

Quarterly Viewpoint

FROM THE DESK OF RATTAN LAL

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Enhancing Awareness About the Importance of Soil to Addressing Global Issues

The year 2022 had two international events of global significance. United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS) conducted numerous meetings over 18 months and involved thousands of scientists, farmer organizations and industry partners from around the world. It was concluded with the report presented by the Secretary General on 23rd September. UNFCCC -COP 26 was held after two years (COP-2020 meeting was not held because of the COVID pandemic) from 31st October to 12 November 2021. Both meeting discussed agriculture and soil during the side events and several meetings. There was a lot of focus on agroecology, regenerative agriculture, nature -positive agriculture etc. Numerous game- changing solutions were discussed in each of the five action tracks of the UNFSS. Discussions under Action Track 3 led to the creation and launch of the Coalition for Action on Soil Health (CA4SH). The initiative has received strong support from UN member nations and the private sector, and its activities are still ongoing.

Despite the discussions within the Action Tracks of UNFSS and several side events of COP26, the word “soil “did not appear in the official announcements of either of the two events. This omission is a challenge to soil scientists and agronomists on continuation and strengthening communication with all stake holders (i.e., the policy makers) regarding the awareness of the importance of soil to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. There is a strong precedence of the launch of 4 per 1000(4pT) initiative at COP21 in Paris in 2015 and of the Adapting African Agriculture (AAA) in 2016 in Marrakesh and subsequent COPs. However, future COPs and UNFSSs must also emphasize the importance of soil and launch on the ground programs to translate science of soils into action. While a tremendous progress has been made, even bigger challenges lie ahead in convincing policy makers about the importance of soils. Indeed. Sustainable Development Goals can only be met if soils are part of the agenda and agriculture is part of the solution to addressing environmental issues.

Sincerely,



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