

Comments to Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM)

We would like to congratulate the author for the effort to synthesis in a brief document the main principles that should guide a sustainable use of the soil resources.

The comments are mainly dealing with question number 4: **Will the results of the guidelines, once implemented be sufficient enough to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?**

The guide refers to SDG Goals 2, target 2.4 and Goal 15 target 15.3, and claims that “The latter can be provided only under sustainable soil management practices that would ensure stable or increasing production from arable lands, pastures and forestry systems (including agroforestry). Combating soil degradation requires introduction of sustainable soil management systems that reflects the challenges of Goal 15” . We would like to highlight that the scoping of target 15. 3 is wider than soil management as it refers to “reverse **land**” and particularly **target 15.3** to restore “degraded **land** and soil and..achieve a **land-degradation neutral world**”. While recognizing that the sustainable soil management is an essential element, meeting Goal 15 is not achievable without considering the broader concept of land management. Meaning land as defined by FAO/UNEP: 1997

***Land and Land Resources** refer to a delineable area of the earth's terrestrial surface, encompassing all attributes of the biosphere immediately above or below this surface, including those of the near-surface, climate, the soil and terrain forms, the surface hydrology (including shallow lakes, rivers, marshes and swamps), the near-surface sedimentary layers and associated groundwater and geohydrological reserve, the plant and animal populations, the human settlement pattern and physical results of past and present human activity (terracing, water storage or drainage structures, roads, buildings, etc.) (FAO/UNEP, 1997).*

Or as UNCCD states (art 1):

Land means the terrestrial bio-productive system that comprise soil,vegetation other biota and the ecological and hydrological processes that operate within the system

The reasons that back up our comment are the following:

Many of the guidelines proposed encompass not only soil management but also vegetal/cover and water management practices. So, for example guidelines 3.2 for creation of a stable soil surface through soil erosion control contains practices of plant cover and residues managements, reduction of surface runoff volume and velocity or modification of terrain topography that cannot be considered “sensu stricto” only soil management practices but land management since they affect vegetal and water components of the land system. Similar for guidelines 3.3 for maintenance and enhancement of a sufficient organic cover, when crop residues management tended to left on surface and not taken them out) is mentioned as one desirable and recommended practices. Also for the efficient use of irrigation water and minimization of soil salinization ,3.7, many of the guidelines proposed are concerned the management of water resources (increasing of irrigation efficiency) in conjunction with soil management.

Indeed the authors quite often interchangeably use the terms land and soil along the text. For instance

- In page 3 when, explaining the proposed scope of the VGSSM, is said that: “ The global scope of the proposed guidelines will complement the Status of the World’s Soil Resources report, which provides a source of locally-specific examples of soil management and information. It also complements existing regionally focused documents such as TerraAfrica’s (2011) guidelines and best practices for sustainable **land** management in Sub-Saharan Africa”
- Or in page 12 speaking about the Guidelines for the preservation of agricultural soils, it is stated that “Wherever possible, preservation of productive agricultural **land** should be a priority”

We hope these comments can be useful for improving later version of the document