

Guidelines for Working Party Report and Preparation of Programme of Work 23rd Session, International Poplar Commission, Beijing, China, 26-30 October, 2008

The preparation of the 23rd Session of the IPC is progressing fast, thanks to the efforts of the Organizing Committee in Beijing and to the Secretariat at the FAO. A large number of paper abstracts are anticipated across all Working Parties and will be screened by the Scientific Committee.

IPC Sessions, bring people from science, industry, agriculture and public administration together to share their knowledge and technology regarding poplar and willow cultivation and applications.

These guidelines are to:

- Emphasize the role that the Working Parties (WP) have in this process and the expectations that the IPC and FAO have on their action;
- Propose a common format for reporting the activities of the last two years to the 44th Executive Committee meeting;
- Stimulate a discussion within the WPs on their relevance, function, objectives, organization;
- Encourage the preparation of a realistic action plan detailing specific outputs and actions for the next two-four years period that should be discussed during IPC-2008 and presented to the Commission.

1. The role of the Working Parties

The mission of FAO in forestry is: “to enhance human well-being through support to member countries in the sustainable management of the world’s trees and forests” and the theme of the 23rd Session is: “Poplars, Willows and People’s Wellbeing”. These should not sound as a distant messages, but be at the core of our focus in each Working Party.

The specific functions of the IPC as stated in the Convention are:

- Study the scientific, technical, social and economic aspects of poplar and willow cultivation;
- Promote the exchange of ideas and material among research workers, producers and users;
- Arrange joint research programmes;
- Stimulate the organization of congresses and study tours;
- Report and make recommendations to the Conference of FAO;
- Make recommendations to NPCs and Governments through FAO.

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/forestry2/index.jsp?siteId=1580&sitetreeId=3700&langId=1&geoId=0>

Within this framework the Working Parties operate as “the life and blood of the IPC”. Ideas and their implementation depend on the effort of the broad community of people that work with and for poplars and willows worldwide, and particularly to the persons, like you, that have offered to dedicate part of your time to the coordination of such effort.

Your contribution is particularly appreciated as it is entirely voluntary and the main reward is the intellectual satisfaction of accomplishing an invaluable service to the rest of the community, with special benefits to the development of less favoured parts of the world.

Therefore, the aim of the IPC, of its Executive Committee and of the Secretariat is to make sure that the Working Parties operate to the best of their abilities particularly in supporting the National Poplar Commissions of the 37 member countries and to other countries with Poplar and Willow resources. Additionally, Working Parties and the IPC, if working effectively can provide policy and implementation inputs to the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and the Council of FAO for consideration in their formulation of their programmes of work.

2. Report of Working Party activity to the Executive Committee

The WPs will report on the activity of the previous two years to the 44th Executive Committee meeting that will convene in Beijing 26 October 2008. It is suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chairs/Technical Secretaries should start to prepare a report, which does not need to be extensive, but clear and factual.

The following structure is suggested:

- i) WP denomination / Activity Report September 2007-November 2008
- ii) Officials in charge (Chair, vice-Chairs/Technical Secretaries, including changes during the reporting period)
- iii) Foreword (if needed)
- iv) Activities and outputs programmed at IPC-2000
A) B) ... C) ...
- v) Activities and outputs achieved ...
A) B) ... C) ...
- vi) Difficulties encountered and corrections suggested
- vii) Other comments

3. Discussion on the role of the Working Party

The 43rd Executive Committee, held in Rome, February 2007 made several recommendations referring to the Working Parties. The full report of the meeting can be found at:

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/webview/media?mediaId=13655&langId=1>

Working Parties of IPC should be reviewed, rationalized and refocused to more effectively integrate with, and complement, the objectives, outputs, activities, resources and mechanisms of FAO, Committee on Forestry, Forestry Department, Regional Forestry Commissions, Statutory Technical Bodies in Forestry; and National Poplar Commissions.

At the 23rd Session of the IPC the Working Parties will hold joint and separate business meetings **to discuss the relevance and integration of their programmes of work and to evaluate and rationalize how best to serve member States and National Poplar Commissions**. This could result in abolition or merging of existing Working Parties and/or formation of new Working Parties, to be recommended to the members of the IPC meeting in plenary.

Attention is drawn, in particular, to the last statement. To put the matter in other words, with the risk of oversimplification, Working Parties (subsidiary bodies, in general) are established, if and when and as long as the IPC feels that there is a need for coordinated action in a specific area to help the Commission in fulfilling its functions (listed previously).

A frank and open discussion should be engaged within and among Working Parties on the need for their existence, the relevance of their objectives, the actual possibilities for producing tangible results, their optimal structure and organization. The idea is that the debate should again start among and between the Chairs/Vice-Chairs/Technical Secretaries in the period before IPC-2004 and be brought to a broader audience in Santiago. The programme of IPC-2004 will ensure that time is apportioned for this effort that the IPC and FAO itself consider of the highest importance.

A useful suggestion: a SWOT analysis of the Working Party could be a good starting point. Each WP should prepare an analysis that details their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This can be reported in a simple box format as follows:

Strength • ... • ...	Weakness • ... • ...
Opportunity • ... • ...	Threat • ... • ...

The SWOT provides a useful foundation on which to analyze the lessons learned and to detail the solutions in the way forward.

The SWOT table should be complemented by a second one more focused on real experience from the past and ideas on how to progress in the future:

Lessons learned • ... • ...	The way forward • ... • ...
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4. Programmes of work for the future

Another of the recommendations of the Executive Committee with regard to the Working Parties was to be more transparent and accountable, and to assist in the review process, Working Parties were requested to **prepare a two year programme of work to detail focused but achievable specific activities, assign persons responsible, detail indicative delivery dates** and show linkages and collaboration with FAO, Forestry Department, Forestry Commissions and other agencies and institutions in particularly meeting the needs of developing countries.

A programme of work to define the objectives, outputs, activities and inputs is the natural consequence of a positive conclusion on the need for the Working Party and of a more focused definition of its mission and terms of reference.

What the IPC and FAO aim at is realism in the definition of objectives and commitment to their accomplishment. The main word of the above recommendation is “achievable”.

To quote a popular “project management” handbook, the objectives must be **SMART**, that is: **Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic** and **Time bounded**.

It is therefore suggested that, again with a discussion that starts before, and is continued during IPC-2008, each WP produce a SMART programme of work for the coming years. The idea is to outline the work to be carried out until IPC-2012 and detail the two years until the 45th Executive Committee Meeting scheduled for the year 2010.

Among the many tools that the WPs can exploit attention is drawn to two in particular:

- The IPC Website: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/ipc> that has grown dramatically in recent years, thanks to the efforts of the Secretariat;
- The IPC2008 Website: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/ipc2008>
- Working papers published by the FAO on specific subjects.

Both are easily updated, published and disseminated once the inputs/outputs from the Working Parties and their members is available and can have a very widespread and rapid outreach in the languages of the IPC. The IPC web site, in particular, already has portals reserved for the Working Parties that can

be enlarged to include the IPC 2008 analysis and report for your Working Party, including objectives, outputs, activities and inputs for the past and future planning periods.

The aim is to have the report of past achievements and a draft vision for the future forwarded to the Chairman and Secretary by the 1 September 2008.

Thank you in anticipation of your kind collaboration in these tasks.

Stefano Bisoffi
Chairman
International Poplar Commission
Commission

Jim Carle
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International Poplar