



Editorial

Earlier this year I had the good fortune to spend three weeks at the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources of the University of Sydney, Australia. Although primarily intended to work on a grant proposal, it was exciting to see how much soil research Alex McBratney and his group have going. And it includes all: field work, laboratory studies and a great deal of desk work. Some weeks after my visit to Sydney, I was in Rwanda where a Wageningen University consortium is supporting the establishment of a MSc in soil science and agroforestry at the National University of Butare, Rwanda. As part of that project, we develop a soil science curriculum and supervise PhD students. Clearly, Butare is quite a different environment from Sydney. But there are also a number of things in common.

In Sydney as well as Butare, I see a lot of hardworking, young students and professional working on soils and aiming to tackle problems that land users encounter. In doing so, they apply the best available technologies and at the same time develop new methodologies. Of course, there is a difference in applied and fundamental work but such distinction is in fact irrelevant. Problems from cotton-based farming systems in New South Wales or coffee and maize systems in Rwanda are not different - what matters is that soils are studied, that the frontiers of our knowledge are moved, and that soil scientists contribute to society and in the end: to a better world.

I bring this up to illustrate something that many of us discuss frequently: the current state of soil science and its future directions. There are appallingly negative views and they are merely based on student numbers in a few countries. Indeed, student numbers have decreased, departments of soil science have been renamed and sometimes have been merged or closed. That is one side of the story and some prophets think that soil science is about to die as a discipline.

What we see, however, is a new generation of soil scientists that is perhaps partly submerged in other departments but that delivers excellent work. Just look through any recent issue of global soil science journal. Note that more and more is being published (obviously some is dilution and repetition) but a clear indication that a lot of work is going on and there are many papers that come from non-traditional soil science groups or department. Soil science has branched out and entered other scientific fields. At the same time, many soil science papers appear in non-traditional soil science journals. It shows that soil science is very alive! We see that other, non soil scientists, start doing soil research. Some see a danger but many would agree that it are tremendous opportunities and that we should offer our expertise to such groups.

The IUSS has a key role to play in all these developments. Whether you are based in Sydney or Butare it is important that you feel part of the global soil science community and the IUSS, which supports all soil science activities across the globe. The IUSS offers a forum (either in the Alert, Bulletin or in meetings) to have your voice heard, to exchange ideas and to move the field of soil science forward. The IUSS strives to be as dynamic as our evolving discipline, but much depends on the involvement of its members. May I invite you to participate in IUSS activities, promote soil science and show that the apocalypse of soil science is sheer nonsense!

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