



Meeting notes

Project Access kick-off workshop

Wednesday, 9 September 2015 | 09:00-13:00 hours | Lumen 1

Present: ISRIC staff; missing (excused): Ingrid, Tom. Evert van der Veen. Carel Jansen.

Agenda

Time	What	Who
09:00-9:20	Introduction to Project Access	Rik, Evert/Carel, Thomas
09:20-10:20	Group exercise: Structure and contents of isric.org – What needs to be improved?	Evert, Thomas
10:20-11:00	Plenary session: isric.org web statistics – What can we learn from them?	Jorge, Thomas, Evert
11:00-11:15	Coffee break	
11:15-12:00	Plenary discussion: Building a lively ISRIC user community	Rik, Evert, Thomas
12:00-12:45	Group exercise: ISRIC clients – Who are they? What do they want? How can we reach them?	Evert, Thomas
12:45-13:00	Summary, closing	All

Introduction

Rik welcomes all participants and explains his motivation to initiate Project Access. When he got to know ISRIC he found the isric.org website rather less appealing - especially for client groups other than scientists - and not effective to acquire information on ISRIC data and services. He decided to prioritise an update of isric.org and initiate the internal User Experience project in early 2015, meanwhile renamed to Project Access (5314014004-DEELPRJ_1). Main aim of the project is to help us better serve our clients. This can also help improving our acquisition and initiate new collaboration, rather than potential partners 'just' downloading our data and using them as a service in their own collaborative projects. A short discussion follows. Participants agree that the project should not just be done to show how great ISRIC is, but to focus on making good products as the basis for promotion. Rik indicates that both can and should be done.

In order to facilitate the Project Access process, two external consultants, Evert van der Veen and Carel Jansen have been hired. Thomas was assigned project leader in mid-2015. The project has a steering committee (Rik, Niels, Godert, Thomas), and the core working group of Evert & Thomas (sometimes also including Jorge and Ingrid) has been meeting several times in the recent past.

[Evert](#) and [Carel](#) introduce themselves. Especially in the first project phase, Evert will support the steering committee in preparation work and process management. He will help to analyse existing information and 'groundtruth' the project's activities. Carel will solely provide advice because of his limited availability (he is leading a similar project for NIOO).

Thomas highlights the project phases and voices his expectation that by March 2016 (50-year jubilee!) ISRIC will have a re-designed and updated web portal whose improved contents and structure contribute to make ISRIC the 'trusted broker of quality-assessed global soil information', as Niels has put it during

the recent strategic day. Working groups will be formed to achieve the project targets and all motivated ISRIC staff will be able to play their part in the process. No-one will be excluded. All relevant project documents can be found in the [respective folder on W: drive](#).

Group exercise: Structure and contents of isric.org

Participants are divided into 4 groups and placed on separate tables. Evert as the technical chair introduces the first element of the workshop. The following 4 tasks are shown, and groups have to compete with each other to most quickly find the right answer through the isric.org website:

1. How many Wageningen soil profiles are in our database according to isric.org?
Correct answer: 4
Source: www.worldsoilprofiles.org
2. What is the title of the latest ISRIC report?
Correct answer: World soil property estimates for broad-scale modelling (WISE30sec)
Source: <http://isric.org/biblio>
3. How much land is affected by human-induced soil degradation according to GLASOD?
Correct answer: 1964 Mha
Source: http://isric.org/sites/default/files/ExplanNote_1.pdf
4. How many Norwegian soil monoliths do we have in our collection?
Correct answer: 3
Source: <http://isis.isric.nl/> (login required)



Figure 1: Hands-on exercise – retrieving information from isric.org (Carel Jansen)

For all of the exercises the correct answer was found by at least one of the groups within a few minutes. Not all of the groups found all answers, though, and frustration was voiced over the fact that even we as experts cannot find things easily in the current setup of isric.org. Some observations:

1. Soil point information is outdated; of the 4 Wageningen profiles in worldsoilprofiles.org one is allegedly from Algeria, and one from Anguilla. None of those 4 points contain any reasonable information at all (fields are empty).

2. ISRIC literature is hard to find. It is not intuitive to place it under 'About ISRIC>Publications'; there is no separate section for ISRIC reports, and the filter function on <http://isric.org/biblio> is very hard to find
3. ISRIC is 'famous' for work on land degradation (GLASOD, GLADA) but main findings of these projects are somewhat hidden in reports that have to be downloaded and searched
4. ISIS and with it data on our collection is hardly accessible from isric.org. The virtual soil museum will be an urgent and welcome solution to this in the near future

Outcome: All staff seem to share the notion that the structure and contents of isric.org can be improved, and that the time has come to take action. Evert explains that some "quick wins" can easily be implemented at this moment in time without the need to wait for the complete overhaul of the site. List with suggested quick wins are distributed to the groups, and participants asked to rank these according to urgency. Participants are encouraged to add their names to quick wins they may want to help implement.

What can be done rather easily?	Urgency? 1=least, 10=highest	Importance	Who is willing to help?
Bring all existing ISRIC web services under isric.org domain, e.g. soilgrids.isric.org , museum.isric.org , etc.	8, 8, 6, 8	8, 8	Johan
Change all ISRIC email addresses to @isric.org.	6, 8, 9, 7	9, 7	Yolanda
Create 'Soil wiki' page that captures and extends the contents of the 'About soil' section on isric.org.	2, 1, 8, 4	5, 6	Stephan, Tom
Delete obsolete information on isric.org (not visited; not up to date); remove domains that display outdated information (e.g. worldsoilprofiles.org).	9, 9, 8, 8	9, 8	Evert, Niels, Eloi, Maria
Create entry points on isric.org for different client groups with separate introductions (experienced soil scientists; professionals with little experience; general public).	10, 7, 6, 7	10, 8	Evert, Rik, Maria, Johan, Godert
Use a larger font for the body text on isric.org.	2, 10, 4, 6	4, 10, 5	Yolanda
Make ISRIC more visible in ESG by putting a logo and/or creating a notice board at the entrance corridor listing all ISRIC staff with image, function, and room number.	2, 7, 9, 4	2, 4	

New suggestions (urgency/importance generally judged high by contributing group):

Extend soil data (download) with functional soil data (soil interpretations, e.g. soil erodibility, fertility, degradation).			
Improve speed of data, less text to read.			
Establish a FAQ.	8	8	
Re-categorize the main menu.	8	8	
Remove blanked vertical bars on the sides of the website.			
Get rid of the WUR logo.	8	8	

Most of the suggested quick-wins scored rather high. Creating different entry points for visitors on isric.org (including better 'guidance' for them on the way to the contents they hope to find), deleting

obsolete information, bringing all existing ISRIC web services under isric.org domain, and changing email addresses to @isric.org appear to be the most 'burning' issues. Their implementation is therefore likely, and will not depend on additional information collected from actual/potential ISRIC clients (ongoing).

Further observations from the exercise:

- 2 groups decided to use the importance category beside the one on urgency. In most cases the ratings for urgency and importance coincided.
- Creating entry points for various client groups is perceived as complex task. Several attempts have been made in the past.
- The establishment of a 'Soil wiki' is considered a lot of work and by some as not being part of our core business. The idea to make a soil wiki available in the WorldSoilMuseum (as part of the map table) is brought up.
- It is recommended by some to restrict the deletion of contents to items that don't work or are very outdated.
- Increasing font size on isric.org is perceived an 'easy' task; Ingrid might disagree on this one. Instead of using a larger font, it is suggested to use a different, more visible/attractive font.

Plenary session: isric.org web statistics

Jorge presents the main findings of his report (available in W: drive). The statistics for isric.org websites are being compiled in the piwiki platform (<http://webstats.isric.org/>) and collected since 2011. Jorge shows visits to isric.org which are in the order of 9.400 visits/month. He presents a 'heatmap' of the locations from which our websites are being accessed from.

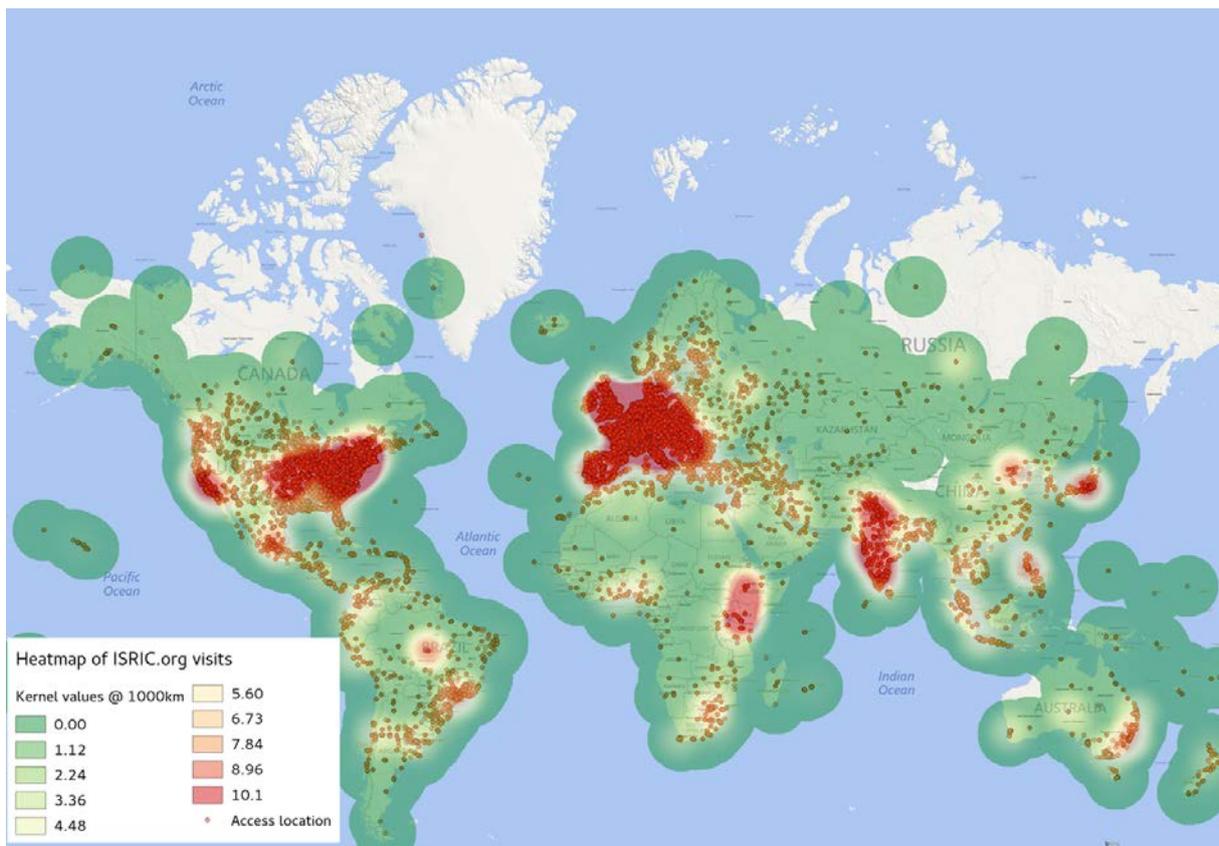


Figure 2: Heatmap of ISRIC.org visits

Most access is from Europe, India and North America. Large parts of Africa, Asia and South America are clearly underrepresented. It is interesting to note that some high values are being generated with few points in them, i.e. few people in a certain are intensively using our sites, e.g. in eastern Africa or central

Brazil. IP information is being collected alongside, so that we roughly know which organisations are behind the access observed. It is difficult to tell, however, who exactly is causing the demand, e.g. in case of a university-related IP a researcher or a student could be requesting data.

Jorge then explains the concept of 'bounce rates'. When a user enters the website and doesn't like it and leaves, this causes a high bounce rate. Bouncing rates of > 80-90 % are considered really bad. Some of the bounce rates observed for isric.org are:

- Entrance page /index.html -> 44%
- /about-soils -> 76%
- /land-evaluation-and-land-use-planning -> 86%
- /world-soil-museum -> 35%

Information on access locations (heat map) as well as client behaviour (bounce rate) – along with additional web statistics – will be used in Project Access to improve the structure and contents of isric.org.



Figure 3: Rik highlights what he wants to achieve with Project Access, using an example of where IFAD and IFDC collaborate using ISRIC data (Evert van den Veen)

A discussion follows on what we can learn from these data. Concerning the heat map, participants feel that missing IT infrastructure in some parts of the world, as well as language barriers can help explain the current picture. A concrete suggestion is brought up to contact those users and their associated organisations that heavily use our data. We could take this as entry point to ask if they need further help, or if they would be willing to collaborate. Vice versa, we can identify and approach organisations that we expect to use our data and services but currently don't.

Looking at the search terms that people enter in search engines there appears to be a focus on applied soil information, with keywords such as 'soil formation', 'soil functions' or 'land evaluation' high up on the list. It was generally felt that we need to strive towards putting more contents on soil interpretations online. This is not new, but confirmed once more through the analysis of our web statistics.

Concerning the bounce rates, participants point at the need to use the right keywords so that user do find on a webpage what they expect. An example is the 'Training' section

(<http://isric.org/services/training-and-education>) where people might hope to find specific training materials but rather find generic information and the dates of past courses. One suggestion was to also analyse the search terms entered by visitors on our site, and compare them to the terms entered in Google. This might reveal what people do currently not easily find on isric.org.

Plenary discussion: Building a lively ISRIC user community

Rik explains why this is close to his heart. He feels that building and cherishing a network of 'loyal' clients will a) improve our standing in the world of soil information, b) helps to understand what our clients want and with that help us to design the right products and be innovative, and c) contribute to our acquisition success. The Project Access kick-off is taken as an opportunity to explore pathways on how to best achieve a lively user community, if we really want!

A lively discussion developed, structured along the following aspects of community-building:

- What makes a good community?
Participants agreed that a community is mainly characterised by a strong, sometimes 'fanatic' common interest (which also helps to erase difference between members). Members of a community often have a similar background which contributes to the social cohesion within the group, the 'team spirit'. A 'common enemy' sometimes contributes. Communities may better flourish if some kind of patronage (/support/leadership) is being provided. It is important to have a balance of the members' willingness/ability to share and help on the one hand, and the prospect of individual benefits ('what's in it for me?') on the other hand. When considering the type of user community we are heading for it can be worthwhile to have a look at the Chinese concept of '['guanxi' \(关系\)](#)' which describes the basic dynamic in personalized networks of influence.
- Do we want a good, functioning ISRIC community? And if so, how would it look like?
There was some disagreement within the group on this point. It was pointed out that as a matter of fact we are part of several existing communities. And we should not create an 'artificial' ISRIC community just to make ourselves more important, as this might be seen as arrogant. ISRIC should rather be the moderator, facilitator, and energizer within established communities. One idea could be to regularly contribute to professional fora and discussion groups outside ISRIC to actively build our reputation. A critical remark was made in so far that ISRIC staff will also have developed within their own expert fields (or into new fields) to better serve the existing communities. Another strand of discussion was that while building 'one' ISRIC community may not be preferable, we already play leading roles in communities that are vital part of ISRIC's activities, such as geostatistics, WRB, soil education (Spring School), or land degradation. But what can be the 'binding factor' here? Rik clarifies that his vision is certainly not about replacing our participation in other communities, but more about an 'informal' type of community that brings together our clients. It would take the form of a service in itself.
- What do we need to do to create these communities? How do we implement this?
Some ideas have been voiced. We can improve reaching out to the ISRIC community/-ies e.g. through regular events organised online/in-situ (the Spring School is an excellent example), webinars, a newsletter, an online competition, etc. We also have to think more on how we could take the 50-year jubilee as an important 'test case' for in-situ type events. Some of our products in the immediate future – such as updated web services, a full-fledged crowdsourcing system, or the virtual soil museum – are expected to increase both, the number of people that we reach, as well as satisfaction levels of our clients. The updated isric.org website will play an important role in this equation, making sure that it is the portal for all of our data & services, and that everything we do is recognised as truly ISRIC.

Group exercise: ISRIC clients and their demands

Evert explains the exercise. He has created a set of some 10 web personas covering ISRIC actual/potential customer base. In a first step, groups are asked to rank these clients according to their importance. The sequence has to be unique, i.e. same ranks are not allowed. The ranked lists are then placed next to each other and discussed.



Figure 4: Discussing the ranking of ISRIC clients

As expected, the results are not the same for every group (see Figure 5). General trends are that scientists - with soil scientists in particular - are considered ISRIC's main clients. Policy makers rank surprisingly high, although the current isric.org platform does not target them at all. The private sector and research funders rank high as well, reflecting the need to earn money in the first place. This high ranking of the private sector was achieved even though this particular client had not been provided as one of the web persona's in the first place. The question has been raised, if research funders would really access our website. In the mid-level we find two groups of clients: international (development) organisations/NGOS, and students. In the lower ranks there are consultants, scholars and journalists. The lowest ranks were given to volunteers and the general public.

The direct comparability of results between groups may be reduced to the fact that some groups judged client importance for ISRIC in general, whereas other judged the same for the isric.org website only. It was interesting to observe that nearly all groups felt the need to cluster clients into groups while ranking them. This will indeed have to be done in Project Access as one of the follow-up activities to the kick-off workshop.

As also brought up during the recent strategic day, more effort has to be put into identifying client-product relationships. Creating these connections will help us in Project Access to better guide clients from their respective entry point to what they are actually interested in.



Figure 5: Results of the client ranking exercise

In a second and last step, groups were presented statements extracted from the 2015 information request database (see W: drive). This is done to analyse the range of requests reaching ISRIC, and see which kind of contents should be on isric.org, but currently are not. The 80/20 rule says that roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. In our context that would mean that we will likely spend some 80% of our time on answering 20% of the questions, while the majority of request could and should actually be answered 'automatically' through information (e.g. an FAQ) on the website.

Although there was not much time left to discuss this exercise with participants, the resulting pattern is that most questions reaching ISRIC have come to the right place, and we are able to answer them. When it comes to serving the answer through the website, the group judgements are more varied. Only about half the answers that people looked for are available on the website (and not all groups always agree on this point). In some cases this is because the request has been very specific, and a personal follow-up is required. Some more general information appears to be clearly missing at the moment, such as information on which software to use in order to open certain data, or on how ISRIC intends to collaborate with its various partners. An aspect that has also occurred in the previous exercise on customer ranking is that ISRIC staff is unsure in how far information for press/journalists should be available from isric.org.

<p>Dear sir, madam, I am looking for the soil map 'Soils of the World' that shows 40 different soil profiles and gives an explanation of the FAO-classification. I cannot find it on your site. Could you help me find it?</p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p> <p>Is this a question for ISRIC? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can ISRIC answer this question? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Is the answer on the ISRIC website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 1 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Should it be on the website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Comments during exercise: Not necessarily the product itself, but at least the link should be provided</p>	<p>Dear sir, madam, I am looking for a data-set of cross-country estimates of soil degradation worldwide. The only thing I could find was a dataset from sub-Saharan Africa, but none worldwide. Could you tell me if such a data-set exists and where I can find it. And if it does not exist, do you know of a number of data-sets that I could use and where to find these?</p> <p>Awaiting your reply. Greetings,</p> <p>Is this a question for ISRIC? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can ISRIC answer this question? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Is the answer on the ISRIC website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 2 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Should it be on the website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 2 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p>	<p>Dear sir, madam, In my country we have national funding agencies along with international funding bodies that are advertising opportunities for research collaboration in the near future. I am wondering whether it is possible to work with you and link proposal to my country on a mutual interest project.</p> <p>Kind regards,</p> <p>Is this a question for ISRIC? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 3 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can ISRIC answer this question? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 3 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Is the answer on the ISRIC website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 3 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Should it be on the website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 2 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Comments during exercise: website should provide some general info on this topic</p>
<p>Dear sir, madam,</p> <p>Recently, I have downloaded soil data from your website. I could not find data on the percentage of sand and clay in the alpine permafrost. Can you tell me where to find these data?</p> <p>I am looking forward to hearing from you.</p> <p>Best Regard</p> <p>Is this a question for ISRIC? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can ISRIC answer this question? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 3 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Is the answer on the ISRIC website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 1 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Should it be on the website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 1 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Comments during exercise: answering of this request needs further research</p>	<p>Dear sir, madam,</p> <p>I am doing a research project in Lesotho using SWAT model and I am having problems downloading soil shape files of Lesotho. Would you kindly assist me?</p> <p>Greetings</p> <p>Is this a question for ISRIC? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can ISRIC answer this question? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Is the answer on the ISRIC website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 2 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Should it be on the website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 1 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p>	<p>Dear sir, madam,</p> <p>We are serving clients in a variety of industries. Depending on the engagement, we are sometimes looking to enhance the predictive potential of customer's data with external data sets. I am writing to inquire whether your data is freely available to use for this purpose. If not, what licensing options are available?</p> <p>Thank you!</p> <p>Regards,</p> <p>Is this a question for ISRIC? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can ISRIC answer this question? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Is the answer on the ISRIC website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 3 NO <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Should it be on the website? YES <input type="checkbox"/> 4 NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>

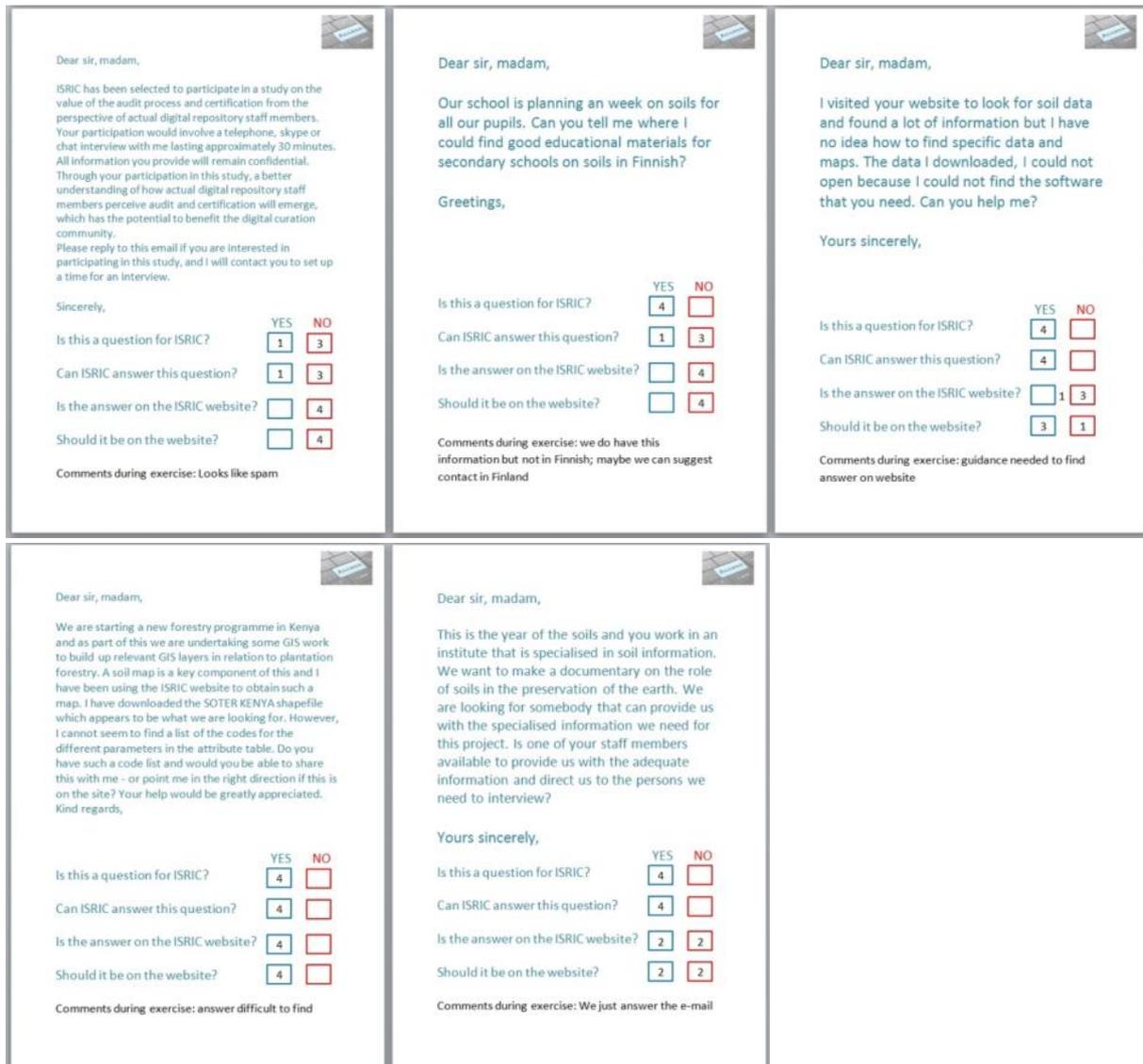


Figure 6: Sample requests as judged by workshop participants (4 groups)

Summary – Closing – Outlook

The Project Access kick-off event has been experience by the organisers as a highly valuable effort. Participants worked in a concentrated, constructive way, listed to each other, and respected each other's opinion. This resulted in a very good working atmosphere. The awareness that work has to be done on the website is shared by everyone, and the workshop has helped to identify immediate first steps ('quick wins') to be implemented.

Rik, Evert, Carel and Thomas thank everyone for their active participation, and the time and effort spent. When asked for their feedback, participants mention general satisfaction with the contents of the event. However, more time for general discussions might have been useful, especially where it comes to ISRIC clients and their needs. Also, instructions for the group work parts were experiences as partly conflicting, and could have been clearer.

Thomas gives an outlook on the immediate future of project activities. As one of the last activities in Phase 1 of the project (data gathering), Evert is designing a questionnaire to be sent out through SurveyMonkey to a number of actual and potential ISRIC customers. Work groups will be created to follow up on the quick wins identified. While grading into project Phases 2 and 3, concrete steps for upgrading ISRIC's web services and the implementation of crowdsourcing mechanisms will be discussed

and implemented, with Tom's ideas in his proposal on 'Transitioning ISRIC towards Web 3.0' as the basis.