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Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

Tenth session

Virtual, 23-25 May 2022

**World Soil Day report 2021, preparations for 2022 and theme for 2023,
awareness raising on soils and prizes (GSPPA: X/2022/9)**

Executive Summary

- World Soil Day (WSD) is held annually on 5 December to focus attention on the importance of soils for a healthy life and to advocate for sustainable soil management (SSM).
- Since 2013, the GSP Secretariat has made it a priority to support the celebration of WSD as the main platform for awareness raising in countries around the world. In 2021, WSD was marked under the theme, “Halt soil salinization, boost soil productivity” and 781 events were held in more than 125 countries. Media coverage was strong reaching 1.15 billion individuals and over 630 articles were published online.
- The 6th Glinka World Soil Prize and the 4th King Bhumibol WSD Award were given out during the WSD21 celebrations.
- As per current practice, the Plenary Assembly (PA) needs to decide on the theme for the WSD 2023.

Suggested actions by the GSP Plenary Assembly

The Plenary Assembly may wish to:

- appreciate the successful World Soil Day (WSD) celebration held in December 2021 and the programme foreseen for WSD 2022 under the theme “Soils, where food begins”;
- encourage countries, other partners and stakeholders to organize WSD celebrations under the 2022 theme;
- support the theme _____ [to be added later] for WSD 2023;
- invite partners to disseminate the call for nominations for the Glinka World Soil Prize 2022, ensuring a fully inclusive process through submissions from the different regions of the world, and call on other funding sources to contribute financially to the implementation of the prize beyond 2022;

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- appreciate the successful organization of the King Bhumibol WSD Award in 2021 and invite partners to disseminate the call for nominations for the 2022 Award; and
- call on resource partners to contribute to the implementation of the sustained communication activities envisaged by the Secretariat.

9.1 Report on the implementation of World Soil Day 2021

1. More than 125 countries marked the date in some form, with media engagement reaching some 1.15 billion taking an interest in the theme: 'Halt soil salinization, boost soil productivity'. More than 781 events were registered on the [WSD interactive map](#). They brought together government representatives, business, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth organizations, the media, and other diverse audiences. From Abu Dhabi, Bangkok, Moscow, New York and Rome, many countries held official ceremonies and 25 FAO Regional, Sub-regional and country offices took an active part in the campaign, with this effort culminating in the official celebration held on 3rd December 2021 (read [more](#)). Several organizers shared their photos ([photo gallery](#)).
2. Sixty ad-hoc communication materials and products were made available on the [WSD website](#) in more than 23 languages and downloaded 15 000 times, more than 50 percent more than in 2020, including the new video: "[Salt-affected soils: discovering a missed reality](#)" which was produced in all FAO languages. As is the case every year, soil enthusiasts, education ministries, teachers, soil science societies, and families joined efforts to make the [WSD logo available in 101 languages](#), including in local dialects. Furthermore, the joint work of soil scientists and graphic designers led to the success of the "Children's booklet contest on salt-affected soils," with 27 entries from 14 countries, under the sponsorship of the GSP and the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS). The GSP and the IUSS also launched the "Kids2kids poster drawing contest on salt-affected soils," and 49 posters were received from children aged between 5 and 14 years old.
3. Media coverage was strong. More than 630 online articles were identified globally between 3-7 December, most of them from Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America. In terms of broadcasting, WSD was well covered by BBC World, China Global Television Network (CGTN), NDTV.com, and Al-Jazeera English (AJE) among many others. An [FAO press release](#) highlighted the threats of soil salinization to global food security while attracting media interest to the cause, and major media outlets such as the Washington Post, the Guardian, CNN World, the Times of India, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Telegraph, der Spiegel, le Monde Diplomatique and la Repubblica gave prominence to soils on 5th December ([list](#) of the key articles).
4. The web stories (1) '[Digging deeper into the arid terrain of the world's largest landlocked country](#)', (2) '[A life dedicated to the soil](#)' as well as the webcast of the virtual event and the Director-General's speech attracted significant attention. Since the campaign's launch, FAO's soil-related websites have generated around 3 million viewings. At peak time, over 48 000 visitors interacted with the dedicated web pages. The highest cumulative traffic came from Asia with 55 percent of users, followed by the Americas with 25 percent and Europe with 16 percent. Significant peaks in specific countries came from India (44 percent), the United States of America, and Mexico.
5. It is also estimated that the Organization reached 134 million social media users with 150 multilingual posts on 5th December. The GSP Facebook page was liked by 20 625 people and followed by 22 638 users up by 273 percent between 1-10 December 2021, and the top GSP Facebook post reached over 31 300 people. Meanwhile, the hashtag [#WorldSoilDay](#) was picked up by over 330 million users and was trending on Twitter on 5 December.

9.2 Plan for WSD 2022 and proposed themes for WSD 2023

6. The WSD 2022 theme: “Soils, where food begins” will be an opportunity for the Secretariat and partners to engage even more people and countries in the celebrations, as the theme of soil fertility linked to food security and nutrition is relevant to all countries worldwide. The Secretariat will prepare and disseminate key messages, short animations, and action-oriented communication materials in several languages to keep engaging with wider audiences.
7. The digital and media strategy remains the most crucial element in the WSD awareness-raising platform. However, to effectively deliver pertinent soil-related knowledge and promote learning hubs across multiple platforms, it is important to continue to position the theme throughout the year to trigger public attention with scheduled launches of new communication products, activities and contests.
8. Considering that the annual theme for the WSD celebrations is the same as the theme of the symposium of that same year and in view of the organization of the Global Symposium on Soil and Water to be held in May 2023, the GSP Secretariat invites FAO Members and partners to support one of the themes proposed for WSD 2023: a) “Soil and water: a source of life” and b) “Soil and water: symbiosis for life”.

9.3 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 honours individuals and organizations whose leadership and activities have contributed to the promotion and implementation of SSM in different regions of the world.
10. After the annual call for nominations, 17 applications from several countries were received and deemed to comply with the established criteria. The Glinka World Soil Prize Selection Committee designated the winner who was invited to attend a virtual awarding ceremony on WSD 2021.
11. The 2021 Laureate was Lydie-Stella Koutika, a renowned soil scientist from the Republic of the Congo with over 30 years of experience in applied research on agroecosystems. Her research focuses on soil health and degradation processes to fight food insecurity and foster climate change mitigation and adaptation. Due recognition was granted through a dedicated [webpage](#), [media article](#) and [video](#).
12. In 2022, 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 will be launched in July 2022 and will close on 1 September. National focal points and partners are encouraged to promote the date through local, national and regional networks.

9.4 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 to encourage 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 August 2021, 57 submissions were received from 35 countries and the Selection Committee nominated the winner on WSD 2021.
15. The winner of the fourth WSD Award was the Nigerian Institute of Soil Science (NISS) for its commitment to raising awareness on the importance of healthy soils, particularly during last year's WSD celebration, which addressed soil biodiversity under the motto, "Keep soil alive, protect soil biodiversity". Once again, this received coverage through a dedicated [webpage](#), [media article](#), and [video](#).
16. Throughout 2022, information on this Award will be disseminated through digital media, including social media networks, and will constitute an important element of the WSD 2021 campaign with more communication materials prepared. The call for nominations will be launched in July 2022 and will close on 1 September and it is hoped that national focal points and partners will distribute it far and wide.