

# conference

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ROME

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NUTRITION (ICN)  
PROGRESS REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. To provide the world community with an opportunity to look critically at the continuing problems of hunger, malnutrition and diet-related disease and how they can most effectively be addressed, the 25th Session of the FAO Conference in November 1989 endorsed the convening of an International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) to be co-sponsored by FAO and WHO. The decision was furthermore endorsed at the World Health Assembly in May 1990, and the Conference will be held in Rome in December 1992.

Previous Reports and Discussions

2. Previous meetings of FAO Governing Bodies reviewed information on and discussed the broad objectives of the ICN, the concepts underlying its preparatory process, and progress reports on the Conference preparations. The 98th and 99th Sessions of the FAO Council reviewed progress reports (CL 98/21) and (CL 99/17) in November 1990 and June 1991, respectively. The June 1991 Council document also gave information on the substantive aspects of the preparation of the Conference including themes, case studies, and country-level preparations. In addition, the paper presented at the 11th Session of the Committee on Agriculture held in April 1991, "Towards Better Nutrition for All" (COAG 91/7), highlighted many of the policy and technical issues expected to be addressed by the ICN, with particular reference to the role of the agriculture sector in promoting nutritional well-being.

3. Discussions at these meetings and of WHO's Governing Bodies, which generally supported the preparations underway, and emphasized the need to promote country-level activities, have been taken into account by the ICN organizers and have shaped the subsequent preparations.

4. This paper presents a brief summary of the preparations now underway for the ICN. As these preparations proceed, the continued guidance of the Governing Bodies of the sponsoring organizations will be essential for ensuring that the ICN reflects their views.

## II. GENERAL STATE OF PREPARATION

5. Preparations for the ICN are progressing along two parallel tracks. Globally, preparations for the ICN should be seen as part of an on-going process designed to strengthen the commitment and ability of individual governments, various agencies and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to address nutrition problems. To this end, the Directors-General of FAO and WHO sent a joint Official Communication to all member countries in March 1991, announcing the ICN and inviting them to initiate country-level activities towards the preparation of the Conference. This was followed by instructions sent to the FAO and WHO Representatives in May 1991 calling for their collaboration in country preparations.

6. It is envisaged that these country preparations will be complemented by a series of regional/sub-regional meetings designed to discuss food and nutrition problems common to each region and the means to address these problems. The outcomes of these national and regional activities will contribute significantly to the deliberations during the ICN.

7. Concurrent with the national and regional-level activities, various technical and organizational preparations are being made at the headquarters of the sponsoring organizations. Activities along these two parallel tracks are discussed in more detail below.

8. Overall, the technical and administrative preparation for the ICN is under the direction of a Joint FAO/WHO Steering Committee, chaired jointly by Special Representatives of the Directors-General. Dr V. Ramalingaswami, Professor Emeritus, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, has been named as the Secretary-General of the ICN. The first meeting of the Steering Committee was held in December 1990 with subsequent meetings being held on a quarterly basis. The Steering Committee provides guidance on all aspects of the Conference's preparation and monitors the progress made. Day-to-day coordination of the organizational aspects of the ICN is carried out by the FAO/WHO Joint Secretariat in Rome. The technical preparations within FAO are being coordinated by the Food Policy and Nutrition Division under the direction of the Assistant Director-General of the Economic and Social Policy Department. Technical guidance is also provided by the FAO Interdepartmental Task Force on the ICN, which was established in 1990. Similar arrangements are in place within WHO to provide their agency's inputs.

9. An Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) has also been formed to provide scientific guidance and advice on the technical issues, themes and background documents for the Conference. The Group includes experts invited from various disciplines relevant to nutrition, and representing the major regions of the world. The Advisory Group met in Rome in June 1991 and provided advice on the outline presented for the ICN global assessment document and on the issues to be included in the theme papers. The AGE will meet again in early 1992, and will continue to be called upon for advice up to the time of the Conference.

### III. COUNTRY-LEVEL PREPARATIONS

10. In previous FAO Governing Body discussions, member countries strongly emphasized the need for thorough country-level ICN preparations. To coordinate country-specific activities and to facilitate communication with the ICN co-sponsors, each Member Nation has been encouraged to nominate a national focal point. In May 1991, FAO and WHO Representatives were sent a Note requesting them to ensure full collaboration with the authorities for country preparations. Follow-up notes were sent to FAO and WHO Representatives in June and August in countries which had not responded to encourage country activities and requesting them to inform the Joint Secretariat of progress made. Table 1 summarizes responses to date of National Focal Points designated.

**TABLE 1. Number of National Focal Points by Region as of 6 September 1991**

Region*	Number of National Focal Points nominated as of 6/9/1991	% of Member Nations with focal points
Africa (46)	30	65
Asia (22)	14	64
Europe (29)	14	48
Latin America and the Caribbean (33)	12	36
Near East (18)	8	44
North America (2)	1	50
Southwest Pacific (10)	9	90
<b>TOTAL (160)</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>55</b>

\* In brackets the total number of Member Nations in a region

11. As of 6 September, a total of 88 country focal points have been designated - 53 from the health sector, 10 from agriculture, 4 jointly from both sectors, and 21 from other ministries or nutrition institutes.

12. Each country has been requested to prepare a country paper summarizing the country's nutrition situation, including the extent and causes of nutrition problems, past experience in addressing them and plans for future action. Outlines for these papers have been sent to the focal points along with a request to form national groups of all interested parties to participate in the preparation of the country papers. It is hoped that this process will catalyze action within various sectors at the country level towards ICN preparations and participation, but, more importantly in assuming strong implementation of actions to improve nutrition, following the ICN. Country papers will also be utilized to contribute to a series of technical consultations at regional or sub-regional level.

13. An intersectoral approach is crucial for preparing the country paper and, especially, for implementing related follow-up activities. Member Nations have been encouraged to establish national coordinating committees, or use existing or already planned mechanisms and procedures, to bring together the various ministries, agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia and members of the media and the private sector whose activities are relevant to nutrition, to provide a forum in which the multifaceted nature of nutritional problems and their solutions can be more effectively addressed. Many countries have formed such committees and have held, or are planning to hold, national seminars or workshops to involve all relevant participants in the ICN preparations and related follow-up activities. Table 2, below summarizes by region the number of countries that have reported these national ICN activities.

Table 2. Number of Countries with National Committee and a National Seminar (as of 6 September 1991)

Region*	National Committee		National Seminar	
	Number	%	Number	%
Africa (46)	14	30	9	20
Asia (22)	1	5	1	5
Europe (29)	2	7	0	0
Latin America and Caribbean (33)	3	9	3	9
Near East (18)	1	6	0	0
North America (2)	0	0	0	0
Southwest Pacific (10)	1	10	1	10
Total (160)	22	14	14	9

\* In brackets the total number of Member Nations in a region

14. Many developing countries (32 as of 6 September 1991) have indicated that financial and technical support is needed to adequately prepare for, participate in and follow-up on the ICN. However, the sponsoring organizations, due to budgetary constraints, are not in a position to fulfil these requests. Additional donor assistance is required, and it is hoped that resources will be forthcoming to meet these needs.

15. Country focal points which need financial assistance have been encouraged to seek assistance from donors represented in their country. Several donor countries, which had stressed at previous Council meetings the importance of promoting country-level preparatory activities, have instructed their offices in developing countries to consider providing support for ICN activities, if requested by the government focal points. FAORs have also been requested to liaise with their WHO counterparts to encourage and support government focal points in seeking assistance from donor countries' local offices.

16. FAO and WHO have continued to seek support from potential donor countries, and additional approaches have been made to various foundations and other funding sources as well. UN agencies have also been approached regarding their willingness to assist in country-level preparatory activities, and responses, especially from UNICEF, have been quite encouraging. Member countries needing assistance are again requested to establish contact with each of these potential donors as may be appropriate. Member donor countries are once again requested to consider assisting those countries which have not been able to receive any assistance yet. The relatively small amounts needed to support these activities is an extremely valuable investment for improving the recipient country's nutrition developmental needs.

#### IV. REGIONAL-LEVEL PREPARATION

17. An underlying principle of the preparation for the ICN is that it builds upon country-level experiences and leads to activities aimed at preventing and alleviating malnutrition at the national as well as at the regional and international levels. One of the key mechanisms for linking the ICN to country and regional-specific activities will be through ICN regional and sub-regional meetings, which are scheduled to be held during the first quarter of 1992. ICN meetings have been tentatively scheduled for S.E. Asia (Bangkok), Anglophone Africa (Nairobi), Francophone Africa (Dakar), the Caribbean (Kingston), Latin America (Mexico City), the Western Pacific (Manila), the Near East (Cairo), and Eastern Europe (Bratislava). Extrabudgetary support for these regional and sub-regional ICN meetings is being sought so that all countries can attend.

18. The primary purpose of these ICN regional and sub-regional meetings will be to provide a technical forum for assessing the nutrition problems common to each region, for evaluating various policies and programmes, in particular those related to agriculture, health, economic and social development and their relationship to nutrition. Relevant national and regional strategies for ensuring nutritional well-being will be discussed and will provide the basis for regional-level contributions to the Plan of Action to be adopted by the ICN. Countries will be invited to send delegations of high-level technical representatives from appropriate government agencies, academia, consumer and other NGO groups and the private sector. International NGOs interested in various ICN regional meetings will also be invited to attend.

19. In order to further promote a regional ICN focus, the ICN will also be an agenda item in each of the five FAO Regional Conferences to be held in 1992. In addition to updating Member Nations on the overall status of ICN preparations, this will also provide the opportunity to present them with the results and recommendations from the ICN regional/sub-regional technical meetings. This should contribute significantly to the development of greater consensus on issues of regional concern.

20. Financial assistance will be required by some countries to enable their participation in the ICN regional/sub-regional meetings. Additionally, several countries in which these meetings will be held also require financial assistance to meet the organizational costs.

21. Several donor countries were approached to consider financing the hosting of regional meeting(s) and/or assisting developing countries to attend the ICN Regional/Sub-regional meetings. Estimates of these costs have been made available to donor countries and funding agencies. Follow-up contacts are continuing with those countries that have indicated willingness to consider providing support to sub-regional meetings to be held in specific developing countries. Belgium, Finland, France, Italy and Norway have sponsored Associate Professional Officers (APOs) to work specifically for ICN at FAO Headquarters and at two of the FAO Regional Offices.

22. While extrabudgetary support will be needed for country delegation travel to regional and sub-regional ICN meetings, various meeting costs can be absorbed by the FAO and WHO Regional Offices. For example, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAPA) has indicated that the direct meeting costs (meeting rooms, local administrative and secretariat services, etc.) will be absorbed in RAPA's budget. The Latin American Regional Office has secured funds for similar administration matters for their Regional meeting in Mexico City. However, the crucial issue remains the financial assistance required to fund the travel and per diem expenses of developing country delegates to attend their particular regional meeting.

23. A number of meetings have been held with various other organizations of the UN system to discuss their support and at present responses seem to be encouraging. The support and collaboration of the UN agencies will be crucial in country and regional-level preparations and with the overall technical preparation of the Conference.

#### V. DEVELOPING THE CONFERENCE CONTENT AND THEMES

24. A principal background document for the ICN, "The Assessment and Analysis of Trends and Current Problems in Nutrition" will provide an overall technical review of the current nutrition concerns worldwide and efforts to address them. As a global assessment of the nutrition situation, the paper will include a summary of the preliminary findings from the 6th World Food Survey and a review of experiences in programmes and policies affecting nutrition and institutional arrangements to improve nutrition at national and international levels. Findings from several case studies currently underway will contribute to this paper by highlighting particular issues and concerns within countries.

25. The outline of this paper was presented to the Advisory Group of Experts for comment during their June 1991 meeting and further comments have been received from the appropriate technical Divisions within FAO. This paper, when available, will be circulated and discussed at the preparatory meetings (see Section VI) which, it is envisaged, will be held prior to the ICN.

26. As presented to the March 1991 COAG and June 1991 Council, the overall technical content of the Conference will revolve around several cross-cutting themes. Themes developed for the ICN have evolved from discussions of the ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition and careful consideration by FAO, WHO and other UN agencies. These themes include: Assessing, Analysing and Monitoring Nutrition Situations; Improving Household Food Security; Protecting the Consumer through Improved Food Quality and Safety; Caring for the Socio-economically Deprived and

Nutritionally Vulnerable; Promoting Healthy Diets and Lifestyles; Preventing and Managing Infectious Diseases; Preventing Specific Micronutrient Deficiencies; Incorporating Nutrition Objectives into Development Programmes and Policies.

27. The major issues involved in each of these themes were reviewed in the March 1991 COAG and the June 1991 FAO Council documents. Papers for each of the themes have been commissioned to academia, national institutes, government agencies, and UN agencies. These papers will be aimed at a broad audience in the development community and will be one of the chief mechanisms for briefing policy-makers on nutrition problems. Theme papers will be translated and available for discussions at the preparatory meetings to be held prior to the ICN. Extracts of the theme papers will be available for discussion at the regional ICN meetings.

#### VI. CONFERENCE AND PREPARATORY COMMITTEE ARRANGEMENTS

28. Two Preparatory Committee meetings are envisaged prior to the Conference. The first Preparatory Committee meeting (Prepcom 1) is currently scheduled for early September 1992 in Geneva, for eight working days, and would include substantive discussions of the Assessment Paper. A summary of the results of previous Regional meetings would be available at Prepcom 1, where government representatives will consult their technical experts and NGOs to get advice prior to the Conference. Prepcom 1 would provide the primary mechanism for developing and refining the anticipated Plan of Action to be debated and adopted by the Conference Plenary.

29. Prepcom 2, on the other hand, would be kept as short and as flexible as possible and held, in principle, for 2 - 3 days in Rome immediately preceding the ICN Plenary. As regards the Plenary, a total of six days is tentatively proposed, to be held at FAO Headquarters in Rome, in early December 1992, starting on a Saturday and finishing on a Friday. Two parallel commissions/working groups are envisaged. The main agenda items would comprise the Adoption of a Plan of Action and, if member countries wish, the Adoption of the Declaration.

#### VII. EXPANDING THE ICN PARTNERSHIP

30. Preparations for the ICN are being made in concert with other UN agencies. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has been kept informed of the progress of the ICN through regular briefings by the Directors-General of FAO and WHO. Similarly its Sub-Committee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN) has provided a useful forum for discussing ICN preparatory activities and for receiving technical inputs from the ACC/SCN member agencies. The ACC/SCN will continue to be kept fully informed of ICN technical preparations by the co-sponsors.

31. The Directors-General of FAO and WHO in June 1991 sent a joint letter to the heads of other United Nations organizations and bodies, informing them of developments and requesting their comments and suggestions on how to best cooperate in preparing for the Conference. In addition to the review provided through the ACC/SCN, several UN agencies, including UNICEF, IFAD, UNHCR, UNU, UNEP, WFP and IAEA also indicated that they would make direct contributions to Conference background papers.

32. The ICN will build on previous related UN meetings, including, for example, the World Summit for Children in 1990 and, in particular, the strong momentum it generated for integrated approaches to control and prevent micronutrient deficiencies. FAO strongly endorses such approaches which link agricultural activities with nutrition education and mass communication. As part of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, FAO is co-sponsoring and will actively participate in the October 1991 policy conference on micronutrient malnutrition to be held in Montreal, Canada. Other co-sponsors of this Conference are WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNDP, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the US Agency for International Development. The ICN background documentation will take into consideration the results of the Montreal Conference.

33. Efforts are also underway to increase the involvement of the nutrition community in ICN preparatory activities and to stimulate interest in capitalizing on the occasion of the ICN to promote appropriate nutrition activities. In particular, the ICN has been discussed, or will be discussed, at a number of technical meetings, including: the 6th Conference of the Federation of European Nutrition Societies in Athens in May 1991, the 6th Asian Congress on Nutrition in September 1991 in Kuala Lumpur, and the September 1991 meeting of the Latin American Nutrition Society in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

34. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will be invited to participate in the ICN, and their early involvement in country and regional-level preparations has been encouraged. Because of their work, particularly in developing countries, on food, nutrition, and health issues, it is important that NGOs participate in ICN preparatory activities at country level. This will allow them to share their views and experiences with national authorities and have their concerns reflected in regional/sub-regional meetings and later at the Conference. This should facilitate their active involvement in the follow-up to the ICN during the implementation phase of the Plan of Action.

35. It is also envisaged that NGOs participate actively in the country and regional-level meetings. The participation of NGOs in the Conference itself will, of course, be subject to the decisions of the Preparatory Meeting of Member Governments on the general arrangements for the Conference. Accredited NGOs will be welcome to attend the Conference and to participate as appropriate and practical. In this connection, in view of the very many interested NGOs, it would seem inevitable that there should be selectivity in the representation of different classes of interest (food, agriculture, health, consumers, industry, etc.) as regards interventions, possibly based on their contributions at the country and regional level. In addition, during the FAO Conference in November 1991, the Ad Hoc Group of Representatives of International NGOs to FAO will be holding a meeting and the ICN is on their agenda to discuss their participation.

36. To support the ICN, "Food and Nutrition" has been selected as the theme for the 1992 World Food Day (WFD). Proposed activities for WFD are in line with the concepts and objectives of the ICN. WFD will provide an excellent opportunity to raise public awareness to ICN and global food and nutrition concerns.



37. A public information campaign to promote ICN activities at all levels should be an important part of the ICN preparations. A world-wide public awareness strategy has been developed by FAO and WHO. Public and media information materials are being planned for the ICN. A leaflet on the ICN has been prepared that is targeted primarily to consumers, policy-makers, NGOs, the media and the public at large. A booklet outlining the links among nutrition, food, and health will also be produced by the end of 1991. This booklet is intended to stimulate discussions to raise global awareness of nutrition issues. Other public information campaign activities will depend on the availability of extrabudgetary resources (see paras 39, and 45 below).

38. The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has responded positively to the co-sponsors' request to approach all member countries to launch an international philatelic campaign on the ICN theme. Italy has already prepared a design for an ICN commemorative national stamp and a logo for the ICN Conference in cooperation with the co-sponsors.

39. Proposals are also under consideration for other global activities, including promotional videos and exhibits. For example, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts will organize ICN related food and nutrition activities for their membership worldwide. Donors are still needed to implement these and other proposals for related activities.

#### VIII. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

40. The core costs for the ICN, to be shared equally between FAO and WHO, include: preparation of Conference documents, including theme papers, case studies, the global assessment paper and the Plan of Action; document translation, printing and distribution; the ICN, the preparatory meetings and nutrition congresses; the basic public information campaign; and Secretariat costs. FAO's total estimated expenditure from the Regular Programme for the ICN will be US\$2.5 million. The basic costs of preparing for the Conference in 1990 and 1991 have been met by FAO and WHO from their approved budgets for the current biennium. Costs for 1992 and for follow-up in 1993 will be included in budgets for the 1992-1993 biennium.

41. As both organizations are under severe resource constraints, extrabudgetary funds are being sought to finance important preparatory activities at the country and regional/sub-regional level, as well as for the financing of the attendance of delegates from developing countries at the Prepcoms and the Conference. Estimated funds necessary for these activities include:

- public information activities - US\$535 000;
- to assist developing country papers or national seminars - US\$13 000 to \$23 000 per country;
- to attend ICN meetings - US\$2 000 to \$5 000 per developing country delegate per meeting; and
- for each regional meeting - US\$45 000 to \$65 000.

42. Donor countries and other technical and funding agencies have been requested to support these extrabudgetary ICN activities. A Note Verbale was sent to member donor countries in August 1991 by the Directors-General of FAO and WHO, which presented extrabudgetary requirements for the preparation of country papers, regional meetings, and attendance costs at

ICN preparatory meetings and the Conference, as well as for a public information campaign. Follow-up contacts were made with those countries which had shown, on several occasions, interest in assisting and were willing to make commitments. Direct approaches have also been made by FAO and WHO to specific government and NGO funding agencies for support. Follow-up letters were also sent in September to bilateral donors. Contacts by various individuals involved in ICN preparatory activities have also been made with several agencies and delegations during various meetings and conferences worldwide. In addition, UN agencies have been requested to consider financial support of various extrabudgetary activities for the ICN.

43. As the host of the ICN, the Italian Government has responded positively to the organizers' needs. Details of their support and specific contributions are being finalized. Moreover, several other potential funding agencies and foundations were contacted in August 1991 to obtain their financial assistance to help developing countries participate in ICN activities.

44. Following informal contacts concerning possible contributions from the private sector and industry, preliminary indications are that positive responses are likely.

45. Assistance is also required to generate interest and support among governments, scientific circles, NGOs, the media and the general public. The information strategy together with a plan of action for increasing awareness by the public and by policy-makers of the magnitude, causes and consequences of malnutrition, is crucial to the success of the ICN and the Fourth Development Decade. No funds are available yet to implement this information dissemination process, except for the limited funds in the core budget, US\$300 000, part of which is already allocated for the ICN leaflet and selected activities to promote the ICN. The total extrabudgetary funds required for public information activities is US\$535 000. These activities include: a general information booklet; video films; co-productions with television stations; photographic coverage; seminars for journalists at country level; attendance of journalists, mainly from developing countries, at the Conference; research for video programmes; and reporting missions.

46. Finally, at present, few donor countries have committed to help developing country delegates attend the technical preparatory meetings and the Conference itself.

#### IX. CONCLUDING REMARKS

47. The ICN is not seen as an end itself, but rather as a step in the continuing process to strengthen the commitment and actions necessary to prevent and alleviate problems of hunger and malnutrition. Enthusiasm generated to date by the ICN preparatory activities in many countries is encouraging. It is evident from the progress reported here, that the process of preparing for the ICN has resulted in increased awareness of the scope and dimension of nutrition and diet-related problems, as well as an increased willingness among various public and private sectors to work together to address these problems. If these efforts continue, then a major goal of the ICN will have already been achieved.

48. Still, much more needs to be accomplished if lasting improvements in nutritional well-being are to be achieved. The ICN provides the world community with the opportunity to confront the problems of hunger and malnutrition and relate them to the underlying issues of inadequate food, health, and care and inequitable economic and social development. In this period of rapidly changing economies and political structures, this opportunity, placed before the world community will provide an important step in the process of meeting the nutrition challenge.