



CONFERENCE

Thirty-sixth Session

18 – 23 November 2009

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF NATURAL FIBRES 2009

1. Resolution 3/2005 of the Thirty-third Session of FAO Conference in 2005 endorsed the proposal for an International Year of Natural Fibres, and requested the Director-General to transmit the Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the United Nations declare the year 2009 as the International Year of Natural Fibres.
2. On 20 December 2006 the General Assembly proclaimed 2009 to be the International Year of Natural Fibres (IYNF). In doing so, it noted that the diverse range of natural fibres produced in many countries provides an important source of income for farmers, and thus can play an important role in contributing to food security and in eradicating poverty and hence in contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It invited FAO to facilitate the observance of the Year, in collaboration with governments, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and relevant organizations of the United Nations system.
3. The declaration of the IYNF reflects the importance of this group of commodities to a great many countries. In many developing and least developed countries proceeds from the sale and export of natural fibres contribute significantly to the income and food security of poor farmers and workers in fibre industries. For some countries natural fibres are of major economic importance at the national level, for example, cotton in some west African countries, jute in Bangladesh and sisal in Tanzania. In other cases these fibres are of less significance at the national level but are of considerable local importance, as in the case of jute in West Bengal (India) and sisal in northeast Brazil.
4. Natural fibres constitute an important renewable resource used as raw material for clothing, upholstery and other textiles for consumers. Many natural fibres also have industrial uses in packaging, papermaking and in composite materials with many uses, including automobile construction.

5. Broadly, the IYNF is intended to raise the profile of natural fibres, thereby strengthening demand and contributing to improved welfare of fibre-producing farmers.

6. Several administrative arrangements were proposed at the the Joint Meeting of the Intergovernmental Group on Hard Fibres (Thirty-fourth Session) and of the Intergovernmental Group on Jute, Kenaf and Allied Fibres (Thirty-sixth Session) to facilitate implementation of the IYNF:

- The IYNF would be under the general direction of an International Steering Committee (ISC) with representatives of main partners – fibre organizations, other international organizations, producing countries, consumer organizations, donors, etc. The ISC proposed four objectives:
 - a) to raise awareness and stimulate demand for natural fibres;
 - b) to promote the efficiency and sustainability of natural fibre industries;
 - c) to encourage appropriate policy responses to the problems faced by natural fibre industries; and
 - d) to foster an effective and enduring international partnership among the various natural fibres industries;
- An administrative secretariat would be established in FAO, with staff supported by a project-funded project coordinator and consultants as required to coordinate and publicize.
- Partner organizations would work under the general umbrella provided by the ISC. Within the framework of the IYNF objectives, they would define their own objectives, and plan and fund their own events, drawing on coordination of FAO as the lead unit and under general guidance of the ISC.

7. As the lead agency, with responsibility for all planning and coordinating, it was foreseen that FAO would require around USD 2 000 000 to effectively implement the IYNF, namely: to coordinate the necessary international action to achieve IYNF objectives; to build an international alliance of international and national organizations; to prepare communications material, provide international communication/media coverage; and to plan/host events.

8. As of 30 September 2009, FAO had devoted approximately USD 110 000 from its own budget on IYNF implementation (notwithstanding staff time and resources), while external donations amounted to around USD 57 000 (USD 44 000 from the Common Fund for Commodities; USD 8 000 from the Government of New Zealand; and USD 5 000 from the International Jute Study Group). With such small outlays, FAO's achievements have nonetheless been considerable. These include¹:

- The Symposium on Natural Fibres, held at FAO headquarters on 20 October 2008;
- A set of published proceedings from the Symposium;
- Design of the IYNF logo;
- The official launch of the IYNF at FAO headquarters on 22 January 2009;
- A seven-minute IYNF video produced in seven languages;
- A Web site (www.naturalfibres2009.org) in eight languages, containing:
 - profiles of 15 of the world's major plant and animal fibres;
 - fibre factsheets on health, responsible choices, sustainability, technology and fashion;
 - micrographs of 18 plant and animal natural fibres; and
 - a selection of fibre "stories";
- A poster and a brochure, in various languages;
- Downloadable T-shirt and bag designs for printing;
- A display of natural fibres and a fashion show arranged to coincide with the 67th Session of the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP), from 20 to 22 April 2009.

¹ Further details are contained in the document CCP: HF-JU 09/2.

9. FAO recognizes that many decentralized initiatives have been undertaken around the world, and that many of these potentially have greater impact, superior sustainability and were implemented with more efficiency than any centralized effort might have hoped for. As an indicator of this activity, the calendar of events on the IYNF Web site has almost 80 entries.

10. As a further indicator of IYNF interest, formal requests for permission to use the IYNF logo amounted to several hundred by the end of September 2009. This figure is expected to increase by the end of the year.

11. Looking beyond 2009, a meeting of the ISC in Frankfurt on 19 June 2009 decided to apply the name “International Natural Fibres Committee” (INFC) to the steering committee. It was also agreed that the INFC should remain active in the coming years and to meet at least once per annum in conjunction with other fibre events. One suggestion was that FAO should reinstate the Intersessional Consultations on Natural Fibres under the framework of the Intergovernmental Group on Jute and Hard Fibres, and hold an INFC meeting in conjunction with the intersessional meetings.