

World Soils Policy (UNEP, 1982)

Definition

The World Soils Policy is defined as follows:

In recognition of the fact that soil¹ is a finite resource, and that continuously increasing demands are being placed on this resource to feed, clothe, house and provide energy for a growing world population and to provide worldwide ecological balance, the Governments of the nations of the world agree to use their soils on the basis of sound principles of resource management, to enhance soil productivity, to prevent soil erosion and degradation², and to reduce the loss of good farmland to non-farm purposes.

Objectives

Its objectives are:

- (a) To increase and apply scientific knowledge of the soils of the world with a view to increasing their potential for production and undertaking of their sound management;
- (b) To encourage and assist countries in improving the productivity and management of their soils and in reducing soil degradation;
- (c) To encourage the management and conservation of soil, reduce pollution, and improve the quality of water and air;
- (d) To develop and promote agricultural production systems that assure the use of the soil in a sustained basis;
- (e) To enlarge and improve the world's supply of arable agricultural land through irrigation, flood control, and reclamation;
- (f) To slow the loss of productive agricultural and forest land to other purposes;
- (g) To monitor changes in soil quantity and quality and in land use;
- (h) To bring to the attention of the people of the world, and their political leaders in particular, the extent of world soil degradation and its seriousness, its causes and its remedies.

¹ Soil is that part of the earth's surface that is penetrated by plant roots and upon which the world depends for most of its food and fibre supply. A soil type is a unit of soil classification which includes soils which are essentially alike in all major profile characteristics including the surface texture.

² Soil degradation: The decline in soil quality caused through its use by humans. Soil degradation includes physical biological and chemical deterioration such as decline in soil fertility, decline in structural condition, erosion, adverse changes in salinity, acidity or alkalinity, and the effects of toxic chemicals, pollutants or excessive inundation.

Its addressed to:

- (a) International and regional organizations, including UNEP, FAO and UNESCO, who will share responsibility in promoting and supporting the international and regional activities suggested;
- (b) National governments and non-governmental organizations, without whose support the recommendations cannot be carried out;
- (c) Individuals who, conscious of their individual and collective responsibilities for safeguarding soil, water and related resources, are willing to lend support to the principle of a World Soils Policy.

The actions required to implement the World Soils Policy are as follows:

- (a) The appropriate organizations should:
 - (i) Promote sound use of land and water resources;
 - (ii) Continue and intensify efforts to create the awareness of the necessity for rational resource use among all sections of the world community, including Governments and non-governmental organizations; assist where required to provide training, to mount publicity campaigns, seminars, conferences and provision of publications;
 - (iii) Intensify efforts to promote optimum land use for sustained production on a world-wide basis, and interregional and international co-operation in the use and development of land and water resources;
 - (iv) Promote cooperation between Governments in adopting sound land-use practices, particularly in international watersheds;
 - (v) Encourage international financing agencies to pay particular attention to the needs of agricultural development projects which include conservation and improvement of soil and water resources, provision of inputs and incentives at the farm level and establishment of the necessary institutional structures as major components;
 - (vi) Assist Governments, on request, in establishing appropriate legislation, institutions and procedures to enable them to mount, implement and monitor appropriate land-use and soil and water management programmes;
 - (vii) Encourage the extension of the bilateral assistance in resources management to developing countries from developed countries, foundations, and other institutions;
 - (viii) Help countries improve their capabilities to assess the agricultural potential of their soils, expand the wise use of fertilizers, and apply improved soil management;
 - (ix) Select critical areas of resource degradation for the application of experimental pilot programmes in resource management;
 - (x) Harmonize the collection and exchange of information on practical application of soil research among international organizations and institutions, in particular:
 - (a) Promote the adoption of an international reference system of soil classification with a view to facilitating transfer of experience and technology;

- (b) Develop simple soil capability classification and land evaluation methods; develop common methodologies for monitoring soil degradation and changes in land use;
- (xi) As a final objective, incorporate the principles of national land use and the conservation and development of soil and water resources into a comprehensive international resource law;

(b) All national Governments should:

- (i) Commit themselves to the sound use of land and water resources;
- (ii) Develop a land-use policy and the necessary legislative framework to implement it;
- (iii) Increase awareness among all sections of the community of the problems caused by the loss of productive soil and of the need for prompt action;
- (iv) Identify, map and assess the potentials and constraints of soil resources, map current land use, assess the present extent of soil degradation, predict foreseeable hazards and develop methods for their prevention;
- (v) Adapt soil capability classifications and methods of land evaluation to local conditions;
- (vi) Develop programmes to ensure the availability and wide application of fertilizers and other actions appropriate to the improvement and sustained use of the soil;
- (vii) Establish an adequate legislative and institutional framework for monitoring and supervising soil conservation development and management;
- (viii) Impose obligations on users, with the aim of ensuring the most rational use of land, through the use of tax exemptions, subsidies, credit facilities and other types of financial devices;
- (ix) Train an adequately paid professional cadre of extension workers to assist farmers in managing soil and water resources effectively;
- (x) Establish and fund programmes, where needed, for reforestation, irrigation, and reclamation of saline, flooded or other land not presently productive;
- (xi) Actively pursue research needed to develop systems of farming that combine adequate production with resource protection and are compatible with socio-economic and cultural conditions;
- (xii) Help develop local institutions to secure the leadership, assistance and cooperation of farmers in applying soil and water improvement and conservation practices. Provide an adequate programme of environmental education in support of resource management activities.