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Integrating High-Resolution Remote Sensing, GPS, and GIS forb Precision Soil Mapping

Th. Nengparmoi[1], Marwan Reddy Chinnam[2], Yogita Lather[3], Koushik Ghosh[4] and Md Shadab Alam[5]

Abstract: -

Accurate and timely information on soil properties, distribution, and extent is essential for the efficient and sustainable management of natural resources. Advances in remote sensing, the Global Positioning System (GPS), and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have significantly improved the effectiveness of soil surveys. Sustainable resource management prioritizes regional development while preserving environmental integrity. The integration of advanced computing technologies with comprehensive databases can support decision-makers in strategic planning. However, most studies to date have been conducted on a small scale, with limited research at regional or larger mapping scales. While progress has been made, current methodologies still have untapped potential to fully utilize the spectral, spatial, and temporal capabilities of high-resolution satellite data for soil resource mapping and characterization. This review focuses on the application of high-resolution remote sensing data, including IRS-P6 LISS IV, PAN, Cartosat-I, IKONOS, GPS, and GIS, in large-scale soil resource inventory and characterization to support micro-level agricultural planning.

Introduction:

Soil is a crucial, non-renewable resource that supports ecosystems and varies widely in its properties and behavior across the globe. Excessive exploitation to meet human

Th. Nengparmoi[1], Marwan Reddy Chinnam[2], Yogita Lather[3], Koushik Ghosh[4] and Md Shadab Alam[5]

[1]Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Agronomy, School of Agricultural Sciences, Nagaland University

[2]M.Sc. Scholar, Department of Agronomy, Vivekanand Global University, Jaipur

[3]Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Agronomy, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar

[4]Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry, Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Coochbehar, West Bengal-736165

[5]Guest faculty, Department of Aquaculture (Fisheries science), College of Fisheries, OUAT, Rangeilunda

needs has led to both depletion and degradation of finite land resources. The increasing global demand for raw materials, industrial inputs, and energy has been a primary driver of resource depletion and soil degradation. Since soil forms the foundation of all production systems, understanding its properties, distribution, and extent is essential for sustainable management. In this regard, soil characterization and mapping play a critical role in preserving and managing soil resources. Accurate baseline data and effective evaluation methods are prerequisites for mapping and classifying different soil types. Soil surveys provide detailed scientific inventories of soil types, their distribution, and potential uses, aiding in better resource planning and management. Additionally, geo-encoding such data enhances understanding of natural resources, enabling informed decision-making. However, traditional soil assessment methods are often costly and time-intensive due to the large number of observations required. Advancements in computer and information technology have introduced innovative tools and techniques for soil analysis. Rapid developments in remote sensing (RS), GPS, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) offer efficient approaches for soil resource mapping and characterization. These technologies have revolutionized land resource inventory by providing digital, spatially explicit representations of the Earth's surface, which can be integrated with GIS for comprehensive analysis. Satellite remote sensing, when combined with GIS, has proven invaluable for natural resource management, reducing costs, saving time, and increasing the accuracy of soil surveys. The ability to capture high-precision data with cost-effectiveness and efficiency has made geomorphological mapping a powerful tool for environmental and resource management. Most importantly, these technologies facilitate the rapid generation of outputs that are relevant to environmental and socio-economic policy needs.

Need of large scale soil resource mapping

Soil maps are required at various scales to support planning and decision-making at different levels. The level of detail in these maps depends on the scale used-larger scales provide more detailed information, while smaller scales offer a broader overview. Coarse-resolution satellite data (spatial resolution of 70m or more) from sensors such as IRS LISS-I, AWiFs, and LANDSAT-MSS are suitable for generating soil maps at a 1:250,000 scale or smaller. For mapping at a 1:50,000 scale, medium-resolution data from LANDSAT-TM, IRS LISS-II, and SPOT-MLA are utilized. More recently, high-resolution satellite imagery from IRS-P6

(LISS-IV sensor), Cartosat-1, Cartosat-2, and IKONOS is being used for detailed soil characterization at a 1:10,000 scale or larger.

High resolution remote sensing

Remote sensing (RS) plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable land resource management, maintaining ecological balance, and improving socio-economic conditions. It enables data collection from a distance rather than through direct contact, displaying measurements over a two-dimensional spatial grid in the form of images. Curran (1985) defines remote sensing as the measurement of object properties on the Earth's surface using data acquired from aircraft and satellites. Similarly, Sabins (1997) describes it as acquiring information about an object or phenomenon through a recording device that does not physically interact with the subject under study. Before the launch of Landsat-1 in 1972, aerial photographs were the primary remote sensing tool for soil mapping and characterization. Since then, both digital and analog satellite data have been extensively used to create large-scale soil maps depicting soil sub-groups and their associations. The advent of high-resolution satellite data in the 1990s enabled researchers to conduct detailed soil mapping for micro-level planning. The stereo capabilities of SPOT and IRS-PAN data further enhanced the accuracy and quality of soil mapping. Selecting an appropriate remote sensing system for soil mapping depends on several factors, including spatial, spectral, radiometric, and temporal resolution. Spatial resolution refers to the smallest object that can be detected in an image, with each pixel representing a specific ground area. A one-meter spatial resolution, for instance, means that each pixel corresponds to a one-square-meter area—smaller pixel sizes equate to higher-resolution imagery. With the launch of high-resolution satellites such as IKONOS, Cartosat I and II, WorldView, and Quickbird, users now have access to very high-resolution imagery. Typically, feasibility studies on using imaging devices for soil mapping involve acquiring and analyzing remotely sensed data over specific areas, supplemented by limited ground reference data. This study aims to review the diverse applications of high-resolution remote sensing, integrated with GPS and GIS, in land resource management, particularly in soil resource inventory, mapping, and characterization.

GIS and its applications

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are a powerful set of tools designed for collecting, storing, retrieving, transforming, and displaying spatial data for specific purposes. GIS operates through four primary software functions: input, storage, manipulation, and output of spatial information. It is capable of handling large volumes of spatially distributed data from diverse sources, including satellite imagery and topographical maps, which can be stored within a GIS database. By integrating spatial and non-spatial data, GIS facilitates scientific mapping and soil characterization, ultimately benefiting local communities. It also helps resolve data integration challenges caused by variations in geographic units across different datasets. GIS systems can be either manual or computer-based, but modern GIS primarily relies on computational tools to analyze and extract meaningful information from spatial data. These findings are then visually represented using images, enhancing decision-making processes. In recent years, GIS applications have expanded significantly across multiple disciplines, fostering interdisciplinary research in natural sciences, environmental studies, social sciences, and economics. With advancements in remote sensing, GIS has evolved into a critical infrastructure for analyzing complex spatial problems in innovative ways. It is particularly effective in managing spatial data at different scales and integrating vast amounts of point data, enabling comprehensive resource analysis and optimized problem-solving for various sectors.

Utilizing High-Resolution Remote Sensing and GIS for Terrain Characterization

Traditionally, landform mapping relied on the visual interpretation of aerial photographs. However, advancements in remote sensing technology have significantly enhanced the accuracy of resource mapping. A wide range of satellite data is now available for generating resource maps at various scales. The extensive datasets within GIS serve as a powerful tool for spatial data analysis and interpretation. Examining terrain morphometric parameters aids in evaluating erosion risks, soil and water conservation strategies, watershed characterization, and other environmental factors. Qualitative assessment of drainage morphometry helps establish relationships between drainage parameters and land resource distribution, a method previously studied through conventional techniques. Many researchers recognize topographic variation as a key factor in depicting soil variability, requiring comprehensive knowledge of geomorphology supported by field surveys. By integrating satellite imagery with topographic maps, physiographic variations—such as slope, aspect, and land cover—can be effectively characterized to delineate soil boundaries. High-resolution satellite data provides a dependable source for identifying and cataloging geographic units in detail. A thorough analysis of landforms plays a crucial role in environmental resource assessment and planning. According to Reddy and Maji (2003), the combination of IRS-ID LISS-III data with distinct lithological units, drainage patterns, and contour information enhances the ability to classify and characterize geomorphological features. The study of landform-soil relationships, in conjunction with drainage and elevation properties, offers valuable insights into spatial soil attribute patterns under similar geological and climatic conditions.

Soil-landform units tend to exhibit homogeneity concerning key factors such as parent material, which aids in identifying dominant soil-geomorphic processes. Hammer et al. (1995) demonstrated the use of digital elevation models (DEMs) within GIS to evaluate the precision and accuracy of computer-generated slope classification maps for soil surveys and land-use planning. Terrain attributes derived from DEMs and satellite imagery have proven useful in delineating soil boundaries highlighted that integrating high-resolution satellite data with GIS technologies, supplemented by ground-truth validation, is the most efficient and effective approach for terrain characterization and soil resource inventory. This approach has successfully established soil-landform relationships, facilitating the characterization of both landforms and soil properties.

High resolution remote sensing and GPS during soil survey

The integration of GPS with GIS has significantly enhanced the accuracy and efficiency of spatial data collection for soil surveys. This advancement has revolutionized field data collection by reducing processing time and minimizing errors associated with converting hard copy maps into digital formats. By incorporating GPS position data into GIS, surveyors no longer face the challenge of manually determining their location on a map. High-resolution GPS data in soil surveys enables precise positioning, resulting in highly accurate soil maps, efficient recording of profile description sites, and clear delineation of recently altered land areas. GPS technology precisely identifies soil sampling points within a field, offering detailed insights into soil variability. Panhalkar (2011) utilized advanced GPS navigation techniques for collecting training site data and field-checking classified datasets. The geographic coordinates link field observations with corresponding satellite imagery, improving classification and interpretation. Additionally, metadata, including latitude and longitude, is stored for future analysis using image processing or GIS tools. GPS facilitates the continuous recording of in-field variability by encoding spatial data geographically, allowing for precise and ongoing position determination. One of the key advantages of GPS is its ability to provide detailed information, resulting in a more extensive and useful database for users. Data collected from multiple satellite sources and referenced using GPS can be integrated to develop effective resource management strategies. The combination of GPS and GIS has played a crucial role in the development and implementation of site-specific farming. These technologies enable real-time data collection with accurate geospatial positioning, allowing for efficient manipulation and analysis of large datasets. Representative soil profiles, identified using handheld GPS devices, were examined based on morphological properties as outlined in the USDA Soil Survey Manual. The collected profile location data was subsequently transferred to GIS layers for the creation of thematic maps, further enhancing soil resource assessment and management.

Utility of soil database derived from high resolution data:

Geo-spatial technology offers an integrated approach that plays a crucial role in the sustainable development and management of watersheds. It has become an essential scientific tool for mapping and monitoring natural resources, particularly in the characterization and prioritization of watersheds for effective planning. Watershed characterization models operate at different scales and serve as decision-support tools, providing valuable insights to prioritize areas for restoration, conservation, protection, and development. Local authorities can utilize this information as a foundation for land use regulations. Numerous researchers have studied the morphometric characteristics of various basins using remote sensing (RS) and geographic information system (GIS) techniques. The integration of PAN with LISS III and LISS IV data has been widely applied for watershed characterization and prioritization. Additionally, the successful use of Cartosat-1 stereo data in constructing Digital Elevation Models (DEMs) has enabled various applications, including watershed demarcation, mapping, and characterization.

Conclusion

Emerging technologies, such as high-resolution satellite data, offer significant potential for obtaining spatial and temporal agricultural information at a micro level. Integrating satellite-derived spatial data with ground observations and non-spatial attribute data within a remote sensing, GPS, and GIS framework would be highly beneficial in promoting the sustainable development of specific regions. The availability of high-resolution satellite imagery in recent years has greatly enhanced resource management by providing real-time and repetitive data, which is crucial for effective monitoring. Soil and land resources require not only protection and reclamation but also a scientific foundation for sustainable management. This ensures that developmental changes meet current needs without compromising future resource potential. By analyzing detailed agro-ecological information, suitable land-use strategies can be devised, considering the socio-economic conditions of farming communities and the prevailing political landscape. A review of high-resolution remote sensing applications, combined with GPS and GIS, indicates that soil resource mapping and characterization are both cost-effective and time-efficient, facilitating their sustainable utilization and management.

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