



A soil plan of action to awaken society beyond 2015

Arwyn Jones (1), Francesca Bampa (1,2), Willie Towers (3), Gabrielle Broll (4), and Ronald Vargas (5)

(1) European Commission, Ispra, Italy (arwyn.jones@jrc.ec.europa.eu), (2) University of Padova, Padova, Italy (francesca.bampa@jrc.ec.europa.eu), (3) James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen, UK (Willie.Towers@hutton.ac.uk), (4) University of Osnabrueck, Osnabrueck, Germany (gabriele.broll@uni-osnabrueck.de), (5) FAO, Rome, Italy (r.vargas@fao.org)

2015 will be a significant year for soil. In addition to being the target date for the Millennium Development Goals, the global campaign “Beyond 2015” has among its eight objectives the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and ensuring environmental sustainability, both requiring soil protection and conservation aspects. The Expo 2015 Milano “Feeding the Planet. Energy for life” will open its pavilions to the public in May of the same year. In the meantime, the entire year, as designated by the 68th UN General Assembly, will be celebrated as the International Year of Soils. Despite this worldwide celebrations and acknowledgement of the value of soil, there is still a shocking ignorance amongst people about where their food comes from and food security issues. Soil, as a natural resource, is still not widely considered as a major actor in combating hunger, facing climate change, fresh water scarcity and biodiversity loss (Bouma et al., 2012).

Since the publication of the EU Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection (EC, 2006), many activities on soil research and awareness have blossomed in Europe. Soil expertise and local knowledge have built up a creative range of initiatives at primary, high school and university education levels. In recent years, the concept of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary collaboration for soil science has started to be accepted and the topic embraced by pedologists to team up with geographers, agronomists, biologists, chemists and urban planners. Official and informal networks of soil experts are appearing worldwide (e.g. ENSA, ESNB, SSSA, BSSS, VSSLR, LinkedIn group on soil science education, etc.).

Despite this boom of innovative activities to promote the protection of our soil, many projects still remain unfriendly to teachers, lacking active learning or local applicability, too costly to communicate and difficult for the public to comprehend, therefore lacking broader appeal.

The way to capitalize on this rather uncoordinated suite of positive examples offered by soil enthusiasts is to provide a common platform appropriate to all parts of the world, with a common consensus on soil issues to be covered and be brought to the table of consumers. The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) is an interactive, responsive and voluntary partnership, open to governments, regional organizations, institutions and other stakeholders. One of the pillars of action aims to “Encourage investment, technical cooperation, policy, education awareness and extension in soil”. In order to achieve this goal, a small regionally balanced committee was formed following the 3rd European Network on Soil Awareness conference in Aberdeen and the 2nd Global Soil Week in Berlin. This group produced a draft plan of action that will be submitted to the Intergovernmental technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) of the GSP.

Some key points that we need to address are: finding new soil communicators to awake and engage the society and the political arena (e.g. actors, poets, artists, etc.); focusing on a harmonised public perception of soil and their importance for environment and society; re-introducing soil science into the school curricula as a cross-cutting discipline designing a coherent but flexible structure and ensuring a proper and logical constructive transition between each learning stage (e.g. training teachers, web-based courses/ web-based platform, etc.).

REFERENCES

- Bouma J, Broll G, Crane TA, Dewitte O, Gardi C, Schulte RPO, Towers W (2012) Soil information in support of policy making and awareness raising. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 4, 552-558.
- EC (2006) (COM(2006)231 final) Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions, Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection. (ed Commission E), Brussels, Belgium.