PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Hundred and Thirty-second Session

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Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP)

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Mr Benjamin Davis
Director
Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division
Tel: +39 06570 56812
Email: Benjamin.Davis@fao.org

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The FAO Conference in 2017 endorsed the call to develop a rural youth action plan that addresses the importance of making rural areas more attractive for young women and men.
- Under the aegis of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP) was developed and endorsed by the Committee during its Twenty-seventh Session in 2020.
- The RYAP, developed in consultation with Rome-based agencies, other UN Entities and youth organizations, presents a five-year Action Plan (2021-2025), aligned to five thematic areas (or pillars) with the goal of contributing to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by equally empowering rural young women and men, protecting children and other excluded youth groups.
- During the Programme Committee’s Hundred and Thirtieth Session (22-26 March 2021), the Committee encouraged FAO to integrate the RYAP into corporate mechanisms to adequately monitor the progress towards youth inclusiveness and to fully implement the five pillars of the Plan in support of the SDGs. Further, it was requested to update the RYAP in order to be aligned with FAO’s Strategic Framework 2022-31.
- FAO, in its Strategic Framework 2022-31, has acknowledged that youth, as future managers of our agri-food systems, need to be explicitly targeted to ensure inclusive economic development that is resilient to future crises and shocks and contributes to the realization of the SDGs. Furthermore, the RYAP is being embedded in the Medium Term Plan 2022-25 and Programme of Work and Budget 2022-23, as the guide for the implementation, monitoring and reporting of youth-specific and youth-sensitive activities.
- An informal consultation with the Programme Committee Members was organized on 3 September 2021, to feature the revisions requested on the RYAP during the Programme Committee’s Hundred and Thirtieth Session. The requested revisions from the Hundred and Thirtieth Session of the Programme Committee have been taken into consideration and duly integrated into the document.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to welcome the updated revisions in the Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP) which follow the inputs provided during its 130th Session (22-26 March 2021) and as featured during the informal consultation (3 September 2021).
- The Programme Committee is further invited to recommend the forthcoming Council to endorse the RYAP.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- appreciated the inclusion of the revisions suggested during its 130th Session;
- welcomed FAO’s embedding of the RYAP in its Medium Term Plan 2022-25 and its alignment with the Strategic Framework 2022-31; and
- recommended the Council to endorse the RYAP and looked forward to future progress reports.
I. Background

1. The 40th Session of FAO Conference in 2017 endorsed the call to develop a rural youth action plan that addresses the importance of making rural areas more attractive for young women and men.

2. The Committee on Agriculture (COAG), at its 26th Session (2018), discussed why and how young women and men in rural areas suffer from unemployment and lack of decent jobs, and how this contributes to an ageing farming community, out-migration and the economic, cultural and environmental decline of rural areas. COAG highlighted that supporting youth is essential to revitalizing rural areas and ensuring the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and further identified the territorial approach as an overall framework to revitalize rural areas and create decent job opportunities for youth.¹

3. Under the aegis of COAG, the Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP) was developed and endorsed by the Committee during its Twenty-seventh Session in 2020.

4. During further presentations on the RYAP’s progress, and specifically during the Hundred and Thirtieth Session of the Programme Committee (PC) (22-26 March 2021), the Committee appreciated the progress made that far on its implementation while encouraging FAO to integrate the RYAP into corporate mechanisms. The RYAP now features the requested revisions made during PC’s Hundred and Thirtieth Session, presented at an informal consultation with FAO Members on 3 September 2021.

II. Youth and the RYAP in corporate mechanisms

5. In its Strategic Framework 2022-31, FAO, has identified the themes of gender, youth, and inclusion (for reduced inequalities and leave no one behind, LNOB), as cross-cutting and important issues that need to be taken into account across all of FAO’s programmatic work, which require particular visibility. In doing so, the intent is to promote a more systematic mainstreaming and operationalization of these issues across all of FAO’s work.

6. The four betters identified - better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life - will reflect the interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of agrifood systems and represent an organizing principle for how FAO intends to contribute directly to the SDGs, while also mainstreaming youth in its work and specifically in its 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs).

7. In its Medium Term Plan 2022-25, FAO acknowledges that youth, as future managers of our agri-food systems, need to be explicitly targeted to ensure inclusive economic development that is resilient to future crises and shocks and contributes to the realization of the SDGs. Further, the Medium Term Plan 2022-25 acknowledges that RYAP will guide the implementation, monitoring and reporting of youth-specific and youth-sensitive activities.²

8. FAO’s results framework, besides providing the adequate measurement of the PPAs, is also including a specific Key Performance Indicator (KPI) on youth, connected to the RYAP.

III. The RYAP (2021-2025)

9. To strengthen areas of collaboration and synergy in the RYAP, FAO, in 2019, when developing the Plan, undertook consultations with the Rome-based Agencies: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Food Programme (WFP), as well as several other United Nations (UN) entities: the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCDD), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN International

Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Women and the World Tourism Organization (UNTWO) as joint members of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD). Consultations were also made with FAO divisional and regional children and youth focal points, the Young UN network, WFP Youth Network, and other global and regional youth networks, such as the Youth Alliance for Zero Hunger, the Major Group of Children and Youth (MGCY), the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) and the World Food Forum (WFF). The outcomes of the consultations are reflected in the RYAP. Further, the RYAP seeks to capitalize, to the extent possible, on all FAO programmes and projects, in particular youth-related initiatives.

10. In respect of youth engagement, the RYAP promotes empowerment and youth leadership, as well as facilitates youth engagement in decision-making processes, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged youth, youth in remote areas and those with limited access to the internet and other communication channels. In doing so, FAO collaborates with other UN agencies and relevant partners at global, regional and country levels to strengthen and create a coherent design of youth-centric and gender-sensitive processes.

11. While FAO, for statistical purposes, follows the UN definition of youth - as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years -, for operational activities at regional or country level, the Plan follows the youth definitions set by Member Nations.

12. The Plan takes into account the suggestions provided during the Hundred and Thirtieth Session of PC, and continues to remain a living document to accommodate emerging issues.

A. Goal

13. The goal of the RYAP is to contribute to the realization of the SDGs by equally empowering rural young women and men, protecting children and other excluded youth groups, revitalizing rural areas through on-farm and off-farm activities and leaving no one behind. This will be achieved through improved policy guidance, supporting governments and other stakeholders and targeting of FAO’s normative and field programmes on youth-related issues, with a view to strengthen youth participation in decision-making processes and access to education, decent employment and rural services.

14. The RYAP predominately contributes to SDGs 1 (end poverty), 2 (end hunger) and 8 (sustainable economic growth and employment) as well as SDGs 4 (education), 5 (gender equality), 6 (water), 7 (energy), 13 (climate action), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable communities) and 14 and 15 (life on land and in water).

B. RYAP’s pillars and outcomes

15. The RYAP has five pillars that follow the five priority themes endorsed by COAG\(^3\) and main outcomes and outputs as indicated below.

a) **Pillar 1: Support youth participation in rural development, within the context of integrated landscape and territorial approaches.**\(^4\)

i. Sustainable rural development needs to take into account different land uses, livelihood needs and socio-economic factors, all of which shape social and ecological outcomes at various scales. Integrated landscape and territorial approaches strive to meet the needs, interests and values of all women and men of all generations and ethnic groups who live in a given ‘territory’ while also addressing biophysical and ecological objectives and requirements. It recognizes spatial, socio-political and environmental diversity and supports equitable decision making and governance systems. Such approaches address the economic, social and environmental interlinkages and through participatory

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\(^4\) Landscape and territorial approaches emphasize the context specific nature of rural development policy.
approaches identify optimal use of assets and resources in a given space to ensure sustainable transitions that create synergies and reduce tradeoffs. Such an approach is, therefore, suited for addressing multiple interlinked challenges such as the climate emergency, degraded natural resources and ecosystems and the economic decline in rural areas. Considering such challenges are being further exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, especially in rural areas, these approaches need to ensure sustainable and resilient transitions that respect the specificities of different territories, making sure to leave no one behind. This will require economic inclusion and targeted social protection measures, to address the immediate emergency but also ensure a “build back better” approach. Youth have demonstrated their increasingly important role in meeting these global challenges.

ii. The RYAP aims at increasing youth awareness of integrated landscape and territorial approaches, support increased youth participation, instill ownerships in landscapes and create the means for youth to be positive active agents of change. Guidelines will be developed to ensure approaches, tools and methodologies are youth and child sensitive, and public policy support measures will be strengthened for incentivizing youth engagement in the formulation, governance and implementation of landscape and territorial development strategies and programmes. Youth-focused capacity-building tools for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of rural development public policies, including those needed for strengthening family farming will also be developed. Programmes will also be strengthened for the protection of individuals below 18-year age and adolescents from the worst forms of child labour, including hazardous labour, contributing to the FAO Framework on Ending Child Labour in Agriculture. Guidance will also be created to build government capacity on youth sensitive social protection measures.

iii. **Outcome 1.1**: Integrated landscape and territorial approaches created that incorporate the needs and aspirations of young women and men. Indicative outputs:

- Youth and child sensitive integrated landscape and territorial strategies developed through participatory processes that include the vision of youth constituencies in its formulation, governance and implementation.
- Institutional and legal frameworks and strategies developed which foster improved natural resource governance, ensure secured access to land for youth and promote farm transfer and generational turnover.
- Capacities of governments strengthened to integrate youth sensitive resilience and emergency responses into landscape and territorial approaches.

iv. **Outcome 1.2**: Strengthened self-organization of youth within rural communities and interconnected urban areas. Indicative outputs:

- Youth participation strengthened in rural decision-making processes fostering their role as innovators and agents of change.
- Generational sustainability for sustainable natural resource management and food supply networks strengthened.
- Innovative sustainable solutions promoted for young agripreneurs especially through global, regional and country fora.

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5 FAO. 2017. *Landscapes for life: Approaches to landscape management for sustainable food and agriculture.*

b) **Pillar 2: Foster youth employment in an inclusive green economy\(^6\) within the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic.**

i. Many of the world’s ecosystems and natural resources are overexploited and degraded while they need to continue providing food, clean water, energy and other essential economic, social and environmental goods and services to a growing population. This is further aggravated by challenges such as climate change and other emerging shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Major transitions are required for sustainable production systems and consumption patterns in order for countries to achieve their SDGs. This requires major efforts, especially in rural areas, to build resilience, reduce investment risks, develop relevant bioeconomy\(^7\) infrastructures and create market opportunities, for example through the provision of environmental services, carbon trading and the promotion of innovative practices including, but not limited to, fair trade, geographic indications and organic production.

ii. Sustainable innovations in farm and non-farm rural employment and in agricultural value chains have the potential of creating millions of jobs. However, it is essential that such interventions are youth-sensitive and that jobs and market opportunities are equitable, non-discriminatory, viable and attractive to young women and men. This will require partnerships among business, academia, government and local entities, as well as youth organizations, in order to undertake the needed research, skills training, and create bioeconomy clusters within rural communities and in rural-urban interfaces.

iii. Through the RYAP, policy guidance and technical support will be provided to governments to identify optimal entry points for transforming agricultural sectors, generating new rural value chains and creating youth sensitive sustainable jobs. Special attention will be given to the analysis and development of value chains that address gender inequalities, increase the engagement of young women and most marginalized youth and foster equal benefit distribution.

iv. **Outcome 2.1:** Promote government policies which ensure youth- and gender-sensitive transitions to the green economy. Indicative outputs:

   - Sustainable bioeconomy policies and strategies are in place to promote inclusive agri-food systems and sustainable decent jobs that are youth- and gender-sensitive.
   - Policy uptake and adoption of technical guidance achieved through the establishment of distribution and information measures that are effective even during social distancing measures.
   - Guidance generated that empowers young people to contribute to issues related to environmental services.

v. **Outcome 2.2:** Initiatives supported that allow young women and men to equally access sustainable jobs and participate in the bioeconomy. Indicative outputs:

   - Sustainable innovations, including technologies and practices are introduced across value chains sectors including non-food sectors such as agro-tourism and eco-tourism.
   - Youth-sensitive methodologies developed and used to assess the policy implications, business validity, resource efficiency and cultural-sensitivity of sustainable production systems and value chains.

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\(^6\) Based on the principles of RIO+20 [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20/futurewewant](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20/futurewewant) and agreed definition: ‘‘A green economy is defined as low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive’’.

\(^7\) Bioeconomy is the production, utilization, conservation, and regeneration of biological resources, including related knowledge, science, technology, and innovation, to provide sustainable solutions (information, products, processes and services) within and across all economic sectors and enable a transformation to a sustainable economy - Global Bioeconomy Summit Communiqué, 2020.
National, regional and global partnerships strengthened to support the creation of sustainable bioeconomies that are youth- and gender-sensitive.

c) **Pillar 3: Strengthen rural youth capacities for the use of innovative approaches and technologies in food and agriculture.**

i. Formal education (such as schools, universities, vocational schools and training institutions), non-formal education (such as community groups, farm schools, and structured initiatives) and informal education (such as intergenerational knowledge transfer, peer-peer and community forums) are essential for capacity development, knowledge sharing and changing behaviors required to allow sustainable school to work transitions to occur and ensuring equal involvement of young women and men. Education not only improves employment opportunities but also addresses issues such as informal jobs, as the level of informality decreases when education increases.  

ii. Innovation, including in information and communication technology (ICT), increases the opportunities for the exchange of farm and value-chain information, and supports the cross-fertilization among research, innovation and traditional and indigenous knowledge. ICT also creates opportunities to access inputs and services, identify potential markets and job opportunities, and create linkages between rural and urban areas. In addition, it can also provide options compatible with social distancing measures required under COVID-19. ICT, however, to be effective will need to be tailored to the specific rural contexts taking into consideration the needs of young women and men and function with the available infrastructure, such as broadband and smartphone coverage. Knowledge and the ability to apply modern and labour-saving technologies can also contribute to reducing the hardship of work and trigger the interest of young women and men to participate in rural value chains.

iii. Based on partnerships and collaborations, educational programmes, curricula and other products will be developed to support sustainable production transitions and providing the needed entrepreneurial and job skills. In particular, FAO will strengthen support to national extension services, vocational schools and other capacity development programmes such as FFS to ensure they are youth sensitive and meet current and future learning needs. The RYAP will also support in ensuring that innovations in FAO initiatives feed into education and capacity development initiatives.

iv. **Outcome 3.1:** Youth and gender sensitive education and training programmes developed taking into consideration specific contexts and needs of youth constituencies such as disabled, indigenous, minorities and marginalized groups. Indicative outputs:

- Policy guidance allows national policy makers and local entities to develop youth sensitive educational and capacity building programmes related to agricultural value chains.

- Extension and educational resources developed or adapted to address identified opportunities that connect local traditional and indigenous knowledge with new innovations.

- Educational resources for school and youth organizations developed that increase knowledge and raise interest in agriculture, instill environmental and social consciousness and ensure the adoption of balanced diets and sustainable lifestyles.

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o New research and lessons learned used to create more effective capacity building strategies, programmes, initiatives, curricular and youth-led knowledge and support mechanisms.

v. **Outcome 3.2:** Young men and women capacities developed through ICTs, agribusiness support programmes, Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools, education clubs and related mechanisms. Indicative outputs:

- Agriculture Digital Innovation Hubs strengthened to address key knowledge gaps and improve youth adoption of digital technologies and innovative practices.
- Youth entrepreneurship skills strengthened through programmes and related initiatives that connect youth with global agri-tech companies.
- Improved learning and information achieved through optimized junior farmer field and life schools, distance learning tools and other mechanisms including partnerships.
- Guidance on improving informal education mechanisms, including intergenerational knowledge transfer, used to strengthen youth capacity development initiatives.

**d) Pillar 4: Promote rural services for youth and agripreneurs.**

i. The achievement of the SDGs requires a significant increase in investments in sustainable agriculture. In this context, attracting youth to agriculture and empowering them to carry out sustainable investments is crucial since it will have significant positive impacts on food security, economic development, employment creation and the reduction of forced migration. It is essential to strengthen youth access to services, including (micro-) credit and (micro-) financial services, and those for land acquisition. Other crucial services include advisory services on enterprise development, market information as well as equitable access to innovations such as e-commerce platforms and e-banking. Sustainable interventions also require incorporating youth-specific investment incentives into national investment promotion strategies, as well as working with youth organizations to strengthen their capacities to provide services and engage in policy dialogues. In addition the use of specific rural youth orientated incentive schemes can increase youth attachment, retention and recruitment to rural areas. Rural infrastructure, including internet connectivity and other services, such as social, health and education services will also be essential in creating opportunities in both agricultural sectors and other sectors such as tourism. Transitioning towards a sustainable resilient future will also require youth policies and targeted social protection and safety-net measures that address recurrent or foreseeable shocks, such as climate change, as well as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Other needed accompanying measures would include opportunities to incentivize family care facilities, family planning and social assistance.

ii. The FAO Umbrella Programme “Supporting Responsible Investments in Agriculture and Food Systems” supports FAO Members through strategic planning, capacity development and policy dialogue with youth on investment incentives and services. FAO also collaborates with UNIDO under the joint flagship initiative: “Opportunities for Youth in Africa: Accelerating Jobs Creation in Agriculture and Agribusiness” (OYA) as well as other initiatives such as the “Accelerator for Agriculture and Agroindustry Development and Innovation” (3ADI+), the African Agribusiness and Agro-industries Development Initiative (3ADI), Agrinvest, as well as non-agriculture activities
and environmentally-friendly business, such as agrotourism and eco-tourism. Furthermore, a Youth-Sensitive Value Chain Analysis Guide (YSVCA guide) is currently being finalized and field tested in selected countries. Key in creating the enabling environment are also the work on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, as well as the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management.

iii. **Outcome 4.1:** Youth entrepreneurship and decent jobs promoted and investment strengthened. Indicative outputs:

- Policy measures and incentives to enhance youth access to farming assets, financial services and markets are identified, developed, disseminated and implemented.
- Youth sensitive investments attracted through evidence base assessments of economic opportunities, including analysis of gaps in policies, services and social protection measures.
- Youth capacity to engage in responsible investment in agri-food systems supported through multi-stakeholder think-tanks, agricultural hubs, mentorship programmes and other youth participatory processes.
- Public policies established that incentivize youth engagement in agriculture and along its value chain, create new economic opportunities for young people and support farm succession and improved generational turnover.

iv. **Outcome 4.2:** Youth communities, organizations and networks supported in accessing rural services, including agricultural measures. Indicative outputs:

- Capacity of national and local institutions strengthened on innovations linking sustainable production to consumers and markets for improved diets and reduced malnutrition.
- Young women and men have increased access to land, finance and markets, including through the creation of multi-partner incubator platforms.
- Youth, including indigenous, involved in participatory approaches of FAO’s voluntary guidelines that initiate work on youth’s access to land and natural resources.
- Policy guidance ensures that humanitarian and emergency responses, including social protection schemes are youth sensitive and promote long term sustainable rural transitions.

e) **Pillar 5: Building FAO institutional capacity to address rural youth areas of work.**

i. One of the key objectives of the RYAP is to initiate a more systematic and strategic approach in how FAO addresses youth related issues. Although there is considerable improvement from the past, certain technical areas still need to be strengthened to ensure they are youth and children sensitive. Personnel, including from regional and country offices, may not necessarily have the capacity to develop programmes that are relevant for their country contexts, or undertake adequate youth participatory processes. In addition, country offices often are not equipped to address youth issues in new UN country processes and ensure that the needs and views of the different rural youth constituencies are represented. Guidance is also required to support the integration of children and youth issues in FAO technical programmes and projects. Identifying suitable mechanisms needs to take into consideration that FAO does not have a

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dedicated coordination unit (or even officer), nor a dedicated regular
programme budget for such work.

ii. Strengthening partnerships with relevant organizations can help mitigate these
internal limitations, and empowering youth to be partners, can provide
considerable strength at global, regional, country and most importantly,
grassroot levels. Building on each organization’s strengths will allow to work at
larger scales and strengthen advocacy efforts. RYAP will therefore strengthen
collaborative efforts with regards to institutional capacities and participatory
youth networks. This will include creation of joint initiatives, improved
coordination in regional processes and country implementation, the
development of joint knowledge products and training materials, as well as
resources such as policy and guidance briefs.

iii. Outcome 5.1: FAO’s capacity strengthened to strategically deal with rural
youth issues by capitalizing as much as possible, on existing programmes.
Indicative outputs:
  o FAO programmes and projects are youth and child sensitive and youth-
    participatory through the provision of guidance and staff capacity
development.
  o Youth related indicators incorporated into sustainability and SDG
    assessment framework and evidence base used to monitor and strengthen
    the impact of programmes and initiatives.
  o FAO network of divisional, regional and country youth and child focal
    points strengthened to exchange and disseminate youth-relevant
    information and created more integrative programmes.

iv. Outcome 5.2: Partnerships established and youth participation in UN processes
supported in view of establishing a specific youth engagement
network/mechanism. Indicative outputs:
  o UN inter-organizational collaboration mechanisms strengthened on
    children and youth issues, in particular at regional and country level and
    with the RBAs, to collaborate on related initiatives.
  o Youth able to engage in FAO and related UN processes through
    interlinked networks and participatory engagement mechanisms.
  o Youth and child sensitive strategic planning advocated and funds
    mobilized in support of youth interdisciplinary responses.

16. Main partners for implementation are listed in para 9.

IV. Conclusions

17. The need to initiate an Organization-wide Rural Youth Action Plan was stressed in various
events and processes. FAO has acknowledged that youth need to be explicitly targeted to ensure
inclusive economic development that is resilient to future crises and shocks in order to adequately
contribute to the realization of the SDGs. Further, as emphasized in the Declaration on the
Commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, the peoples have to be at the
centre of all FAO’s efforts and particular attention must be given to people in vulnerable situations,
including assuring the full participation of and engagement with youth, as the missing piece for peace
and development.¹⁰

18. Considering its transverse nature, the RYAP has been structured with a series of activities and
integrative processes within existing programmes. It has become evident though, during the inception
of the RYAP’s implementation and also the inclusion of youth as cross cutting theme within FAO’s
Strategic Framework 2022-31 and the embedding of the RYAP in FAO’s Medium-Term Plan 2022-

25, that an adequate monitoring and reporting of youth-specific activities and a needed strengthened institutional capacity to address rural youth areas of work for an adequate inclusion in FAO’s four betters and related 20 PPAs, will require additional resources to set up a specific "youth desk”. Should additional funding be secured, the Plan will be expanded, in collaboration with partners, to include additional cross cutting normative and operational activities. In this regard, the RYAP remains, since its first development, a living document that will evolve to address needs and opportunities, in the face of the very rapidly changing world environment.

19. The Programme Committee may wish to appreciate the inclusion of the revisions proposed during its 130th Session (22-26 March 2021)¹¹ and as featured during the informal consultation (3 September 2021), while also inviting the Council to endorse the RYAP.