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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Third session

Rome, 22-24 June 2015

Implementation of the International Year of Soils

Executive Summary

- The Plenary Assembly may recall that, following the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) decisions (in December 2013) to designate 5th December as World Soil Day and to declare 2015 as the International Year of Soils (IYS), it considered and endorsed a tentative IYS plan of action at its last session of July 2014.
- As key practical steps to facilitate IYS implementation, the year's theme: "Healthy soils for a healthy life", as well as the visual identity of activities linked to the IYS, were also approved.
- It is also worth stressing that FAO within the framework of the Global Soil Partnership was invited by the UNGA to facilitate the implementation of both the Day and Year in collaboration with governments and various partners.
- The present progress report is derived from a similar report submitted to the FAO Conference at its 39th session (6-13 June 2015).

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish:
 - to note the progress so far in the celebration of the International Year of Soils;
 - to invite all GSP partners to continue to implement activities linked to the IYS at all levels, and potential funding sources to provide further financial support;
 - to call the attention of all stakeholders to pursuing beyond 2015 the acquired momentum in the fight against soil degradation and for sustainable soil management;
 - to take note of the positive premise embodied in the soils related indicators included in the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

I. Background (pro memoria)

1. Recalling resolutions 4/2013 and 5/2013 adopted on 22 June 2013 by the FAO Conference, in December 2013 the sixty-eight session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) decided to designate 5th December as World Soil Day and to declare 2015 as the International Year of Soils. FAO within the framework of the Global Soil Partnership was invited to facilitate the implementation of both the Day and the Year in collaboration with governments and various partners.
2. The main objective of the IYS is to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, fuel and fibre production, essential ecosystem services and better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations.
3. Five specific objectives were identified for the IYS:
 - i. raise full awareness of all stakeholders about the fundamental roles of soils for human life;
 - ii. promote full recognition of the crucial role of soils to food security and nutrition, climate change adaptation and mitigation, essential ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and sustainable development;
 - iii. support effective policies and actions for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources;
 - iv. promote investment in sustainable soil management activities in order to ensure healthy soils for different land users and population groups;
 - v. strengthen initiatives in connection with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process and Post-2015 agenda.
4. Following the UNGA decisions, a tentative IYS Plan of Action was considered and endorsed by the GSP Plenary Assembly at its second session (22-24 July 2014). As key practical steps to facilitate IYS implementation, the year's theme: "Healthy soils for a healthy life", as well as the visual identity of activities linked to the IYS, were also approved.

II. Concomitant recognition of soils within the SDGs

5. It is worth stressing that the importance of soils was highlighted through the related goals and targets under consideration in the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There are four SDGs (2, 3, 12 and 15) which are closely linked to sustainable soil management and conservation. The associated targets cover various key aspects such as: improving soil quality, reducing the number of deaths and illnesses caused by soil pollution, combating desertification and restoring degraded land and soil.
6. No doubt, the resonance of the IYS will hopefully contribute to final endorsement of these goals and indicators at the highest political level, as a recognition of the key role of soils for sustainable development.

III. Support arrangements to the IYS

7. An IYS Steering Committee (IYS-SC) was established to oversee activities during the Year. The Kingdom of Thailand was appointed as Chair of the IYS-SC and the Committee includes a mix of representatives from Member Countries and other key partners: i.e. Argentina; Australia; Bangladesh; Brazil; Egypt; Ethiopia; the European Commission; Germany; Russia; USA; as well as representatives from civil society and farmers organizations, private sector, academia and UN system organizations, especially the other Rome based Agencies.
8. Internally, Secretariat support to the Year involves three different units: the Office of Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC) for coordination; the Land and Water Division (NRL) for technical inputs; and the Office of Corporate Communications (OCC) for the communication aspects.

Progress so far

9. Key activities undertaken within the Plan of Action for the IYS have included:
 - i. The formal launching of the IYS on 5th December 2014 in New York, which was mirrored by events organized in Rome, Bangkok, and Santiago de Chile.
 - ii. Crafting of IYS communications materials and creation of a dedicated [website](#) to disseminate information on the different activities carried out in connection with the IYS, either by the Secretariat and by partners globally.
 - iii. The design of an IYS calendar of events to assist in coordinating efforts in different countries.
 - iv. Convening of Regional Soil Partnership workshops to develop regional plans on sustainable soil management for the next five years where IYS follow up is given attention.

IV. Funding

10. IYS activities are being funded through the Healthy Soils Facility, including generous contributions from: the Kingdom of Thailand (100,000 USD); Switzerland (100,000 USD); and the International Fertilizer Industry Association (58,000 USD).

V. Challenges

11. The main challenges identified in the context of ongoing IYS implementation are the following:
 - i. Funding: as for other international years, the IYS needs to rely primarily on extra-budgetary funds to support global and national activities. Besides the above generous contributions, there is substantial requirement for additional resources that would allow for a full implementation of the IYS Plan of Action at all levels.
 - ii. Continuity of efforts on sustainable soil management: while the IYS is to raise the awareness among different stakeholders of the centrality of soils to food security and improved nutrition, this renewed attention must be kept beyond 2015. The Global Soil Partnership is one of the most valuable vehicles to support future efforts in soil management and maintaining the momentum generated by the IYS.