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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly



Fourth session

Rome, 23-25 May 2016

Report on the Implementation of the International Year of Soils

Executive Summary

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) decided (in December 2013) to declare 2015 as the International Year of Soils (IYS) – as well as designating 5th December as World Soil Day. 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 GSP Plenary Assembly endorsed a tentative IYS plan of action at its session of July 2014, and received a preliminary progress report on IYS implementation at its last session of May 2015.
- The GSP Secretariat sought to obtain, and did receive information on what was going on in all regions and countries in the context of the IYS. In effect, many events and activities took place in connection with IYS celebrations throughout the year and at all levels, from global down to local. These activities involved a very wide range of stakeholders and interested parties, including government entities and civil society organizations, as well as the media and the general public, in particular large numbers of students in schools and other teaching institutions. In all likelihood, the real picture is certainly much broader than what is known to the Secretariat.
- Every effort was made to encourage and provide advice for the organization of IYS events and activities, when requested. Some financial resources were also made available by donors.
- This document does not purport to describe all activities in detail and is limited to give the Assembly a flavour of the interest the events triggered under the IYS umbrella. The main outputs of the IYS could be summarized as: awareness raising material produced and widely distributed; launch of the Status of the World's Soil Resources report; endorsement of the revised World Soil Charter; and soils being included in the Sustainable Development Goals. As is the established practice in connection with International Years for which FAO was entrusted leadership, a full report is to be submitted to the next session of the FAO Conference in 2017.

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- It is clear that the strong momentum gained through the IYS in supporting soil conservation and sustainable management, should be pursued in future years.

Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly wish to:
 - note the substantial achievements in the celebration of the International Year of Soils at all levels.
 - renew its call to all stakeholders to pursue the acquired momentum and translate it into further concrete actions against soil degradation and for promoting sustainable soil management; including continuous efforts of awareness raising.

I. Objectives of the IYS (pro memoria) and other key features

1. The main objective of the IYS was 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.
2. Support arrangements made by FAO included an IYS Steering Committee (IYS-SC) with participation of representatives from Member Countries and other key partners to oversee activities during the Year, and strengthened coordination between the main units involved (i.e. the Office of Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC); the Land and Water Division (AGL); and the Office of Corporate Communications (OCC)).
3. Professor Claire Chenu (France) and Professor Tekalign Mamo (Ethiopia) were appointed as Global Ambassadors for the IYS. Their contributions throughout 2015 were key to raising awareness on the importance and value of soils.
4. The Kingdom of Thailand, the Swiss confederation, the International Fertilizer Industry Association, the European Commission, the Russian Federation, the International Association of Agriculture Production Insurers and the Austrian Hail Insurance Company provided financial resources to support at least in part the implementation of the IYS plan of action.

The activities in connection with the IYS fell in broad terms under the following categories:

- Normative work and key publications
- Preparation and dissemination of awareness raising materials
- Organization of scientific events
- Organization of informal events/campaigns for general public
- Contests: video and movie festivals
- Training sessions
- Social media participation
- Targeting actions

II. Overview of achievements

5. More than 900 (as registered by the Secretariat) events were organized in more than 90 countries under the umbrella of the IYS. They ranged from art exhibitions to high level meetings, symposia, regional consultations, local workshops and activities in schools. The financial resources entrusted to FAO were invested primarily in the production of education materials (i.e. infographics, fact sheets, posters, animations on soils, videos, booklets for children aged 5 to 14, and gadgets such as t-shirts, bags, USB sticks and caps). For the purpose of having an effective impact on global awareness , new highlights on soils were released each week, the IYS website was made available in the six official languages of the United Nations, initiatives such as competitions, quizzes, movie

festivals were organized, and it was made sure that the IYS had a strong presence in social media. More than 150 articles focusing on the IYS were given to the press. Additionally, donations were invested in organizing regional and national workshops with governmental involvement.

6. These activities dovetailed with those organized by the GSP for the purpose of boosting soil health worldwide. From March to October, consultations of the regional soil partnerships (RSPs) took place in seven out of the nine areas. With regard to the five Pillars of the GSP, regional implementation plans were, or started to be prepared with a view to be executed as soon as possible. The GSP also supported various events worldwide, including in Nigeria, Ghana, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Bolivia, Thailand, France, Brussels, Amman, Cuba, Turkey, Switzerland, Algeria, Peru, Namibia, Nicaragua, Cape Verde, Santo Domingo, Germany, Austria and Hungary. Regional events and consultations were also supported. Additionally, great attention was given to major international events such as the Global Soil Week, EU meetings, COP12 in Ankara, FAO Committee on Food Security, , and EXPO 2015 Milano.

7. In coincidence with the IYS (2015), it is worth stressing that the World Soil Charter was revised and approved by the FAO Conference, and the first edition of the Status of the World's Soil Resources report was released. In addition, soils were well reflected in the approved sustainable development goals (SDGs). Four out of the 17 SDGs endorsed by the international community directly address soils and their role in enabling life on Earth and ensure human well-being.

8. While certainly not exhaustive of what happened in connection with the ISY, some interesting numbers can be provided as follows:

- IYS gadgets produced and distributed in all regions: 7324 IYS bags; 3000 USBs; 5000 pens; 3380 t-shirts; 1000 caps;
- Regional workshops: 7
- National workshops/events: 450
- Videos/animations: 7
- More than 50 videos on good practices
- Factsheets: 6
- Infographics: 12
- Posters: 18

III. Conclusions

9. The IYS undoubtedly generated an impressive momentum of sustained interest, and embodied an important historical turning point in the cause for soil conservation and sustainable management. By making good use of the legacy of the year, all stakeholders, including from civil society, governments, institutions and academia should continue to serve this cause most actively.