

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

The Global Soil Partnership

To cite this article: Luca Montanarella 2015 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Earth Environ. Sci.* **25** 012001

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.


You may also like

- [\(Invited\) The Status of SOFC and SOEC R&D in the Clean Hydrogen Partnership](#)
Mirela Atanasiu, Antonio Aguilo-Rullan,
Dimitra Dirmiki et al.

- [Research and Innovation Activities on PEM Fuel Cells and Electrolysers Supported by the Clean Hydrogen Partnership](#)
Claudiu Pavel, Nikolaos Lymperopoulos,
Eleni Kontonasiou et al.

- [GAS GAPS IN THE PROTOPLANETARY DISK AROUND THE YOUNG PROTOSTAR HL TAU](#)
Hsi-Wei Yen, Hanyu Baobab Liu, Pin-Gao
Gu et al.





The
Electrochemical
Society

Advancing solid state &
electrochemical science & technology

DISCOVER
how sustainability
intersects with
electrochemistry & solid
state science research

The Global Soil Partnership

Luca Montanarella

European Commission - DG JRC, Via E. Fermi, 2749, I-21027 Ispra (VA), ITALY

E-mail: luca.montanarella@jrc.ec.europa.eu

Abstract. The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) has been established, following an intensive preparatory work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with the European Commission (EC), as a voluntary partnership coordinated by the FAO in September 2011 [1]. The GSP is open to all interested stakeholders: Governments (FAO Member States), Universities, Research Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, Industry and private companies. It is a voluntary partnership aiming towards providing a platform for active engagement in sustainable soil management and soil protection at all scales: local, national, regional and global. As a “coalition of the willing” towards soil protection, it attempts to make progress in reversing soil degradation with those partners that have a genuine will of protecting soils for our future generations. It openly aims towards creating an enabling environment, despite the resistance of a minority of national governments, for effective soil protection in the large majority of the countries that are genuinely concerned about the rapid depletion of their limited soil resources.

1. The Global Soil Partnership in Action

The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) partners are the owners of the GSP. Therefore the GSP Plenary assembly is the main decision making body of the partnership. It meets annually and is tasked with all relevant decisions for the GSP, like the approval of the various plan of action, the nomination of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) and the coordination of the Regional Partnerships. The GSP is supported by a Secretariat hosted by FAO (Figure 1).

The GSP is active in 5 main pillars of action:

- 1- Promote sustainable management of soil resources for soil protection, conservation and sustainable productivity
- 2- Encourage investment, technical cooperation, policy, education awareness and extension in soil
- 3- Promote targeted soil research and development focusing on identified gaps and priorities and synergies with related productive, environmental and social development actions
- 4- Enhance the quantity and quality of soil data and information: data collection (generation), analysis, validation, reporting, monitoring and integration with other disciplines
- 5- Harmonization of methods, measurements and indicators for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources



For each of these pillars detailed plans of action are developed with the help of specific working groups assembling the most relevant stakeholders and experts in relation to each of the relevant subjects. The highest scientific and technical level is guaranteed by the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS), as a core component of the GSP.

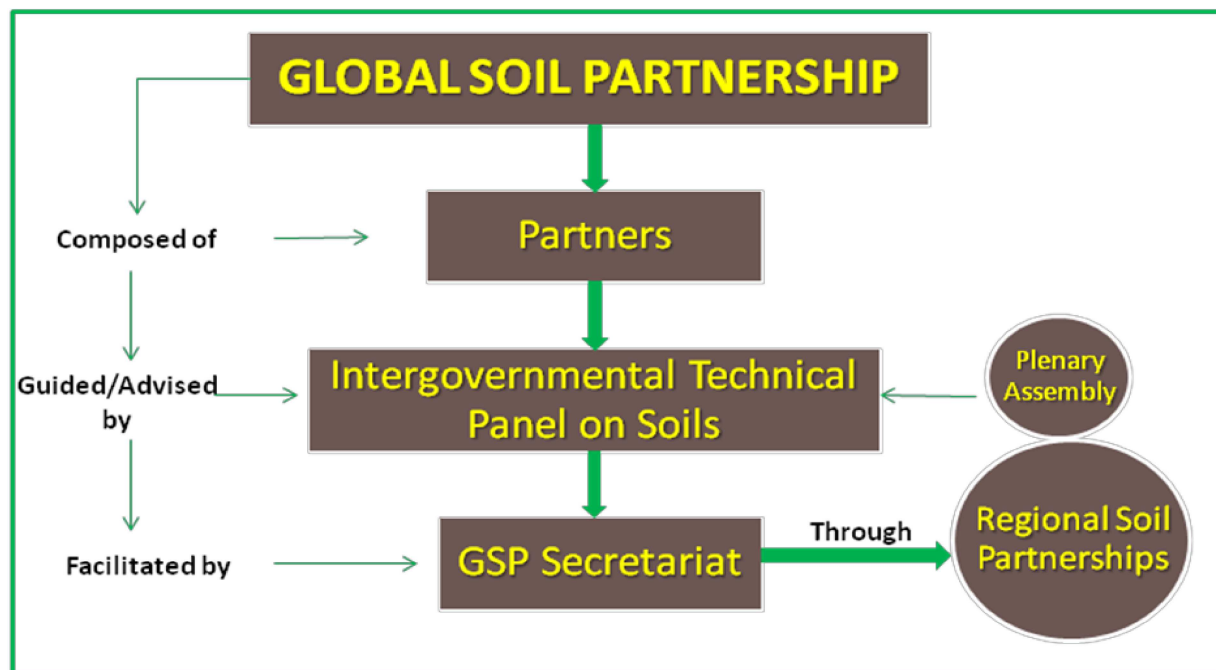


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the GSP.

2. The Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS)

The ITPS is a scientific panel of 27 high level scientists selected according to a regional balance as follows:

- five from Africa
- five from Asia
- five from Europe
- five from Latin America and the Caribbean
- three from Near East
- two from North America
- two from South West Pacific

Given its intergovernmental nature, panel members are nominated by the FAO Member Countries on the basis of a shortlist prepared by the GSP Secretariat (FAO). The mandate of the panel members is of two years and can be renewed for an additional term of two years (Figure 2). Panel members are acting as independent experts and are not bound to respond to their respective governments. They provide the necessary scientific and technical advice to the GSP as well as to other UN bodies requiring soil related expertise, like the UNFCCC, the CBD and the UNCCD. As a science policy interface, the ITPS operates as similar bodies for other policy areas, like IPCC for climate change, IPBES for biodiversity and the new SPI for desertification.

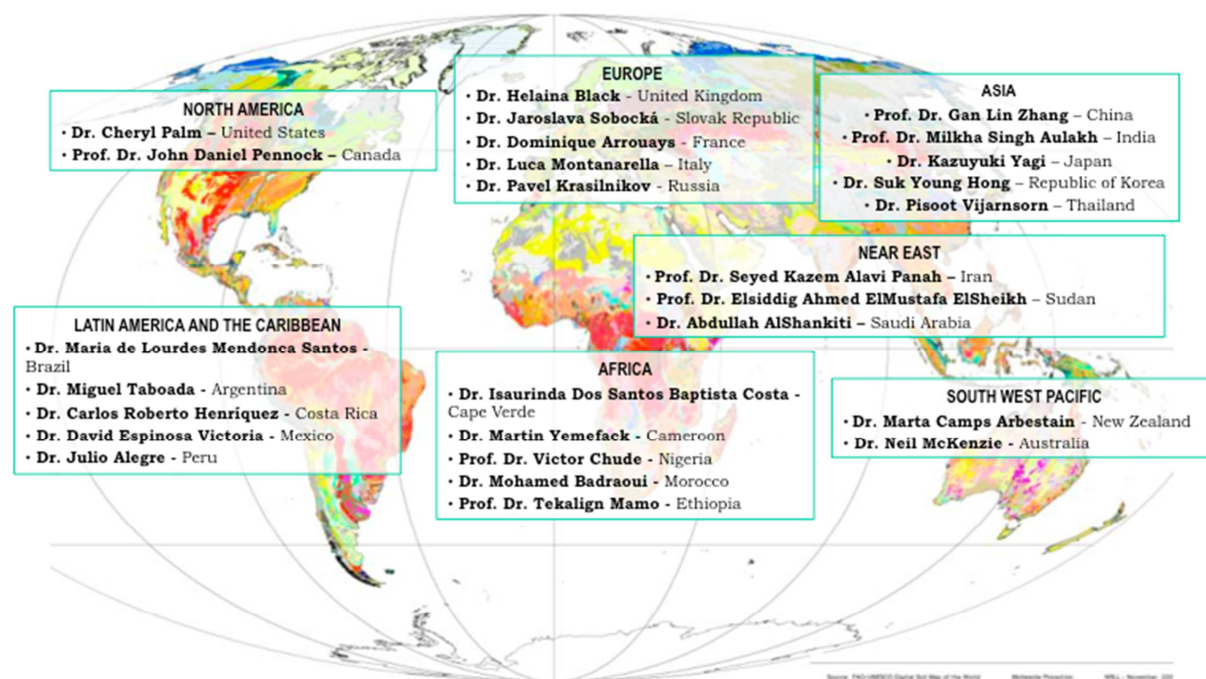


Figure 2. Members of the 1st Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) 2013-2015.

The ITPS, at its first meeting in July 2013 has identified its main activities and planned deliverables for its mandate of two years:

1. Development of the background scientific and technical evidence towards the inclusion of soils within the sustainable development agenda post-2015, especially in the frame of the outcome of the Rio+20 sustainable development conference. Particularly the development of a soil related sustainable development goal (SDG) is addressed by this scientific and technical support activity.
2. Revision and update of the World Soil Charter. The FAO World Soil Charter was adopted in 1981 by the 21st session of the FAO Conference and establishes a set of principles for the optimum use of the world's soil resources, for improvement of their productivity, and for their conservation for future generations. The basic principles of the Charter are still valid today, but need in some parts some revision and updates in light of the new scientific findings and the rapidly changing environmental and social conditions of the world. A new updated version of the Charter will be submitted for endorsement in 2015.
3. Compilation of the new World Soil Resources Report (WSRR). This report is intended as the flagship publication of the ITPS and should be aiming towards the establishment of a fully updated assessment of the status and trends of the global soil resources. It should be forming the reference for future policy decisions at global scale concerning soils and will provide an updated assessment of soil degradation processes after the last Global Assessment of the Status of human-Induced Soil Degradation (GLASOD) of 1990. It is planned to release the new WSRR in 2015, 25 years after GLASOD and in occasion of the UN International Year of Soils 2015.
4. Endorsement of the plan of action for the 5 pillars of the GSP. As one of its main institutional tasks, the ITPS is mandated by the GSP plenary to develop and finalize the detailed plans of action for the five main pillars of the GSP. The plans of action form the basis for the GSP activities and require a very detailed analysis of the current status and the necessary immediate actions on the priority areas identified by the GSP partners. The draft plans of action are prepared by specific working groups established by the GSP Secretariat that submit then the

first draft versions to the ITPS for finalization. Once finalized and endorsed by the ITPS the GSP Secretariat (FAO) submits the five action plans to the GSP Plenary for final formal approval and subsequent implementation. Donors are encouraged to provide the necessary financial support to their implementation. A specific trust fund has been established by the GSP to facilitate the financial support by potential donors.

5. Establishing relations with other science-policy interfaces like IPCC, IPBES and the SPI of UNCCD. The ITPS has the ambition to provide policy relevant scientific advice and information not only to the GSP, but also to other related UN bodies and conventions. It is well recognized by the climate change community that soils play a crucial role in the global greenhouse gas balance, especially as the major terrestrial carbon sink. Soil related scientific knowledge and information is needed by the UNFCCC to properly take decisions in relation to soils. The need for such data and information clearly emerged in the recent debate around the LULUCF issue. The special attention that this convention is now dedicating to organic soils, like peatlands, will require a substantial scientific input in the near future. Similar requirements are emerging also in other policy areas, like biodiversity and desertification. The recently established IPBES will require substantial support on soil related issues, especially on the recently decided fast track assessment on land degradation. The same applies for the recently established science-policy interface (SPI) of the UNCCD. The ITPS is open to collaborations with all these various organizations and stakeholders and formal contacts are on going between the GSP Secretariat and the various bodies on this matter.

3. Regional Soil Partnerships

The actual implementation on the ground of the various plan of action of the GSP will have to be coordinated at Regional level. Soil properties and drivers and pressures are very different in the various parts of the world. Therefore there cannot be “one solution fits it all” approaches. Each action needs to be tailored and adapted to the local conditions. Therefore it is of crucial importance to activate Regional partnerships that can mobilize the existing stakeholders and organizations at national and local level. Seven Regional Soil Partnerships are proposed, following the FAO regional structure. But it is already evident that sub-regional partnerships will have to emerge in order to get closer to the actual realities at local level. Regional and Sub-Regional Partnerships have already been established for Europe, Eurasia, Asia, Near East and North Africa, West and Central Africa, East and South Africa, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, South America (Figure 3). More will follow in the near future, as the implementation of the GSP will get more and more operational.

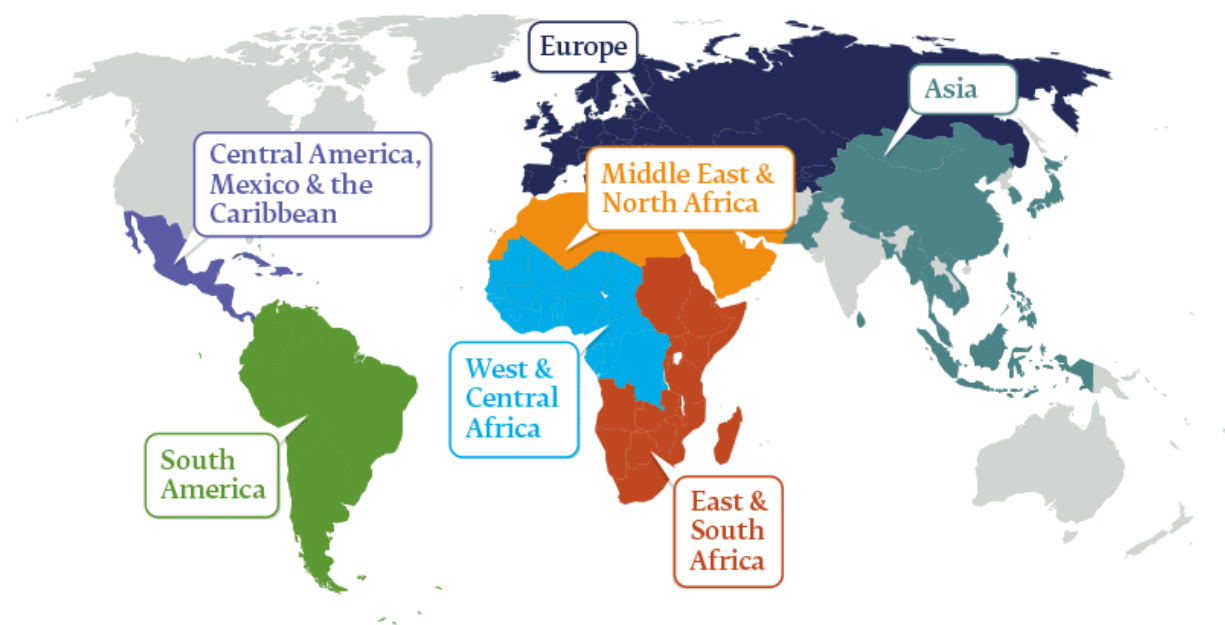


Figure 3. Current areas of world covered by Regional Soil Partnerships (status February 2014).

4. Conclusions and way forward

The Global Soil Partnership is by now in its full operational phase. In less than two years an effective voluntary partnership has emerged facilitating all those stakeholders and governments that are genuinely committed to soil protection and sustainable soil management. This initiative has proved once more that if there is the will, actions can be implemented also at international and global level. Compared to lengthy processes in other more formal frameworks, this simple voluntary partnership was able to get into operational mode in a very short time. All its planned bodies and structures are in place and fully operational, its action plans are in their final development phase and are soon ready for full implementation and substantial financial means have been already mobilized by donors. There is great hope that the GSP will trigger the needed pro-active thinking by all involved organizations towards achieving measurable progress in a short time frame on the vital issue of protecting our limited soil resources for future generations. Failing to do so will have catastrophic consequences for all of us. Recognizing that soil resources are of crucial importance for food security, climate change, biodiversity and many other ecosystem services is a first step towards soil protection and sustainable soil management. The recent endorsement by the UN General Assembly of the UN World Soil Day (5th of December) and the UN International Year of Soils 2015 is a major step towards building the framework for global awareness raising initiatives on this crucial issue. As a first achievement of the GSP, this is already an outstanding result of this very young, but already very effective partnership.

References

- [1] Montanarella L, Vargas R 2012 Global governance of soil resources as a necessary condition for sustainable development, *Curr Opin Environ Sus* **4** 559-564