

March 2012



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JOINT MEETING

**Hundred and Tenth Session of the Programme Committee
and Hundred and Forty-third Session of the Finance Committee**

Rome, 7 May 2012

**PROCLAMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF INTERNATIONAL YEARS**

Executive Summary

The proclamation of International Years (IYs) is a prerogative of the United Nations General Assembly, which follows a process of extensive consultations. However, any UN system institution may make a proposal that an International Year be declared.

The present document outlines elements for an FAO policy concerning IYs closely based on the related guidance from the United Nations. It also provides summary background information on International Years and their practical implications.

Guidance sought from the Joint Meeting

The Joint Meeting is invited to review and endorse the proposed FAO policy regarding the proclamation and implementation of International Years, as set out in the Annex.

Background

Purpose of International Years

1. International Years (IYs) are primarily intended as catalysts for awareness-raising and concerted action at all levels. Successful IYs should cover themes of global interest at the time they are held by taking into account the evolution of topics of global concern.. Their importance to FAO depends on the theme selected, for example if focused on specific sectors, strategic dimensions or commodities pertinent to the mandate of the Organization.
2. In the last decade, FAO played a major role in relation to: the IY of Mountains (2002); the IY of Rice (2004); the IY of Potato (2008); the IY of Natural Fibres (2009); and the IY of Forests (2011). Currently FAO is also involved in the IY of Cooperatives (2012). Additionally, following a request of

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the 37th Session of the FAO Conference (June-July 2011)¹, two IYs have recently been declared: 2013 as the IY of Quinoa; and 2014 as the IY of Family Farming.

3. In general terms, IYs aim to: (i) increase global and local understanding of the importance of the selected theme and the problems to be addressed; (ii) raise the profile of the theme on international agendas, particularly as far as FAO is concerned in the areas of food security and sustainable rural development; (iii) encourage stakeholders to take concrete actions at all levels; and (iv) foster active cooperation among countries and regions, where pertinent.

4. Whereas IYs are by definition time-bound, they are also expected to lead to more lasting forms of information exchange (such as through partnerships and networking arrangements), as well as medium and longer-term programmes and projects, including sustained donor support and partnerships. Therefore, while designed for the long-term, activities should mostly be action-oriented and decentralized to local levels whenever possible.

Process of declaration

5. IYs are proclaimed by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), while proposals may originate from other UN institutions, e.g. FAO in the cases of the IYs of Rice, Potato, Quinoa and Family Farming. Proposals for the proclamation of IYs are submitted, through the Secretary-General, directly to the General Assembly, which may also decide to bring them to the attention of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

6. Requests from FAO for proclamation of a particular International Year arises normally as a proposal from one or more Members or the Organization, or one of its Technical Committees. Such proposals are in the first instance usually reviewed by the relevant Technical Committee and by Council, in order to fully evaluate the proposal and canvass support among the membership. For example, the proposal for the IY of Natural Fibres was initially considered and endorsed by the Committee on Commodity Problems in April 2005, then approved by Council in June 2005.

7. Subsequently, a draft resolution is submitted to the FAO Conference by a Member or group of Members, and the Director-General is requested to transmit it to the UN Secretary-General with a view to the IY being declared by the UNGA. After its adoption by the Conference, the resolution is conveyed to the Secretary-General for appropriate action.

8. Irrespective of the origin of proposals, the related UNGA resolution usually specifies the responsibilities assigned to the concerned components of the UN system, as well as other important players. By way of example, FAO has been invited to serve as the lead agency (for the IY of Mountains), to have a facilitation role (for the IYs of Rice, Potato, Natural Fibres, Quinoa, and Family Farming), or a support role (for the IY of Forests) respectively.

Implications of IYs

9. By accepting the UNGA invitation to assume responsibility in implementing a given IY, FAO undertakes to play its due part during the course of the IY, in collaboration with the other actors involved: governments, regional and international organizations, civil society and the private sector. As briefly described below, this has practical implications in terms of activities and costs, with the intensity of workload depending on whether FAO has a lead, facilitation or support role.

Activities

10. A lead unit having expertise in the subject matter of the IY generally acts as focal point within the Organization. It needs to coordinate for instance the preparation of communication materials and the organization of scheduled events at headquarters, regional or country levels.

11. Groups comprising representatives of stakeholders (governments, organizations, technical associations, private sector, etc.) are normally set up to catalyze decentralized programmes. Thus, national committees are often created to coordinate IY activities at country level.

¹ C 2011/REP, paragraphs 137-141.

12. For instance, in the case of the IY of Rice, an informal international working group was formed of representatives from 17 rice-producing and rice-consuming countries, as well as UN institutions (UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNICEF, IFAD)²; Centres of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research; NGOs such as the International Federation of Agricultural Producers; and the private sector (e.g. International AgriFood Network).

Costs

13. Involvement in the implementation of an IY entails costs which are normally additional to those of planned activities under the regular programme. Hence, extrabudgetary resources are required and trust funds are usually established to acquire them, in particular to ensure that adequate resources are available for meetings with potential donors and private sector stakeholders and also to provide the necessary catalytic support to national and regional events.

14. Moreover, significant in-kind contributions may be provided through the Organization's administrative and logistical frameworks, for planning and coordinating international actions, organizing and hosting events, communication campaigns, backstopping by regional and subregional offices, and similar activities.

15. These operational aspects need to be adequately discussed by the appropriate FAO authorities, based on precise information regarding the availability of extrabudgetary funds. Indeed, the actual expenses for some previous IYs involving FAO have been lower than the initial estimates because of the limited availability of extrabudgetary resources³.

Elements for an FAO policy on IYs

16. As the process of proclamation and implementation of IYs is disciplined by inter-agency procedures and agreements, including the sole prerogative of the UNGA to declare them, it is fundamental for a proposed FAO policy on IYs to take on board the guidance on IYs that was adopted by the UNGA and ECOSOC⁴, in terms of criteria for selection of themes and the procedures to be pursued.

17. A primary concern in all the intergovernmental *fora* involved is to avoid proliferation and profusion of IYs, not only for the obvious financial reasons, but also to minimize risks of trivialization and donor fatigue. In this regard, the FAO Conference noted in 2007 “*an apparent increase in the frequency with which International Years are proclaimed, and it urged that careful consideration in conjunction with other UN Agencies be given to the issue of funding well in advance and the rationale of the designation of any future Years.*”⁵

18. Hence, the criteria and procedures for IYs must incorporate a due process of consultations in order to ensure pondered decision-making, to agree on concrete objectives, and to ensure the presence of requisites for a successful outcome – such as clear roles for all players, and adequate arrangements for coordination.

² United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Environment Programme; United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization; United Nations' Children Fund; the International Fund for Agricultural Development

³ This was the case, for example, in connection with the IY of Mountains.

⁴ The relevant decisions are: (i) Resolution 61/185 of the UNGA on Proclamation of International Years (20 December 2006); (ii) Resolution 53/199 of the UNGA on Proclamation of International Years (15 December 1998); (iii) Resolution 1980/67 of ECOSOC on International Years and Anniversaries, with Guidelines appended thereto (25 July 1980), which was adopted by (iv) Decision 35/424 of the UNGA (5 December 1980). The Guidelines provide criteria and procedures for the proclamation of IYs, which the Governing Bodies of the UN system organizations are advised to adopt, and which the Members are invited to take into account in considering proposals for IYs.

⁵ C 2007/REP, paragraph 81

19. Another important consideration with regard to decision-making should be the availability of clear and precise cost estimates and other practical implications which would ensue from a proposed IY, aligned with an assessment of prospects for extrabudgetary support.
20. These elements have been translated into the proposed policy on IYs set out in the Annex.

Guidance sought from the Joint Meeting

21. The Joint Meeting is invited to review and endorse the proposed FAO policy regarding the proclamation and implementation International Years, as set out in the Annex.

Annex

Policy for the proclamation and implementation of International Years

Criteria for selection of themes

- 1) A subject proposed for an International Year should be consistent with the purposes and principles listed in the main constitutional instruments of concerned UN system entities (i.e. the United Nations Charter, the FAO Constitution, etc).
- 2) The International Year should address a priority concern to all, or the majority of countries, and should contribute to the development of international cooperation in solving global problems, in particular those affecting developing countries.
- 3) The International Year, if endorsed, should involve concrete action at the international and national levels and should be expected to generate significant follow-up at both levels in the form of new activities or the strengthening of existing ones.
- 4) There should be an interval of at least two years between two International Years, and a longer interval between years concerning similar subjects.
- 5) The proclamation of an International Year should be considered only when celebrations of shorter duration (a month, week or day) would not suffice.
- 6) An International Year should not be proclaimed when a World Conference has been convened separately on the same subject, or when a subject is already of wide international concern and effective programmes exist to further its ends.

Procedures to be followed and other requisites

- 1) Adequate time should be allowed for full consultations, including the fact that a final decision on a proposal is taken by the United Nations General Assembly not earlier than one full year after the introduction of the proposal in order to take into account the views expressed by Members, and to allow a thorough assessment of the proposal by the competent organs.
- 2) In general, there should be a period of two years between the proclamation and the beginning of an International Year.
- 3) An International Year should not be proclaimed before basic arrangements necessary for its financing (which in principle should be based on voluntary contributions) and its organization have been made.
- 4) There should be effective coordination of the activities of United Nations organizations and bodies concerned so as to build on inherent synergies and avoid duplication.
- 5) Each International Year should have objectives that are likely to lead to identifiable and practical results.
- 6) Arrangements for evaluation should be established in the preparatory phase and form part of the implementation of, and follow-up, to each International Year.