

May 2016



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



GLOBAL SOIL
PARTNERSHIP

E

Fourth session

Rome, 23-25 May 2016

Work of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS)

Executive Summary

- This document contains the usual annual progress report of the ITPS, complementing those submitted to previous sessions of the Plenary Assembly. It provides a succinct overview of the main activities carried out by the Panel and the conclusions reached, since the current members were appointed by the PA last year. The ITPS Chair is also due to make an oral presentation.
- Besides its formal working sessions, the ITPS often relies on the convening of smaller groups as appropriate to deal with specific assignments. In fact, as indicated below, a number of such groups are to deal with follow-up on the “Status of the World’s Soil Resources” report, and the implementation of Plans of Action under the GSP Pillars at both the global and regional levels.
- Section II of the document covers another key facet of the work of the Panel, e.g. its interface with other pertinent bodies and initiatives. Section III provides the revised work programme of the Panel for 2016-17 for the information of the PA. Section IV contains some conclusions and recommendations which the Panel deems pertinent to bring to the attention of the PA.
- The full reports of the fourth and fifth meeting of the ITPS can be consulted at: [Fourth ITPS meeting September 2014](#) | [Fifth ITPS meeting March 2016](#)

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
 - review and comment as appropriate on the range of activities undertaken by the ITPS in the last twelve month period.
 - address the recommendations made by the Panel in section IV, particularly:
 - the need to increase the term of ITPS members from two to three years.
 - the rotation of venues for ITPS working sessions between FAO regions.
 - an increase in the necessary financial and administrative (Secretariat) resources to support the increasing number of ITPS activities such as interaction with other panels and support of the SDGs.

This document is printed in limited numbers to minimize the environmental impact of FAO's processes and contribute to climate neutrality. Delegates and observers are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings and to avoid asking for additional copies. Most FAO meeting documents are available on the Internet at www.fao.org

I. Report by the chairperson on main activities and outcomes

1. The 3rd GSP Plenary Assembly held in June 2015 endorsed the list of 27 experts constituting the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) for a further period of two years (2015-2017).
2. During its first year of activities, the Panel carried out a number of tasks as follows:
 - Follow up of, and support to the celebrations of the International Year of Soils 2015 in different parts of the world;
 - Preparation of the “zero” and first draft of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) ;
 - Follow-up on the first version of the “Status of the World’s Soil Resources” report issued at the end of 2015;
 - Support as appropriate to the implementation of the GSP Plans of Action and the development of Regional Implementation Plans; and
 - Ensuring cooperative links with other scientific panels, such as the Science Policy Interface (SPI) of UNCCD, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as well as assisting with the implementation of the SDGs as appropriate (N.B. this rubric is covered separately in section II below)

A. Finalization of draft Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM)

3. The ITPS undertook to prepare a “zero” draft of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) which was then subject to an e-consultation. Building on the diverse and rich comments coming from this consultation, a first draft was finalized which - at the time of writing - remained to be submitted to the OEWG (Open-ended Working Group) for final discussion and endorsement, prior to consideration by the PA at its present meeting and the pertinent FAO bodies (COAG and Council).
4. The ITPS focused on ensuring the essential scientific and technical underpinnings of the document, leaving it to the OEWG and the above FAO intergovernmental bodies to incorporate more politically relevant dimensions into the guidelines. It may be noted that, prior to that, the extensive e-mail consultation allowed to obtain substantial feedback on the zero draft from a broad range of stakeholders and therefore to align the VGSSM as closely as possible with perceived needs by soil practitioners and the general public.

B. Follow-up on the “Status of the World’s Soil Resources” report

5. The successful launch at the end of 2015 of the Status of World’s Soil Resources (SWSR) report called for active follow-up on its findings and recommendations in order to maintain the positive momentum. The ITPS has established four specific working groups (WGs) tasked to address the main priorities for action identified in the report, namely:
 - Sustainable soil management and assessment of soil degradation and restoration (WG Leader: G. Erpul, Turkey);
 - The global management of soil organic matter (WG Leader: M. Taboada, Argentina);
 - Sustainable nutrient management aiming to stabilize or reduce global nitrogen (N) and phosphorous (P) fertilizer use, while simultaneously increasing fertilizer use in regions of nutrient deficiency (WG Leader: G. M. Pierzynski, USA); and
 - Improve soil data and information systems (WG Leader: N. McKenzie, Australia).

6. The four working groups are scheduled to provide detailed progress reports to the 5th session of the GSP Plenary Assembly in 2017.

C. GSP Plans of Action and Regional Implementation Plans

7. The ITPS is fully conscious of the importance of maintaining the highest scientific and technical standards during the implementation phase of the five GSP Plans of Action. It is also worth recalling that Regional Implementation Plans are to guide more concrete actions at regional and country levels. Therefore, the ITPS has been closely supporting and monitoring the implementation at both global and regional level.

8. In this context, five working groups of the ITPS have been established to pool the necessary competencies and put them at the service of implementation requirements. These groups will in particular closely follow the implementation of the Global Implementation Plans (GIPs) and through members from the pertinent regions provide advice and support to the Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs).

9. Working Group (WG) participants are as follows:

- **Pillar 1:** Dan Pennock (chair); Siousa Moala Halavatau, Fernando García-Préchac, Talal Darwish, Juan Comerma, Isaurinda Baptista, Ahmad Muhaimed, Saeb Khresat, Raine Horn
- **Pillar 2:** Maria de Lourdes Mendonça Santos Brefin (chair); Gary Pierzynski, Pavel Krasilnikov, Amanullah, Botle Mapeshoane, Oneyda Hernandez Lara, Siosuia Moala Halavatau, Fernando García-Préchac, Brajendra
- **Pillar 3:** Brajendra (chair); Miguel Taboada, Juan Comerma, Isaurinda Baptista, Gary Pierzynski, Martin Yemefack, Neil McKenzie, Nsalambi V. Nkongolo, Kazuyuki Yagi; Siousa Moala Halavatau
- **Pillar 4:** Neil McKenzie (chair); Maria de Lourdes Mendonça Santos Brefin, Miguel Taboada, Bhanooduth Lalljee, Dan Pennock, Peter De Ruiter, Ahmad Muhaimed, Gunay Erpul, Gan-Lin Zhang
- **Pillar 5:** Bhanooduth Lalljee (chair); Juan Comerma, Ahmad Muhaimed, Martin Yemefack, Gary Pierzynski, Gan-Lin Zhang, Neil McKenzie, Pavel Krasilnikov, Amanullah, Brajendra, Peter De Ruiter

10. These working groups are also scheduled to deliver detailed reports on the progress made under the 5 pillars of action at the 5th GSP plenary assembly in 2017.

II. Interface with other pertinent bodies and initiatives

11. The ITPS has been explicitly mandated to provide scientific and technical advice to other UN organizations and bodies with interest in soils.

12. Therefore, the GSP Secretariat has worked towards establishing official collaboration between the ITPS and other relevant panels, such as the IPCC, IPBES and the SPI of UNCCD. In particular, the ITPS can complement the activities of these panels with specific knowledge and expertise in soil related issues. The GSP Secretariat and the ITPS succeeded to establish structured collaboration arrangements with the SPI of UNCCD, IPBES and the IPCC, including via a full day of meetings with representatives of these organizations during the fifth ITPS working session (March 2016).

Collaboration with the SPI of UNCCD

Following a joint meeting in 2015, further exchanges of notes and information occurred and during the March 2016 meeting, a detailed work programme was agreed with the following activities proposed for 2017:

- The SPI-UNCCD was requested to allow the ITPS to contribute with a chapter on soils in the Global Land Outlook that is currently under development.

- ITPS responsibility on assessing soil organic carbon (including a new global soil organic carbon map by 2017) in the framework of indicator 15.3.1 of the SDGs and the endorsed metrics for the assessment of land degradation neutrality (LDN).
- A joint global assessment of soil erosion will be performed under the leadership of Working Group 1 “Sustainable Soil Management” of the ITPS (Lead G. Erpul, Turkey).

Reports on the achievements from the above work will be submitted to the respective constituencies in 2017.

Collaboration with IPBES

The Secretariat facilitated the nomination in 2015 of the ITPS Chairperson as co-chair of the IPBES Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment (LDRA); thus cooperation between ITPS and IPBES has been developing. During the recent ITPS working session, an official request was made to the IPBES Secretariat to formally invite ITPS to peer review the report as a panel and not via members in their personal capacity. Furthermore, ITPS and the GSP Secretariat offered to host the 3rd Author Meeting (planned for June-July 2017) at FAO Headquarters.

Collaboration with IPCC

This is now under way, after an initial period of difficulties. The major relevance of soil organic carbon within the climate change debate, following the various initiatives presented at COP 21 of UNFCCC, is indeed calling for close interaction between ITPS and IPCC. During the recent ITPS working session, formal links have been established with the IPCC. The GSP Secretariat requested the IPCC Secretariat to explore the nomination of the ITPS chairperson as observer within the IPCC. It was agreed to jointly organize a Soil Organic Carbon conference in the first semester of 2017 as a venue to explore the necessary elements for more prominent inclusion of soils within the 6th Assessment of IPCC (AR6).

Support to the SDG process

During a meeting on “Indicators for the SDG 15” held in Washington on 25-26 February 2016, the GSP was requested to work through the ITPS on the indicators for target 15.3. It is recalled that indicators of target 15.3 relate to:

- Land cover: divided into “land cover” and “land cover change”;
- Land productivity;
- Soil organic carbon.

The ITPS was expected to work more particularly on the last of these indicators, bearing in mind that indicators should have the following characteristics: (1) be country driven; (2) be simple, doable and implementable; and (3) they should be aligned with UN-country processes. While the delivery time is still to be determined, the ITPS is fully committed to assist in this important analytical process as part of the Pillar 4 implementation that is establishing a Global Soil Information System. In addition, there is a commitment with the SPI-UNCCD to develop the new global soil organic carbon map by 2017.

III. Work programme for 2016-17

The ITPS workplan until mid-2017 would consequently include the following:

- five working groups assigned to each pillar addressing global and regional implementation plans from the perspective of the ITPS;
- four working groups to prepare reports on the progress made in addressing the four priorities identified in the SWSR report; also WG1 and WG2 to support the SPI-UNCCD; WG2 and WG4 to participate in the preparation of the joint ITPS-IPCC SOC Conference to be held in the first half of 2017;

- all ITPS members to review the LDRA from IPBES (if official request is received);
- to support the SDG process by developing the new global soil organic carbon map by 2017;
- the ITPS to work on preparations for the second edition of the SWSR; and
- due attention to publishing scientific articles and position papers.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

The ITPS is in its second two-year period of activity and is by now a well-recognized instrument at the service of international cooperation. The transition from the first to the second period was smooth, i.e. without major disruption of working procedures, thanks to the partial renewal of the previous membership, thus allowing for the necessary continuity.

However, Members of the ITPS unanimously feel that the terms of office of members should be increased to three years in order to be able to bring projects and activities to completion or near completion.

An open issue remains the need to rotate the venue for the different ITPS working sessions between FAO regions. The Secretariat shall consider this option as it could generate additional local outreach of the ITPS activities.

Finally, the fast growing number of requests for ITPS activities implies an increase in financial resources to fully address these challenging tasks.