



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



2015
International
Year of Soils

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SOILS 2015

“Healthy soils for a healthy life”

Endorsed plan of action by the Second GSP Plenary Assembly (22-24 July 2014)

Objectives of the IYS

After nearly three years of intensive consultations, 2015 has been declared the International Year of Soils by the 68th UN General Assembly (A/RES/68/232). The IYS is to be a major platform for raising awareness of the importance of soils for food security and nutrition and essential eco-system functions.

Key objectives of the IYS have been identified as follows:

- to create full awareness of all stakeholders about the fundamental roles of soils for human life;
- to achieve full recognition of the prominent contributions of soils to food security and nutrition, climate change adaptation and mitigation, essential ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and sustainable development;
- to promote effective policies and actions for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources;
- to sensitize decision-makers about the need for robust investment in sustainable soil management activities, to ensure healthy soils for different land users and population groups;
- to catalyze initiatives in connection with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process and Post-2015 agenda;
- to advocate rapid enhancement of capacities and systems for soil information collection and monitoring at all levels (global, regional and national).

Secretariat of the IYS and other arrangements

As specified in the UNGA Resolution, FAO is invited - in the framework of the Global Soil Partnership - to facilitate the implementation of WSD and the IYS. In fact, both events have been promoted under the GSP umbrella. Hence, the GSP Secretariat jointly with the OPC division will serve as the IYS Secretariat, while assistance will also be sought from other competent FAO units (see below). The Secretariat will ensure that the main GSP dissemination tools (dedicated website, newsletters, mailing list, brochures and information materials) will actively support the objectives of the IYS.

Inclusive engagement process at all levels

The GSP governance bodies (the Plenary Assembly and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils – ITPS) will be kept aware of developments relating to the IYS, and able to advise, as required. The network of Regional Soil Partnerships (RSPs) which is being put in place in the framework of the GSP will provide concrete channels for exchanging ideas and experiences, and discussing implementation at the regional level.

In particular, the RSPs should be instrumental in canvassing opportunities for the joint organization of activities (for greater impact) and the identification of possible in-kind contributions from the most advanced countries to those in the same region facing serious resource constraints.

More generally, as is established practice for similar events, the Secretariat will seek to promote the establishment of Regional and National Committees ahead of the IYS (calling on the assistance of GSP partners and also contacting civil society and institutions with direct interest in soils) so as to oversee the development and implementation of locally adapted programmes.

Steering Committee

Subject to endorsement by the Plenary Assembly of July 2014, a Steering Committee composed of a variety of GSP partners and other supportive entities, will be established to oversee the implementation of activities in the context of IYS.

It is proposed that this Committee include:

- the Permanent Representation of Thailand to FAO (given the pioneering role played by this country towards institutionalization of the IYD - and WSD)
- Chairs (an alternates) of the FAO Regional Groups (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin American and the Caribbean, Near East, North America and South-West Pacific)
- European Commission
- International Union of Soil Sciences
- Soil Science Society of America
- World Rural Forum
- La Via Campesina
- World Farmers Organization
- International Fertilizer Industry Association
- UNCCD Secretariat
- IYS Secretariat
- Rome based agencies (IFAD, WFP)
- Latin America Soil Science Society

Internal GSP Task Force

The recently established GSP Task Force which includes representatives from most concerned FAO units besides NRL, such as: AGP, NRC, NRD, FOM, ESA, TCSR, OCP, OCC and LEG will be used to mobilize inputs from within the Organization.

Envisaged IYS activities

Nomination of IYS Ambassadors

The nomination of “ambassadors” is a common practice for International Years, and it should also benefit the IYS.

Launch of the International Year of Soils

A formal launch event of the IYS will be organized during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly (New York) on 5th December 2014 to coincide with the first official World Soil Day. Concurrent events will be organized at FAO headquarters in Rome and in Bangkok.

Establishment of the World Soil Prize

The World Soil Prize should be of highly symbolic significance, aiming to recognize and reward the good work performed by individuals in the conservation and sound management of soil resources. This prize is to be institutionalized through the GSP Plenary Assembly and it is proposed to be placed under the patronage of the Thai Royal Family.

Range of other activities to be organized and/or supported by the IYS Secretariat

- Preparatory event during the 20th World Soil Congress: 8-13 June 2014, Jeju, Korea
- Launch of the IYS in Latin America and the Caribbean, during the LAC Soil Congress: 9-15 November 2014, Cuzco, Peru.
- Engagement through outreach activities and the organization of various events at ExpoMilano 2015. Organization of the Conference “Soils and Food security: a key alliance” (tentative working title).
- Side event during the 39th FAO Conference in June 2015 (including launch of the World Soil Resources Report).
- Mainstreaming soil issues into various events (e.g. World Food Day).
- “Congreso Suelos 2015 “Por el Manejo Sostenible del Suelo” – Congress about the sustainable management of soils - to be held on 2-5 June, 2015, La Havana, Cuba.
- Winter/summer schools to deal with different and regionally specific aspects of soils.
- Regional demonstrations/workshops of suitable soil conservation practices (terracing, gully control, etc) in pilot areas with severely degraded soils (involving national soils institutions and universities).

- Regional pilots for restoration of degraded soils (involving international, national and local stakeholders) to be transformed into open schools for training farmers and extension services.
- Compost trials in public spaces such as schools to demonstrate the importance of soil organic matter and the use of residues together with their impact on soils for production of food or fiber (could be accompanied by the preparation and dissemination of manuals for composting at household level).
- Farmer schools on soil health management.
- Demonstrations of critical soil functions through open campaigns in gardens or squares, in cooperation with national soil authorities and education facilities (schools and universities).
- Dissemination of scientific facts through targeted national and regional campaigns.
- Production of a movie on both good and bad practices for soil management (agriculture, forestry and rangelands).

Activities to be organized by various partners (examples)

- Third Global Soil Week, 19-23 April 2015, Berlin, Germany.
- Conference on “Soil science in a changing world”, 23-27 August 2015, Wageningen, The Netherlands.
- 5th International Symposium on Soil Organic Matter, 20-24 September 2015, Gottingen, Germany.
- Emission of postage stamps in various countries (e.g. Austria, Spain).
- Soil culture exhibition by the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World.
- Promotion of simple and inexpensive kits for assessing the status of soils to be used by farmers in different regions.
- A database will be set up as part of the IYS website to assist with the management of events organized by partners.

Policy level actions

- Endorsement of the revised version of the World Soil Charter by the 39th FAO Conference, and wide dissemination thereafter.

Communication work

- Dedicated webpage, logo and ample communication outreach throughout the year.
- Press conferences by national authorities in connection with key events.
- Preparation of communication materials with local and regional examples of successful approaches (e.g. YouTube spots, brochures, magazine articles or dedicated webpages, TV/radio spots, etc) for sustainable soil management.
- Soil-related books for children and young people, as materials to be used in schools.

Closure of the IYS

A “closure” event of the IYS is expected to take place in connection with World Soil Day on 5th December 2015 at FAO headquarters. It will coincide with the planned launch of the first “Status of the World Soil Resources Report”, prepared under the aegis of the ITPS and with inputs from top soil scientists.

Going beyond the IYS

It is hoped that the IYS contributes in no small way to a new era of continuous, sustainable management of limited soil resources. To this end, IYS should also foster concrete investment portfolios and global projects of long-lasting impact. Hence, the IYS would be an ideal platform for discussing and mobilizing resources for:

- “Soil Doctors” programmes,
- global and national soil restoration programmes, and
- global and national soil management and conservation programmes.

Financial implications and resources mobilization

While the Organization will make every effort to facilitate the IYS with its own resources, it is clear that proactive efforts will need to be made to muster extra-budgetary resources (Trust Funds) to support implementation. As mentioned above, opportunities for in-kind contributions, within and possibly also across regions, will be explored, directly with individual GSP partners or via the Regional Soil Partnerships. Given the prominence given to the GSP framework by the UN GA, it is expected that the GSP partners should remain fully committed to successful implementation of this essential awareness-building platform.

As highlighted under agenda item 7, a key tool for resource mobilization will be the facility called: “Healthy Soils Multidonor Platform” which has been established under FAO’s rules.