

# WRITTEN CONTRIBUTION TO THE MISSION ASSEMBLY 'SOIL HEALTH AND FOOD'

January 2021

IEEP welcomes the final report of the Mission Board. The general line adopted in the interim report is kept, and we support the target of 75% of healthy soils by 2030 as well as building on Lighthouses and Laboratory Labs (LL&LH) for developing the mission's R&I activities.

The final report shows progress from the interim report, and we appreciate two elements in particular.

First, a new societal focus was created by adding an objective clearly referring to education (schools and curricula), training and impact of consumers choices (objective 8), which is highly welcome.

We also acknowledge that the report proposes a good approach by structuring R&I priorities along with four headings and by setting the role of LL&LH in the mission to identify R&I gaps and uptake knowledge. As some 2000 LL&LHs need to be created as quickly as possible, we think that timebound and specific goals should be set in the timeline of activities, including steppingstones for a timely realisation. It must be frontloaded to bring the mission to success.

## **Responding to the questions posed to the Mission Assembly in December 2020:**

### ARE MISSION OBJECTIVES, TARGETS AND INDICATORS 'SMART' (SPECIFIC- MEASURABLE- ACHIEVABLE-RELEVANT-TIMELY)?

The Mission objectives overall are well-defined. Their presentation in a long-list mode would benefit from a clearer structure (regrouping certain objectives like 1, 5 and 6) and a hierarchisation (objectives 2 and 4 are top priorities directly linked with the European Green Deal and the SDGs that condition the realisation of other objectives).

For the targets, the Mission Board report used quantified targets mostly in reduction percentages. Looking forward, we suggest including further documentation on statistics that are ought to be used the reference periods, the date of achievement, intermediate targets etc.

The recently launched Soil Observatory will play an interesting role, and we presume that it will further develop the eight indicators. Based on the experience of the first year in practice, it may also be necessary to add additional indicators and define the data source to value them and regularly deliver monitoring reports. With the start of the Soil Observatory, we suggest clarifying these elements within the mission and explaining how work will be coordinated with national bodies and the EEA for the monitoring.

Finally, regarding the timely aspect of indicators and R&I activities in general, the report and the mission should acknowledge that certain objectives require urgent action and solutions. The hotspot issues, like peatland, wetlands and soil sealing, should be treated with a greater sense of urgency. Therefore, we propose to set the implementation date before 2030 to achieve the desired impact, ideally and given the gravity of situations, by 2025.

## WHICH PARTS (BUILDING BLOCKS) WOULD BENEFIT FROM MORE DETAIL OR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?

The report envisages four building blocks: “The mission’s building blocks are based on

- 1) co-creation and sharing in Living Laboratories (LLs) and Lighthouses (LHs) within and across farms and forest, landscape and urban settings;
- 2) a consistent selection of eight indicators to be used in a robust soil monitoring programme by each Member State equivalent to that for other natural resources (air, water and biodiversity);
- 3) an ambitious cross-scale, inter and transdisciplinary R&I programme;
- 4) training, education, communication and citizen engagement embedded into all activities.”

We agree with the choices made here and welcome particularly the advancements in citizen engagement and recommend that civil society will be involved from the beginning.

### **Suggestions for further development**

Two aspects should be further elaborated and integrated into the mission, namely the international dimension of the mission and its transformative capacity.

#### *INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION*

Objective 7 in the report aims at decreasing the soil footprint of EU imports. IEEP share this vision that only holistic approaches will succeed. Nevertheless, the mission seems to miss the opportunity to integrate an international approach. Improvements in the EU cannot be translated to the rest of the world. Consequently, research funded by the mission should pay attention to understanding local economies and local ecosystems abroad with the aim of finding and implementing sustainable solutions for soil protection and conservation in trading partner countries. The mission could foresee cooperation agreements on the matter, for example on arid soil protection conservation in Africa (perhaps on the PRIMA model), or forest conservation in South America and Oceania. This might be a new, separate building block.

#### *TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY*

The report points towards “the understanding of missions as an enabler of changes beyond R&I.”, which is precisely what separates the aim of the missions from a strategic R&I agenda. We suggest this to be further developed within the mission and in the implementation plan.

Annex 3 and 7 already provide a good basis for such a development, as they identify the various policies and programmes which are directly or indirectly linked to soil health. There should be a clear link between the mission's ambition to answer policy orientations (F2F, Biodiversity Strategy, European Green Deal), and the delivery of feedback to policymakers - proposing policy recommendations to better guarantee soil health in the future. The connection between the mission and the new EU soil strategy should further be regarded as an opportunity to enhance the transformative capacity. In the consultation on the EU soil strategy roadmap, IEEP put forward the policy recommendation of integrating, concrete elements to generate a science-based draft proposal for an impactful soil protection strategy: "the Soil Strategy should foresee a legislative proposal, in order to ensure a balanced level of legal protection to the common natural goods like air, water and soils.". IEEP recommends linking, in both mission and strategy, the necessity to gather scientific knowledge, and to make updated evidence and sustainable solutions available to policymakers, to strengthen EU environmental law in a robust Soil protection directive.