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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

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World Soil Day (report 2021 and theme for 2022), awareness raising on soils and Prizes (GSPPA: IX/2021/10)

Executive Summary

- World Soil Day (WSD) is held annually on 5 December as a means to focus attention on the importance of soils for a healthy life and to advocate for sustainable soil management.
- Since 2013, the Secretariat has given due priority to supporting WSD observance as the main platform for awareness raising throughout the world. In 2020, the WSD celebrations under the theme “Keep soil alive, protect soil biodiversity” was particularly successful with 780 events held in more than 105 countries. Media coverage was strong reaching 891 million users with over 500 articles online.
- The 5th Glinka World Soil Prize and the 3rd King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award were awarded during WSD20 celebrations.
- As per current practice, the Plenary Assembly (PA) needs to decide on the theme for the World Soil Day 2022.

Suggested actions by the GSP Plenary Assembly

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- take note of the successful WSD celebration on 5th December 2020 and the programme foreseen for WSD 2021 under the theme “Halt soil salinization, boost soil productivity”;
- invite countries, other partners and stakeholders to organize fulsome WSD celebrations under the 2021 theme; ; endorse one of the themes proposed for WSD 2022: a) “Soils for Nutrition”; b) “Soil, the essential ingredient to healthy food and nutrition”; c) “Soil, where food begins”;
- invite partners to disseminate the call for nominations for the Glinka World Soil Prize 2021 so that the consultation process is fully inclusive, ensuring submissions from the different regions of

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the world, and call on other funding sources to contribute financially to the implementation of the Prize beyond 2021;

- take note of the successful organization of the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award in 2020 and invite partners to disseminate the call for nominations for the 2021 Award;
- call on resource partners to contribute to the implementation of the sustained communication activities envisaged by the Secretariat.

10.1 Report on the implementation of World Soil Day 2020

1. Concrete actions took place in more than 105 countries, with media outreach involving hundreds of millions of participants taking a keen interest in the theme: ‘Keep soil alive, Protect soil biodiversity’. More than 780 events were registered on the [WSD interactive map](#). They brought together representatives of governments, business, NGOs, youth organizations, the media, and the public at large. From Rome to New York, Bangkok, Abu Dhabi, Moscow, many countries held official ceremonies and 21 FAO regional, sub-regional and country offices took an active part in the campaign, with this effort culminating in the official celebration held on 4 December 2020 (read [more](#)). Many event organizers shared their photos ([photogallery](#)).
2. Thirty-five ad-hoc communication materials and products were made available on the [WSD website](#) in more than 16 languages and downloaded 10 000 times (+25% compared to 2019) including the new video “[Beneath our feet](#)” produced in 6 languages for social media. New content presented the secrets of soil biodiversity on which humans rely. As is the case every year, soil fans, education ministries, teachers, soil science societies, and families joined efforts to make the WSD logo available in 100 languages, including local dialects ([here](#)). Furthermore, joint work of soil scientists and designers led to the success of the ‘[Book contest for children on soil biodiversity](#)’, with 97 entries from 75 countries (under the sponsorship of the GSP and the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS)).
3. As mentioned above, media coverage was strong - reaching an estimated 891 million users - roughly 2 out of 10 people worldwide. More than 500 online articles were entered globally between 3 and 7 December, most of them from Asia, North America, and Europe. In terms of broadcasting, WSD was well covered by the BBC, NDTV.com, and al-Jazeera. An [FAO’s press release](#) (in the 6 FAO languages) presented the launch of the “State of knowledge of soil biodiversity” and attracted media interest, while major media outlets such as the New York Times, the Guardian, Xinhuanet, National Geographic, Science, and Le Monde gave prominence to soil biodiversity on 5 December (read [more](#)).
4. The web stories (1) ‘[Soils should have rights too](#)’, (2) ‘[It’s alive! Soil is much more than you think](#)’ as well as the webcast of the virtual event and the Director-General’s speech attracted significant attention. During the campaign, FAO’s soil-related websites generated around 4 million viewings. Over 200 000 new users accessed WSD related content on FAO’s website between 4-7 December. In fact, Web traffic increased 4 times from the usual average compared to previous weeks. The highest cumulative traffic came from Asia with 55% of users, followed by the Americas with 25%, and Europe with 16%. In terms of specific countries, India, the United States, and Mexico recorded the highest peaks.
5. It is also estimated that the organization reached 308 million social media users with 200 multilingual posts on 5 December. The top social media post was published on Twitter, with more than 800 retweets, 14 000 likes and 41 200 views (see hashtag results [here](#)). On the popular

Chinese social media platform Weibo, the topic related to WSD reached 8.3 million accounts. The campaign video, released on WSD, was viewed more than 500 000 times. The promotional videos produced for TikTok were viewed 42 000 times on 5 December. More than 5 490 accounts worldwide shared FAO content. See the [media report](#).

10.2 Plan for World Soil Day 2021 and Proposed Themes for WSD 2022

6. The WSD 2021 theme: ‘Halt soil salinization, boost soil productivity’ will be more challenging for the Secretariat and partners to engage more people and countries in the celebrations. Indeed, a number of countries do not consider salinization as a direct threat while WSD events and celebrations should normally be organized independently of the country situation in regards to the chosen theme. The Secretariat will seek to prepare and disseminate key messages, short animations, and action-oriented communication materials in several languages to engage an as wide WSD audience as possible.
7. The digital and media strategy remains the most crucial element in the WSD awareness-raising platform. However, in order to effectively deliver pertinent soil-related knowledge and promote learning hubs across multiple platforms, it is important to go beyond the official occurrence and trigger public attention throughout the year with scheduled launches of new communication products, activities and contests.
8. Considering that the annual theme for the WSD celebrations is consistent with the symposium theme of that same year and in view of the organization of the Global Symposium on Soil Fertility – “Soils for nutrition” to be held in March 2022, the GSP Secretariat invite FAO members and partners to endorse one of the themes proposed for WSD 2022: a) “Soils for Nutrition”; b) “Soil, the essential ingredient to healthy food and nutrition”; c) “Soil, where food begins”.

10.3 Glinka World Soil Prize

9. The Glinka World Soil Prize, named after the prominent Russian scientist Konstantin D. Glinka, is sponsored by the Russian Federation. It consists of a Glinka Medal and a check for USD 15 000. It honors individuals and organizations whose leadership and activities have contributed to the promotion and implementation of sustainable soil management in different regions of the world.
10. After the annual call for nominations, ten applications from 10 countries were received and were deemed to be compliant to established criteria. The Glinka World Soil Prize Selection Committee designated the winner who was invited to attend a virtual awarding ceremony during the World Soil Day celebration 2020.
11. The 2020 Laureate was Luca Montanarella, from the Joint Research Center of the European Commission for his distinguished career in the field of soil science. For nearly 30 years, he has focused on the crucial role of soils for food security, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and human well-being. He is recognized as an active promoter of soil awareness in Europe and worldwide. Due recognition was provided through a dedicated [webpage](#), [media article](#) and [video](#).
12. In 2021, more information on the Glinka World Soil Prize will be disseminated through digital media, including social media networks, and will be an important element of the WSD

campaign. The call for nominations was launched in July 2021 and will close after the 9th Plenary Assembly. National focal points and partners are strongly invited to further disseminate it through local, national and regional networks.

10.4 King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award

13. Thailand has decided to establish and sponsor the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award (WSDA). The Award aims at encouraging organizers of WSD events at all levels to facilitate challenging and outstanding celebrations across the globe. It prizes the best celebration held in the framework of the previous year's communication campaign. The Award comes in the form of a plaque and a prize of USD 15 000.
14. Following the call for applications issued in July 2020, 24 submissions were received from 15 countries and the pertinent Award Selection Committee designated the winner on WSD 2020.
15. The winner of the third WSD Award was the Indian Council of Agricultural Research - Indian Institute of Soil Science (ICAR-IISS) for its commitment to raising awareness of the importance of healthy soils. During the ceremony that took place in Bangkok on March 2021, Dr. Chalermchai Sreeon, Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand, presented the prize to the Indian Ambassador to Thailand. Due recognition was ensured through a dedicated [webpage](#), [media article](#), and [video](#).
16. In 2021, information on this Award will be further disseminated through digital media, including social media networks, and will constitute an important element of the World Soil Day 2021 campaign with more communication material prepared around it. The call for nominations was issued in July 2021 and will close shortly after the 9th Plenary Assembly and it is hoped that national focal points and partners will further disseminate it.