



Soil information and education for a sustainable management: the Soil Atlas of Africa

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The richness of African soil resources need to be protected for future generations. A number of threats are affecting the functioning of African soils, not only for the purpose of agricultural production, but also for other important environmental services that soil delivers to all of us (e.g., storage, filtering and buffering of contaminants; limiting dramatic floods events; preserving a large pool of biodiversity, etc....).

The Soil Atlas of Africa is an international project involving the Institute for Environment and Sustainability of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, ISRIC – World Soil Information, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Land and Water Development Division) and scientists from the European Soil Bureau Network and the Africa Soil Science Society.

The Atlas will compile existing information on different soil types in easily understandable maps (both at national to continental scale) covering the entire Africa. Similar to the Soil Atlas of Europe and the Northern Circumpolar Soil Database, the Soil Atlas of Africa intends to produce derived maps at continental scale with descriptive text (e.g. vulnerability to desertification, soil nutrient status, carbon stocks and sequestration potential, irrigable areas and water resources) as well as specific maps to illustrate threats such as soil erosion, soil sealing by housing and infrastructure, etc...

Not only climate change, but also desertification and loss of biodiversity are strongly affecting soils globally, making the “Soil Atlas of Africa” relevant to a much larger community of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the three “Rio-Conventions” and allowing to explore possible synergies among international multilateral agreements towards global soil protection.

As requested by the EU’s Communication on Soil Protection, the Soil Atlas of Africa is intended for the general public, aiming to 'bridge the gap' between soil science and public knowledge. By addressing the non-specialized audience, the Atlas will increase public awareness and understanding of the diversity of soils and of the need to protect this precious resource.