Head Office / Secretariat of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South-Eastern Europe (SWG)

Terms of Reference

National Expert on soil management

1. Introduction

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG), as a platform for networking and regional co-operation, has been established during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2005 ("Rural Development Opportunities for Co-operation in the SEE") held in Macedonia and Serbia in June 2005.

With the International Agreement in March 2009, the SWG is registered as an International Intergovernmental Organization, with its managing and coordinative body – SWG Head Office/Secretariat based in Skopje, Macedonia. On September 7th 2009, the Law on Ratification of the SWG Agreement has been decisively completed by the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

The main SWG strategic framework is composed of the following elements:

SWG *vision* is to promote innovative and sustainable agriculture and rural development through regional cooperation, to improve rural livelihoods in the SEE countries.

Mission - to increase horizontal cooperation among respective countries and territories of South Eastern Europe, by coordinating regional initiatives related to agriculture and rural development and supporting the process of social and economic development of rural areas in SEE region.

General objective of SWG is to facilitate close cooperation between the Ministries of Agriculture and other stakeholders in the field of agriculture and rural development and to support EU integration in SEE. The SWG has *four specific objectives* on which the organization has focused its work:

- To improve the common understanding on agriculture and rural development policies;
- To assist the improvement of implementing structures and systems for agriculture and rural development, with specific emphasis on cross border cooperation;
- To improve the understanding and use of implementation tools for agriculture and rural development;
- To identify and share information and application of good practice in agriculture and rural development to broaden the rural agenda.

Regional Expert Advisory Working Groups (REAWGs) are permanent part of the SWG structure. They are comprised of relevant national, regional and international experts, as well as representatives of relevant authorities to analyze specific agricultural and rural development policy issues and provide national and regional policy recommendations. Through the work of the REAWGs SWG contributes to enabling evidence-based policy making in the agricultural sector in Western Balkans.

2. Background

In August 2021 the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development approved the realization of a 3-years regional project with the title "Support to Economic Diversification of Rural Areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA II). The project's target group is the rural population in WB-6, especially in seven less favoured cross-border rural areas: Sharra (Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia), Prespa (Albania and North Macedonia), Drina-Tara (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia), Drina-Sava (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia), Krsh (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro), Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna (Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro), Pchinja-Krajishte (Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Serbia). The project strives to strengthen the regional and national capacities through facilitating theme-specific policy dialogues providing technical expertise on issues related to rural economic diversification in SEE countries in their EU approximation process. The project activities are focused to the further support of the regional platforms for political and policy dialogue and mechanisms for more intensive and broader cooperation, strengthening the regional stakeholders' competencies and expertise related to the EU CAP and Green Agenda for Western Balkans as per adopted Action plan, as well as further alignment of the agriculture and rural development policies of the SEE countries to the EU CAP.

The project overall goal is to encourage competitiveness and employment in the Western Balkan region through strengthening networking capacity for rural development and promotion of the economic diversification and competitiveness of rural areas. Participation of the local actors in less favored rural areas in promotion of the cross-sectoral innovation and inter-regional knowledge exchange through the implementation of local projects, will ultimately contribute to inclusive, environmentally and climate friendly economic diversification, increase the attraction of the areas, improve the market access, encouraging young people and women to get more involved and contribute to reduced out-migration. The impact logic is that increased regional value creation and local resilience building, especially in less favored rural border areas, will change the socio-economic decisions of poor and vulnerable population groups in particular so that they see improved prospects for themselves and their families. The project is focused on strengthening the economic inclusion of the rural and marginalized population, supporting the rural formal/informal sector, fostering sustainable natural resource management practices, as well as, promoting women & youth entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The Secretariat of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in Southeast Europe as an international intergovernmental organisation, consisting of governmental institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in respective Western Balkan countries and territories is responsible for implementation and management of the project. It will be implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo* .

The work of the REAWG for Soil will be conducted by an experts' team, part of the REAWG, consisting of:

- Regional/International Expert
- National Experts in the area of soil from each of the countries/territories of the Western Balkans: Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska)

The experts' team will be supported by inputs from representatives nominated from relevant national authorities for this topic.

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* *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

3. Specific Situation / Scope of assignment

Soil is the thin layer of material (organic and inorganic) on the Earth's surface that has been subjected to and influenced by environmental factors (parent material, climate, organisms, topography and time) providing the basis for plant establishment and growth and the provisioning of ecosystem services. Soil is a finite natural resource. On a human time-scale it is non-renewable. Soil is the foundation of agricultural development and sustainable development and provides the basis for food, feed, fuel, fibre, water availability, nutrient cycling, organic carbon stocks, biodiversity, and a platform for construction. The area of fertile soil is limited and is increasingly under pressure due to climate change and competing, unsuitable land uses, resulting in increasing degradation. Currently, 46% of the world's land is considered to be degraded. Urgent action is needed to reverse this trend. Healthy soils are required to feed the growing world population and meet their further needs. It is considered that this can only be ensured through a strong partnership which takes into account the existing initiatives and institutions[1].

Through enhanced and applied knowledge and information about the soil resources the REAWG will (i) assess the situation regarding the soil management in the respective WB countries, summarize the respective national actors and support for soil management, and (ii) propose respective strategic approaches and policies, as well as joint actions for establishing of the regional soil partnership.

Following the work programme and mandate of the REAWG for Soil, this work shall be continued and extended:

- Reliable and well-structured national soil data are becoming an issue in the past years for reporting to the European Environment Agency, United Nation conventions or for evidence-based decision making for various strategies and National Action Plans.
- The current methodologies and approaches for soil mapping in Western Balkans needs to be improved, especially soil classification and its correlation with the World Referent Base. This will enable to convert the existing soil data sets into a mutual harmonised data base, and will bridge certain differences.
- Collection and integration of existing soil data is challenging but is a basic prerequisite for further analysis of the soil degradation processes and establishing of a regional partnership.
- Soil mapping is continuously improving by adoption of new methods of filed survey and analysis. Correlation of soils with the environmental variables is one segment than can contribute towards more precise soil mapping and evaluation of degradation processes.
- Organising and participation in training programs on a regional or international scale is a unique opportunity for enforcement of current capacities for soil protection.
- Describe and share data about local soil contamination and extend knowledge about contaminated sites: polluting activities, substances, risk assessment procedures, geographic references, thresholds are a basic prerequisite for further analysis of the soil degradation processes.
- Various policies require information about pollutant sources and risks.
- There is a request from European Environment Agency for periodical delivery of contaminated sites data for indicator "Progress in the Management of Contaminated Sites";
- EU Soil Strategy 2030 defines that it is crucial that all Member States identify and maintain a register for contaminated sites, assess the risks and finally remediate these sites in case of unacceptable risks. This Soil Strategy therefore builds on and will significantly contribute to several of the objectives of the Green Deal.
- The types and uses of contamination thresholds need to be understood to explain the level of risk from polluting activities;
- Available information about contaminated sites needs to be improved so that its relationship and role as a source of pollution in different environmental domains can be understood:

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

industrial pollution, water pollution: water use and environmental pressures (based on WFD river basins), waste: information about the effects of waste disposal, human health, effects on biodiversity and ecosystem services, impact on food production and food safety;

- Assessment procedures and information about contamination is still very patchy and inconsistent across Western Balkan countries due to different policy requirements, kinds and depths of investigations, etc.;
- These processes are difficult or impossible to harmonize, so that Europe-wide views must allow for country/regional specific details.

The work will be conducted by an experts' team, part of the REAWG, consisting of:

- Regional Expert
- National Experts in the area of soil from each of the countries/territories of the Western Balkans: Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Serbia, Montenegro, BiH (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska)

The experts' team will be supported by inputs from representatives from relevant national authorities.

4. Tasks of the Contractee

The assignment includes the following tasks:

- Development of harmonised regional soil dataset;
- To participate in the process of collection of the existing national soil classifications and to take an active role in the process of development of chapter with a mutual regional soil classification related to WRB;
- Chapter with description of all existing and available graphical and numerical soil datasets and other environmental co-variables in the country, their identification and looking at possibilities for collection for integration into mutual data base;
- Chapter with detailed description of the specifics and thresholds of the pedogenetic factors for each soil type in the country;
- Development of at least two (2) Projects fishes on a regional scale, to be disseminated to potential donors or applied as a Project concept within various regional and EU initiatives;
- To actively participate in eventual training programs;
- Compile and summarize the existing knowledge on soil contamination related policies, polluting activities, measurement protocols, risk assessment procedures, etc. in the country;
- Prepares an overview of national thresholds for contaminants (background values, ecotoxicological values, screening values, etc. by country);
- Collect available information and data on contaminated sites in the country based on the specifications**:** Location, address and parcel (sometimes geospatial GIS format), Owner and land user, Management history, information from archives and permits, Potentially contaminating risk activities, Current and future land use, Sampling results, Type of contamination and contaminants, Mobility and risk of spreading, Risk assessment outcomes and prioritization classes, Investigation and remediation obligations and liabilities, Remediation and aftercare measures, Investigation and remediation reports, Presence of remaining residual contamination;
- Investigate and suggest the collection of additional data: Substances (concentrations) in soils exceeding thresholds (heavy metals, POPs, emerging substances);
- Establish recommendations for detailed site investigation/remediation options;
- Propose legally binding provisions to identify contaminated sites and set up an inventory/register of (potentially) contaminated sites in the country.

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The Contractor might be required to perform additional tasks that are deemed necessary for the completion and the submission of the proposal/application package.

5. Reporting and Deliverables

Having delivered the outcomes as described in this section, the Contractee will work together with the Regional Expert to ensure the acceptance of the final report by the contracting authority.

The following deliverables are foreseen for the Expert within this ToR:

Deliverable
1. Participation at the Fourth Interim Meeting
2. Collection of the existing national soil classifications;
3. Chapter with description of all existing and available graphical and numerical soil datasets and other environmental co-variables in the country;
4. Participation at the Fifth Interim Meeting
5. Chapter with detailed description of the specifics and thresholds of the pedogenetic factors for each soil type in the country; Take an active role in the process of development of chapter with a regional soil classification related to WRB;
6. Delivered final document for the National Assessment with at least two (2) Projects fishes
7. Participation at the Sixth Interim Meeting
8. Chapter with the soil contamination related policies, polluting activities, measurement protocols, risk assessment procedures, national thresholds for contaminants etc. in the country;
9. Collect available information and data on contaminated sites in the country based on the specifications;
10. Participation at the Seventh Interim Meeting
11. Delivered final document for the National Assessment with the proposal for legally binding provisions to identify contaminated sites and set up an inventory/register of (potentially) contaminated sites in the country;

The foreseen effort for the abovementioned deliverables is up to 20 days in the period March 2023-November 2024.

The working language for the assignment is English.

Expert's profile

- University degree in agriculture, biotechnical sciences, or closely related discipline relevant to the assignment. PhD will be considered as an advantage.
- Fluency in English
- Substantial research experience in soil science and soil mapping
- Proven professional experience in soil contamination research
- High level analytical and document drafting skills
- Understanding of the situation as well as the relevant legislative and policy framework in the respective country/territory
- Excellent communication and reporting skills
- Computer literacy
- Ability to work in a team.