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Biodiversity and agriculture

**Progress report on the implementation of the Plan of Action (2020–2030)
for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use
of Soil Biodiversity by the Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative****

Note by the Secretariat

The present progress report on the implementation of the Plan of Action (2020–2030) for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity has been prepared by the Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative. It is provided in the form and language in which it was received by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

* CBD/SBSTTA/27/1.

** The present document is being issued without formal editing.

Executive Summary – Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative (GSBI) – Fall 2025 Submission to the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), Convention on Biological Diversity

The GSBI at a Glance

- Vision: Translate soil biodiversity knowledge into effective environmental policy.
- Mandate: Increase awareness of soil biodiversity, promote education and innovative solutions, provide policy advice, and build capacity worldwide.
- Status: Incorporated as a Not-for-Profit (Canada); official relaunch planned for GSB2026.

Contributions to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Implementation

- Active input to the Plan of Action (2020–2030) for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity (CBD/COP/DEC/15/28).
- Supporting indicator development for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) monitoring framework.
- Strengthening synergies with FAO, IPBES, and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Scientific Advances

- GSB2026 Conference (April 2026, Canada):
 - 700+ participants anticipated
 - 13 symposia, 3 keynote speakers
 - 500+ talks and posters
- Development of SoilBON; harmonized soil biodiversity methodologies for monitoring and reporting.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Broad global membership across science, education, policy, NGOs, and international organizations, as well as the general public.
- Inclusive focus on underrepresented regions reaching >5000 members across 136 countries.
- Co-organization of side events and policy dialogues at CBD and FAO meetings.

Training & Capacity-Building (Regional Impact)

- Workshops in Portugal (2024–25): trained participants from Mexico, Costa Rica, Uzbekistan in practical soil biodiversity assessment.
- Targeted support for low- and middle-income countries.
- Ongoing mentorship for early-career researchers.

Strategic Renewal

- Transition to a transparent, inclusive governance model.
- Strengthened operational base through incorporation and compliance with Canadian law.
- Positioned to scale global engagement and impact.

Looking Ahead

The GSBI directly supports CBD Parties by advancing science, capacity, and policy solutions to safeguard soil biodiversity as a foundation for resilient ecosystems. The GSBI will continue to:

- Advocate for soil biodiversity in global and national policy frameworks.
- Build skills and knowledge to implement the CBD Plan of Action (2020–2030) for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity.
- Provide a trusted platform to unite scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

Introduction

The Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative (GSBI) was established in 2011 under the leadership of the late Dr. Diana Wall, whose vision and dedication laid the foundation for a global community committed to advancing awareness and knowledge of the vital role soil biodiversity plays in sustaining life on Earth. From the outset, GSBI operated as an unfunded, grassroots initiative, relying on the voluntary commitment of its members to build momentum. Despite these limitations, it successfully brought together scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders to translate scientific knowledge into environmental policies, strengthen conservation action, and build global capacity. Following Dr. Wall's passing in 2024, the GSBI undertook leadership transition and strategic restructuring to ensure continuity and long-term impact. Now incorporated as a Not-for-Profit organization in Canada, GSBI is strengthening its governance framework and creating a legal foundation to pursue new funding streams and partnerships. This renewal broadens opportunities for participation and sets the stage for a formal relaunch at the 2026 Global Soil Biodiversity Conference (GSB2026). Leadership has also been refreshed with the appointment of Dr. Zoë Lindo (Canada) and Dr. Carlos Guerra (Portugal) as co-leads, bringing world-class expertise in biodiversity monitoring, synthesis, and science-policy engagement to keep GSBI both scientifically robust and globally connected.

Building on its long-standing role in advancing the integration of soil biodiversity into international policy processes, particularly under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the GSBI today continues to play a central role in shaping the global soil biodiversity agenda. Its efforts support Parties in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and advancing CBD Decision 15/28.

Contributions to CBD Implementation

The GSBI has actively supported the implementation of CBD decisions and frameworks by:

- providing scientific input to discussions on soil biodiversity indicators relevant to the KMGBF monitoring framework¹;
- contributing to the development and dissemination of the Plan of Action (2020–2030) for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity through outreach, engagement, and capacity-building;
- fostering synergies between the CBD and other international processes, including the FAO Global Soil Partnership, IPBES, and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

These contributions ensure that soil biodiversity remains visible and prioritized within biodiversity policy dialogues.

Scientific Advances

Since its establishment, the GSBI has played a central role in advancing soil biodiversity science and ensuring that research findings inform international policy processes under the CBD.

A major vehicle for this progress is the Global Soil Biodiversity Conference (GSB) series. Previous conferences held in Dijon, France (2012; ~700 delegates), Nanjing, China (2016; >1,000 delegates), and Dublin, Ireland (2023; >600 delegates) have established the GSB as the preeminent global forum for soil biodiversity. These meetings have brought together scientists, policymakers, and practitioners to synthesize knowledge, foster collaboration, and strengthen the integration of soil biodiversity into global biodiversity agendas.

The upcoming GSB2026 (Victoria, Canada) on April 12-15, 2026 will build on this legacy, with:

- 700+ expected participants from across sectors and regions;
- 3 keynote addresses, 13 confirmed symposia, and an Early Career Researcher showcase;
- Over 500 presentation opportunities (talks and posters).

¹ Parnell et al. 2025. Combining science and policy for a unified global soil biodiversity observatory. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*. 9: 1302–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-025-02754-z>

The Conference is explicitly aligned with CBD priorities, focusing on soil biodiversity as a foundation for ecosystem services, nature-based solutions, monitoring and standardization, and strategies for conservation and protection.

As preparations for the Conference move forward, the GSBI will invite the Secretariat of the Convention, and any other organization in the position to do so, to provide support in raising the visibility of the event and in exploring potential avenues for financial or in-kind support, for example, for facilitating the participation of delegates (in particular participants from underrepresented regions), in alignment with the Plan of Action.

Beyond the conference platform, the GSBI continues to support scientific progress by:

- Leading international discussions on harmonized methodologies for assessing and monitoring soil biodiversity (SoilBON), enhancing data comparability across regions;
- Facilitating global collaborations that integrate soil biodiversity into broader research agendas on ecosystem services, resilience, and sustainable development.
- Contributing to the work of the International Network on Soil Biodiversity (NETSOB), ensuring alignment with the FAO Global Soil Partnership and supporting the development and dissemination of standardized approaches.

Together, these efforts position the GSBI as a key driver of scientific advances that directly support CBD implementation and reporting, particularly under the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Plan of Action (2020–2030) for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity.

Stakeholder Engagement

The GSBI provides a global platform that connects scientists, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society, ensuring that soil biodiversity is represented across diverse perspectives and decision-making arenas. A key strength of the Initiative is its ability to convene communities across regions and disciplines, and to serve as a trusted interface between science, policy, and practice.

Recent engagement activities reflect this convening role. The GSBI has worked closely with representatives from government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations to co-develop themes and symposia for the upcoming Global Soil Biodiversity Conference, ensuring that the program reflects policy priorities as well as emerging scientific advances. The Initiative has also placed emphasis on expanding its network to include underrepresented regions, thereby diversifying participation and amplifying voices that are often absent in global discussions.

Beyond conferences, the GSBI has advanced policy dialogue through workshops and side events at international meetings, including those convened under the CBD and FAO. These activities have raised the profile of soil biodiversity in multilateral fora, while providing practical entry points for Parties to integrate soil biodiversity into their national commitments.

Outreach to the wider community of practice has been strengthened through a series of webinars, blogs, and newsletters, which now reach an active network of approximately 5,000 GSBI members worldwide. These communication channels serve as vital tools for knowledge-sharing, capacity building, and maintaining momentum between global events.

Training and Capacity-Building Across Regions

Training initiatives have been a central focus of GSBI activities:

- In 2024–2025, GSBI experts partnered with the FAO Global Soil Partnership to deliver hands-on soil biodiversity workshops in Portugal, training participants from Mexico, Costa Rica, and Uzbekistan in standardized assessment methods;
- Regional collaborations have been supported to enhance technical skills and access to tools, particularly in low- and middle-income countries;
- GSBI members continue to provide mentorship and resources to early-career researchers, reinforcing the next generation of soil biodiversity scientists.

- These efforts directly support the CBD’s call for capacity-building and technology transfer to advance the implementation of the Plan of Action (2020–2030) for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity.

Strategic Restructuring and Renewed Leadership

In 2024, following the passing of GSBI’s founding leader, Dr. Diana Wall, the Initiative entered a period of transition and renewal. To ensure continuity and sustain its global role, the GSBI has designated new leadership and is preparing for a formal relaunch at the Global Soil Biodiversity Conference in 2026. The new Co-Chairs are:

- Dr. Zoë Lindo – Professor at Western University (Canada), is an internationally recognized expert in soil biodiversity and community ecology, with a focus on the impacts of global change and biodiversity loss on soil ecosystems. They lead major national and international research initiatives and contribute to global assessments under the UN-FAO’s Global Soil Partnership and the International Network on Soil Biodiversity (NETSOB) working group, bringing extensive experience in science–policy engagement.
- Dr. Carlos Guerra – Professor at University of Coimbra (Portugal), is an internationally recognized expert in global biodiversity monitoring, synthesis, and the interface between soil ecology and policy. Dr. Guerra has led major international initiatives, including global biodiversity assessments and indicator development such as SoilBON, and plays a central role in advancing soil biodiversity within global science–policy processes, bringing extensive experience in building international networks and collaborations.

Together, this leadership team brings a strong combination of scientific expertise, international networks, and policy engagement experience. Their mandate is to guide GSBI through a period of strategic realignment, strengthen its ability to engage across regions and sectors, and position the Initiative for long-term impact. While GSBI has also taken initial steps toward incorporation in Canada to support future activities, its current focus is on consolidating leadership, broadening participation, and preparing for a formal relaunch at GSB2026.

Through this renewal, GSBI is building on its strong legacy while positioning itself to scale its contributions to CBD implementation, capacity building, and scientific collaboration. The strengthened organizational model will enable the Initiative to provide clear, sustainable avenues for member engagement and long-term global impact.

Strategic Vision and Mandate

The GSBI envisions a future where soil biodiversity is fully recognized as essential to ecosystem resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development. As an international not-for-profit organization, the GSBI will:

- advocate for policy and societal change through awareness-raising and engagement with governments and institutions;
- provide educational resources, training, and workshops to strengthen technical capacity worldwide;
- foster global networks and collaborations among scientists, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society.

Conclusion

The GSBI remains committed to supporting the CBD and its Parties by contributing with scientific expertise, engaging diverse stakeholders, and building capacity across regions. By aligning science, policy, and practice, the GSBI ensures that soils, home to the majority of Earth’s biodiversity, are protected and sustainably managed in support of the KMGBF and a resilient future for all.