the Secretariat received nominations by 20 March 2023. The work started on 20 March through a first introductory meeting. A zero draft document was sent to group members for their review and contributions. This will be followed by a number of iterations. A final meeting will be organized to clear the document.