

Global Soil Doctors Programme

A farmer-to-farmer training programme

1. Background and rationale

SK Agricare is a promoter of the Global Soil Doctor programme at country level in South Africa. The Global Soil Doctor programme is a Food and Agriculture Organisation's initiative. The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) was established in 2012 as a mechanism to develop a strong interactive partnership, and, enhanced collaboration and synergy of efforts between all stakeholders involved with soils. One of the key objectives of the GSP is to improve soil governance and to promote sustainable soil management. The GSP Secretariat is currently housed in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome

By promoting the establishment of a farmer-to-farmer training system, the Global Soil Doctors Programme aims to build the capacity of farmers on the practice of sustainable soil management and, by doing so, support governmental agencies and organizations working on agricultural extension at the field level (promoting broader impact and cost reduction).

2. The objectives of the programme are:

- To establish a farmer-to-farmer training system by building the capacity of farmers on the practice of sustainable soil management;
- To support the efforts of governmental agencies and organizations working on agricultural extension at the field level
- To support field research based on interactions between the Soil Doctors and universities and research institutes, including access to demonstration and experimental fields
- To promote the concept of soil testing prior to recommendations on soil management

3. Selection of the Soil Doctors

Farmers joining the Soil Doctors Global programme should be identified as a group of excellence by their community. Based on that, only farmers that meet certain criteria can become Soil Doctors. Candidates to the position of Soil Doctors should:

- Be in good health
- Have access to land
- Be willing to coordinate or host demonstration plots under their direct control or that of cooperating farmers;
- Be at least 20 years old
- Be willing to work
- Be interested in land development activities
- Reside in areas of interest for the programme and promoters
- Be willing to share the inputs provided by the promoter(s) with other farmers; and
- Be willing to join the trainings provided by the promoter(s).

Being lettered and in possession of a degree in soil science or agricultural related fields is an advantage, as well as having access to technology (laptops, smartphones, access to Internet, etc.), having strong networking skills, being proactive in helping others, having a good level of knowledge on soil management and a good ability to pass that knowledge onto others.

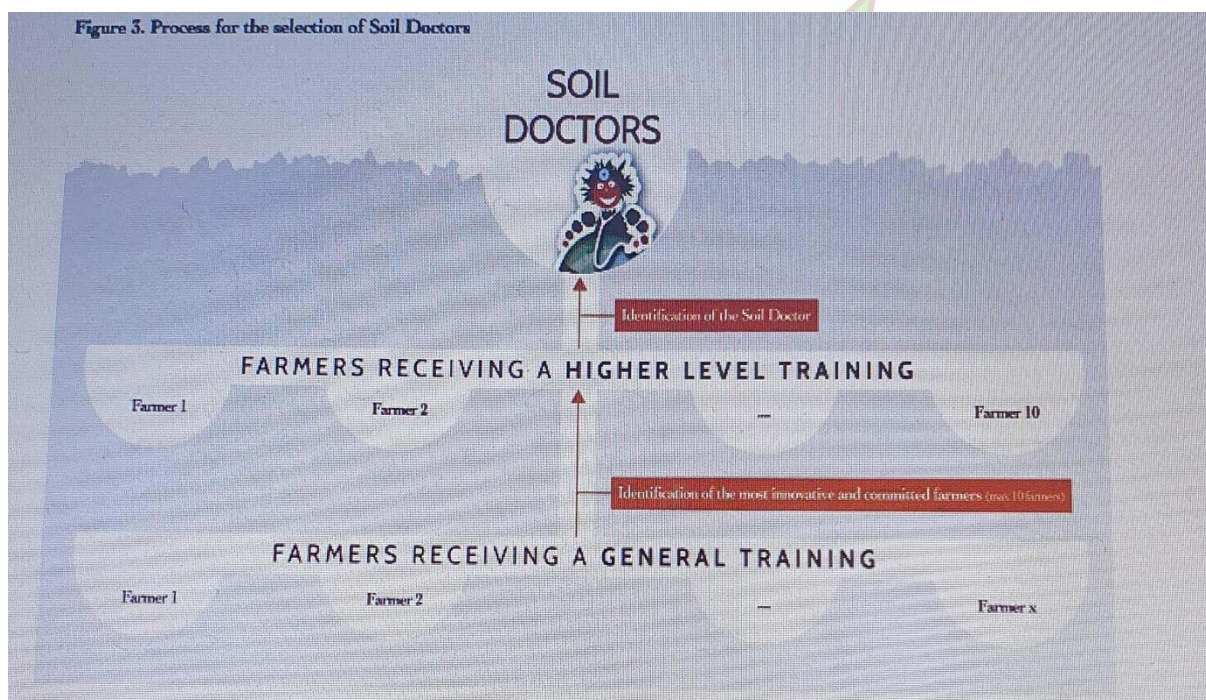
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Once the eligible farmers are selected, they will receive a **general training** on the importance of soil and land resources management, conservation and basic sustainable soil management practices.

A **higher-level training** course will then be provided to those farmers (maximum 10) that excelled during the general training. Ultimately, only one farmer will be appointed to serve as Soil Doctor in his/her community. The appointment will take place either by selection (farmers deciding themselves who becomes the Soil Doctors) or by trainer's judging based on farmers' performances

Once the selection of the Soil Doctors is completed, the promoter oversees providing Soil Doctors with the training most appropriate to their skills and needs. The Soil Doctors will keep their position if any of the conditions for the replacement of a Soil Doctors apply (see section on the "Replacement of a Soil Doctor").

4. Selection Process



5. Incentives

In order to motivate and commit farmers to the programme, promoters are encouraged to provide them with a series of incentives such as:

- Provision of the equipment needed to assess soil conditions as per the method chosen in the STM
- Provision of trainings
- Invitation to public events and in schools to talk about their work and on how to preserve soils from degradation.

Each Soil Doctor should receive a certificate of competence and a uniform with the logo of the programme, which will allow them to be recognized within their community.

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6. Role of the Soil Doctors within their communities

The Soil Doctors are asked to:

- Attend the training sessions provided by the promoters
- Carry out public relation activities such as making announcements, delivering messages to farmers, inviting farmers to participate in study tours, workshops and other events on behalf of the promoter(s)
- Support farmers to practice sustainable soil management and to restore degraded soils: e.g. give basic recommendations and answers to possible questions they may receive from farmers
- Assist farmers in analysing their soils using the methods provided in the STM
- Practice sustainable soil management on their land and be service centres for information and technology transfer especially through demonstrational plots for farmers in their administrative area of competence
- Provide data and information on soil quality to the promoters in order to facilitate soil quality monitoring activities
- Share their local knowledge and experience with the promoters who will then share them with the GSP to improve the programme
- Assist each other in complying with their role.

7. Implementation of the programme at the country level

The flexible structure of the Global Soil Doctors programme allows for its implementation in a country that either does or does not have similar programmes and/or initiatives currently in place. However, its successful implementation depends on the analysis of the following variables:

1. **Identification of farmer communities** taking into consideration the distance between villages and farms, which can hamper communication, networking and the efficiency of action of the Soil Doctors.
2. **Support of the promoter(s) to the programme and availability of incentives to the Soil Doctors:** the success of the programme is directly linked to the willingness of the promoter(s) to invest in it and the availability of subsidies and/ or incentives available to the Soil Doctors.
Greater support from the promoter(s) will enhance the ability of the Soil Doctors to train other farmers, install experimental and demonstration plots, use the methods in the STM and promote the practice of sustainable soil management.
3. **Social structure (hierarchy) and culture:** can represent a constraint to the selection of the most appropriate farmer to be appointed as Soil Doctors and to the replacement of those who do not perform and efficiently serve their network.
4. **Training dates:** training dates should not overlap with the harvesting period and/ or the time of major field operations. It is indeed necessary to minimize the economic losses of farmers joining the training. To this end, it might be appropriate to propose different training dates to farmers belonging to the same rank in the programme that are growing different crops.

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Guidelines for implementing the programme in both countries that have and do not have programmes and/or initiatives similar to it, are herewith provided.

