

The Twenty-third Session of the Intergovernmental Group on Tea (IGG/Tea)

The Twenty-third Session of the Intergovernmental Group on Tea (IGG/Tea) was held from 17 to 20 May 2018 in Hangzhou, People's Republic of China (PRC). The IGG/Tea meeting was attended by more than 100 delegates from 19 member countries and observers from five organizations¹.

The session was formally inaugurated by Mr. Qu Dongyu, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the PRC. Mr. Wang Hong, Vice Mayor, Hangzhou Municipal Government, also delivered welcoming remarks showing a high level support from the host country. The Meeting elected Mr. Jianyun Ruan (China) as Chairperson, Mr. Ramaz O. Chanturiya (Russian Federation) as First Vice-Chairperson and Mr. Prabhat Bezboruah (India), as Second Vice Chairperson.

The Group reviewed the current market situation and medium-term outlook to 2027 supported by detailed insights on market developments at country level. Discussions highlighted the need to continue supporting tea consumption and stressed the importance of generic promotion in increasing demand. The need to set up an international tea day was identified as an important action towards enhancing people's knowledge of tea and sustaining consumption.

The Group examined possible strategies and challenges on developing futures and swap markets for tea noting that price volatility is one of the major challenges affecting the sub-sector. The IGG decided therefore to revive the Working Group on futures and swap markets in order to support members' move towards such institutional arrangements.

Through the round table on "sustainability and certification schemes in the tea industry", the Group identified challenges including duplication and multiplicity of certification schemes, high compliance and transaction cost for farmers, especially smallholders, low inclusiveness of the standards development process and weak price transmission. The benefits arising from sustainability certification schemes included increased awareness on sustainability issues, improved working conditions, higher yields and better access to markets. The Group underscored that certification schemes should be integrated with other interventions to reach acceptable environmental and social standards; and that, improved market transparency in the tea sector, would enhance the effectiveness and positive impact on all sustainability issues.

The need to strengthen the collaboration on data collection and projections activities within the Secretariat was further emphasized. Members were invited to provide regular updates and feedbacks on countries' statistics in order to facilitate Secretariat's analysis on the current market situation and prospects.

On the future action plan of the IGG, the Group called for enhanced participation, ownership and more visibility of the work of the Group. Members encouraged more producing and consuming countries and observers to attend the IGG/Tea and host its activities. India offered to host the next Session of the IGG/Tea in 2020. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, expressed interest in hosting the next intersessional meeting of the IGG in 2019. Viet Nam also expressed the intention to host one of the two events.

¹ Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Turkey, United Kingdom, Viet Nam and Zambia. Observers attended from the International Tea Committee (ITC), La Nouvelle Presse du Thé, The Tea and Herbal Infusions Europe (THIE), The Research Institute on Organic Agriculture (FIBL) and the Tea Association of the United States

The Joint Meeting (JM) of the 39th Session of the Intergovernmental Group (IGG) on Hard Fibres and the 41st Session of the IGG on Jute, Kenaf and Allied Fibres

The Joint Meeting (JM) of the 39th Session of the Intergovernmental Group (IGG) on Hard Fibres and the 41st Session of the IGG on Jute, Kenaf and Allied Fibres was held on 15-17 November 2017 in Tanga, United Republic of Tanzania (URT). It was attended by 25 delegates from the seven member countries² and observers from three international organizations.

The Session was inaugurated by Hon. Dr Charles Tizeba, Minister for Agriculture of the URT. The meeting was preceded by a consultation on Sisal and Social Development in Tanzania. The JM elected Mr. Salum Shamte (URT) as Chairperson, Mr. Oliver Reimer-Wollenweber (Germany) as First Vice-Chairperson and Mr. Sushil R. Gaikwad (India) as Second Vice-Chairperson.

The JM reviewed the current market situation and the medium term outlook and recommended to extend the price analyses to various processed and manufactured products, as well as those of competing products. The JM encouraged the Secretariat to provide more analyses on key drivers behind changes in production, trade, prices and use of natural fibres. Delegates recommended to establish an outlook process that allows to harness the expertise of the Groups and, at the same time, the formal modelling skills of the Secretariat.

The JM reviewed the statistical issues and expressed its appreciation on the timeliness, quality and uniqueness of the data provided by the Secretariat. Delegates suggested to supplement official information with up-to-date market intelligence and other sources. The group recommended to create a dedicated, interactive website for the member countries to share, consult and review on a real-time basis updates on statistical information.

The meeting discussed the importance of coconut and coir production for the economy of Sri Lanka underlining the high degree and diverse forms of use of coconut products. Delegates encouraged producers of the other fibres to draw lessons from the coconut industry and stimulate domestic consumption of fibres and fibre products; encourage higher use of by-products; and increase productivity and quality to ensure higher competitiveness.

In order to strengthen its working groups, the JM decided to assign countries as the champions, as opposed to individuals, who would be responsible for reporting on progress. To this end, the JM encouraged the Working Groups to hold regular virtual meetings and commence their work as soon as possible. The intersessional meeting in 2018 would then offer the opportunity for the Working Groups to physically meet and update on progress made.

The JM identified the following Working Groups and champions: (1) the WG on Life-Cycle Analysis and Sustainable Management, led by India; (2) the WG on Foresight and Capacity Development led by INFO; and (3) the WG on Research and Development led by Tanzania.

² Member States attending included Germany, Haiti, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka and the URT. Observers came from the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), International Natural Fibres Organization (INFO) and the London Sisal Association (LSA).