



## FROM THE DESK OF RATTAN LAL Quarterly Viewpoint

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### COVID-19: The World is One Family

The Sanskrit phrase *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The World is One Family) is more relevant now than ever before. The virus pandemic has spread rapidly throughout the world in developed and developing countries, rich and poor nations, advanced and emerging economies, and among friends and foes alike. It is the formidable enemy of all of humanity, regardless of differences in race, language, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender and political ideology. Therefore, its effective and swift mitigation demands a united approach of helping one another, maintaining a strict code of social distancing, adopting high standards of hygiene and cleanliness, and taking care of others in need of help. We must salute and appreciate the services of health-giver professionals who are on the frontline of the World War against an invisible and a microscopic enemy of the human race.

The global tragedy of COVID-19 necessitates a paradigm shift in the thinking of the scientific community towards addressing future research and education priorities. Obviously, international cooperation on issues of global significance is a high priority. The daunting challenge of the sustainable management of finite and fragile natural resources must be based on strong international cooperation. The global soil resource, and its management for food and nutritional security through adoption of nutrition-sensitive agriculture, is an example of the need for protecting and managing a precious resource, which must never be taken for granted. Not only should food be produced by using conservation-effective strategies of “producing more from less,” the waste must also be minimized.

The food waste, equivalent to one-third produced globally, may be exacerbated by COVID-19 because of unnecessary hoarding and panic buying. Wastage of prime soil, through degradation of its quality by indiscriminate and inappropriate use of inputs and by conversion to other land uses (rapid and ad-hoc urbanization), must be addressed by adopting the concept of the “Rights-of-Soil” and global soil protection policy.

The focus of the world community on COVID-19 will adversely affect the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the Agenda 2030. Yet, sustainable management of soil is essential to achieving SDG #2 (Zero Hunger), #3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), #4 (Clean Water and Sanitation), #13 (Climate Action) and #15 (Life on Land). The tragedy of COVID-19 has refocused the attention on restoration and management of soil health as stated in SDG #3 (Global Health and Wellbeing) and SDG #15 (Life on Land).

The general education curricula, at all levels (from primary school to the college and graduate level), must be revisited to enhance focus on the “One Health” concept: the health of soil, plants, animal, people and environment is one and indivisible. The need for soil protection also necessitates implementation of the [“Revised World Soil Charter” \(FAO 2015\)](#) across the globe.

Sincerely,

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Past President, International Union of Soil Sciences

