

Press Release

We Need Fertile Soils for Sustainable Development and Mitigation of Climate Change

Berlin, 23 April 2015. 600 participants from 80 countries met this week in Berlin at the third **Global Soil Week** to discuss and develop ways to attain sustainable soil management and responsible land governance. The Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) and its partners hosted this unique international, multi-stakeholder science-policy platform in the International Year of Soils. In various dialogue formats, policymakers, scientists from many different disciplines, practitioners, farmers and stakeholders from civil society formed a diverse knowledge platform and contributed to political processes dealing with soils as a key resource in the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Participants discussed topical issues such as soil rehabilitation, sustainable land management and land governance.

In the concluding plenary session on Wednesday, IASS Executive Director Klaus Töpfer stated: "Soil really is the substance of transformation. Transformation is needed and it is possible in a way that the voices of the poor can be integrated into development." Thomas Silberhorn, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), one of the many partners of the Global Soil Week, concluded in his speech: "Germany is doing a lot to make sure that humankind will not lose the very ground from under its feet. It will use its G7 presidency to encourage other partners to join the effort, because a world without hunger is not some distant dream. It would be possible today."

In order to achieve the current set of SDGs, the IASS proposed an integrated approach to their implementation at both national and international level. In the light of the SDGs that will be agreed by the United Nations in September and the COP 21 in Paris in December, the key conclusions of the Global Soil Week were:

1. Sustainable soil and land management contributes to achieving several of the proposed SDGs, such as food security, land-degradation neutrality and an ambitious climate and biodiversity agenda. These agendas, SDGs and the Climate, would benefit from being thought through and worked upon together. And soils can contribute to solutions in both agendas. Soils – and the need for their sustainable management – cut across a range of the proposed sustainable development goals. If we do not protect and sustainably use our soils, essential ecosystem services such as food security, sustainable freshwater management or the protection of the oceans will not be possible. Soils are the world's largest terrestrial carbon sinks. Sound soil management holds the potential to increase soil's organic carbon content, thereby adapting to and mitigating climate change while increasing productivity. This must be acknowledged in the lead-up to Paris and in the outcome of COP 21.

2. We need a consistent approach to implementing the SDGs and we must protect soils by investing in a holistic approach to sustainable soil management.

In terms of our soil resources, the SDGs run the risk of not being sustainable. We might need more land to implement the SDGs than we have at our disposal. Balancing competing demands made on soils and the bio-resources they sustain is a necessary step to achieving consistency across the goals.

3. Investments in soil rehabilitation have various benefits, from food security to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. In a world of 9 billion people we cannot afford lose more fertile soils. We must halt degradation processes. The degradation of soil and land resources is threatening livelihoods and the provision of ecosystem services in many parts of our world. The rehabilitation of degraded soils is therefore key to attaining national food security goals and the objectives of the Zero Hunger Challenge. Measures to restore soil fertility are not only important to achieve food security, they also increase soil's organic carbon content. Soil rehabilitation policies therefore offer a great opportunity to link the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the negotiations on an ambitious climate agreement, while advancing food security through the restoration of soil quality. The newly established Green Climate Fund could and should be used by soil-related programmes that can demonstrate that their implementation contributes to both the soil and the climate agendas.

4. Soil protection and soil rehabilitation policies need to be based on a human rights framework, principally emphasising land rights for marginal and vulnerable groups in society. A focus on soil rehabilitation holds great potential. We need to be aware, however, that technologies for soil rehabilitation are not neutral. This applies in particular to large-scale rehabilitation efforts. Technologies might favour some groups in society over others or they

might even have negative implications for some. In principle, soil rehabilitation measures must contribute to the progressive realisation of the right to food. In general, soil protection policies need to be based on a human rights framework.

5. To make the transformational potential of the SDGs work, we need to set up institutions and processes at national level that will allow for a public debate on the post-2015 Development Agenda.

In implementing the SDGs, we have to put in place processes and institutions at national level in all countries – and, where relevant, at regional level – to set priorities and balance potential conflicts between the goals. These processes will also help us to better understand negative externalities within and beyond our own countries. We need public fora that allow for debates on what type of development we want to see for our societies. The Global Soil Week contributed for example to the development of the Brazilian Seminar on Soil Governance, which calls for the establishment of such a forum at national level in Brazil. These public fora also assume particular importance in the monitoring, review and accountability of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Press contact IASS

Corina Weber, corina.weber@iass-potsdam.de, Tel. 0331 – 28822 340

