



The Soil Atlas of Africa: raising awareness and educate to the importance of soil

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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. This is of particular importance once we know that many health-related problems in Africa are indirectly related to the services of soils.

To raise the awareness of the general public, policy makers and other scientists to the importance of soil in Africa, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission is to produce the first ever Soil Atlas of Africa. This is in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Africa Soil Science Society, ISRIC – World Soil Information and scientists from both Europe and Africa.

The Atlas compiles existing information on different soil types as easily understandable maps (both at regional and continental scale) covering the African continent. 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 for instance. For each regional overview, large scale examples of soil maps and derived products are presented too.

The Atlas will be published as a hardcover book containing 174 A3 pages, which will allow soils maps to be displayed at the A2 scale. Both French and English versions of the Atlas will be edited. The Atlas will be sold at a low cost and will be for free for educational purpose (Schools and Universities). A digital version on CD and eventually downloadable on internet will also be available.

Together with the publication of the Atlas, associated datasets on soil characteristics for Africa will be made available. These datasets will be useful for making broad distinction among soil types and provide general trends at the global and regional scales. The datasets will be made accessible for free downloading from the portals of the SOIL Action (<http://eusoils.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>) and the ACP Observatory for Sustainable Development (<http://acpobservatory.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>).

The Atlas links the theme of soil with rural development and, at the same time, supports the goals of the EU Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection in conserving a threatened natural resource that is vital to human existence.

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.