



COST Action Report

Report of the Technical sessions of COST Action SUSTAIN during the joint INSAS and SUSTAIN International workshop on Salt-affected soils: threats and potential – Valencia, Spain | May 27–31, 2024

On the second day, the technical sessions of the COST Action SUSTAIN took place, covering the report on progress of the Action and each working group since the start (November 2023), identification of the priorities and key actions to meet planned deliverables for the upcoming years.

The technical session of COST Action started with the Management Committee meeting. This started with a presentation from the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Action, Katarzyna Negacz, on the progress performed by the network and its growth (number of participants and involved countries) since November 2023. She reported about the main achievements of the network which included: Kick-off meeting in Brussels in 2023; Annual meeting in Valencia; Training schools in Valencia (06/2024) and Trebinje (09/2024); Impact investors in Brussels (04/2024). Then the Grant Coordinator, Giulia Atzori, presented the progress on the grants for short term scientific missions and conferences, providing an overview of the grants already awarded and opening a new call before the end of the financial year and all the members then agreed on the new rules for grant applications.

An open discussion then followed focusing on:

- the organization of meetings for each year setting up the rules for the upcoming years.
- The **outlook for 2024/2025** (Calls for meetings, schools and workshops; Grant calls; Work group activities; Communication and dissemination).

After the Management Committee meeting, the Vice-Chair of the Action, Nadia Bazihizina, started the three consecutive meeting of SUSTAIN's working group (WG) where the leaders of each WG updated the participants on their progress and required steps to reach the deliverables of this Action. In addition, for each WG, the following updates were given:

- Working group 1. This WG focuses on: i) evaluation of existing soil mapping technologies and analysis pipelines; and ii) providing new guidelines to capture soil properties at a scale physiologically relevant for plants. During this meeting the WG1 leaders and chairs discussed the organization of an online meeting for the working group, coordinating tasks, and assigning leads for main tasks based on interest.

- Working group 2. This WG investigates plant responses to salinity and formulate new research hypotheses and common goals for future experimental work and genetic improvement programs to characterize and quantify root-soil interactions in saline soils, and their potential in terms of the optimal soil and water management of these lands. During the meeting the WG leaders discussed planned publications, setting up the databases and how to improve inter-WG collaboration.
- Working group 3. This WG addresses the upscaling of sustainable management practices for salt-affected soils, to promote the transfer of research findings from the lab to the field and improve water use and crop productivity focusing on: i) highlighting the economic, social and environmental value of salt-affected lands and saline landscapes instead of cost-focused approaches; ii) valorizing saline ecosystems from irrigated lands and drylands to raise awareness, inspire new business models and improve communication; and iii) addressing upscaling the market for saline production and consumption by informing about new crops, salt-induced changes in nutritional characteristics, and potential market chains. During the meeting the WG leader discussed the need to plan a workshop or training school for the next year and to organize the next meeting in the first week of July.
- Working group 4. This WG focuses on enhancing the dialogue and knowledge exchange and building capacity among all affected stakeholders and those involved in the sustainable development of saline agriculture. During the meeting WG leaders discussed the plan for the upcoming months and discussed the criteria for the organization of workshops and outreach activities.
- Working group 5. This WG will determine how to put salinization on the European policy agenda. During the meeting WG leaders brought the need to organize, when the budget of the Action allows, a meeting face-to-face with the WG5 members, inviting at least a representative of each country member of SUSTAIN. Also participants discussed the need to showcase that saline agriculture can be a sustainable economic endeavor for farmers.
- WG6. This work conducted in this WG aims to raise awareness about the issues linked with salinity and to enhance the uptake and implementation of the results through dissemination and outreach activities. During the meeting the WG leaders discussed the organization to evaluate member participation and address duplications and the need to find a person to support the science coordinator position and engage the communication and networking group actively.

The COST Action technical sessions ended with a Core group meeting where the members discussed future meetings and workshops planning and organization, budget allocation and overall Action management.