



منظمة الأغذية
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Food
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная
организация
Объединенных
Наций

Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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PRIORITIZATION OF TECHNICAL WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

I. Introduction

1. The prioritization of the technical work of the Organization has been under consideration by the governing bodies for many bienna. The Council approved a set of priority-setting criteria in 1995; these were modified based on experience and incorporated in the Strategic Framework 2000-2015 adopted by Conference in 1999; and during 2003-2005 the Programme Committee considered a series of proposals on priority setting in the context of programme planning.
2. In 2005 the Conference decided to undertake the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (IEE) and in 2007 decided to develop an immediate plan of action after a systematic review of the IEE report and its management response. The resulting Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) for FAO Renewal (2009-2011) approved by the Conference in 2008 included a series of measures concerning priorities and programmes of the Organization and reform of governance, programming and budgeting.
3. In 2009 the Conference approved a series of changes to the Basic Texts, as well as a new results-based Strategic Framework 2010-19, Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2010-13 and Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2010-11, that provide a new basis for further prioritization of the technical work of the Organization. Under these new arrangements, the Regional Conferences and Technical Committees will report to the Council, through the Programme and Finance Committees, on priority areas of work which should be taken into account in preparation of the planning, programme and budgetary documents of the Organization.
4. In considering the next steps in IPA implementation, the Conference Committee for IEE Follow-up (CoC-IEE) in 2009 "*..recognized that prioritization is a long-term exercise dependant on the availability of adequate complementary information from the Technical Committees and Regional Conferences, which should be provided in the first full cycle of results-based planning in 2010-11.*" The Conference in 2009 "*...emphasized the need for improvements in prioritization*"

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and specifically requested COAG, COFI and COFO to consider priorities for FAO's technical work at their next sessions.

5. This paper provides an overview of prioritization efforts to date, sets out a roadmap for preparation, approval and adjustment of the MTP and PWB 2012-13, and proposes an approach for advising on priorities by the Regional Conferences, Technical Committees and Programme and Finance Committees within this roadmap.

II. Consideration of Prioritization prior to 2006

6. Prioritization has been addressed on numerous occasions in FAO inter-governmental fora. This took place either via specific items on the agenda, especially in the Programme Committee, or when discussing MTP and PWB proposals.

7. Discussions have covered three main aspects of prioritization:

- *definitions* and *semantics*, especially to take account of the specificity of UN system contexts, as opposed to concepts, terminologies and practices widely used by national governments or individual institutions;
- *methodologies* and *tools* to assist with priority-setting;
- *process*, including the involvement of various instances and how to ensure complementarity of advice, and the articulation and scope of forward-planning documents, especially in conveying the necessary priority choices inherent in proposals.

8. Prioritization has been defined as a process of making relative choices among areas of work which eventually lead to the allocation of resources. At FAO the setting of priorities is essentially a political process in view of the inter-governmental nature of the Organization. It is also a complex process in view of FAO's worldwide coverage and action at global, regional and country levels; the breadth of its mandate; and the type of products and services provided to member countries.

9. In terms of methodological tools, an important historical milestone was the approval of a set of priority-setting criteria by the Council at its 110th session of November 1995. Subject to minor successive adjustments, the criteria for priority setting have been consistently confirmed for use during the formulation and examination of the MTP and PWB. The Strategic Framework 2000-2015 recognized that the development of practical and effective criteria was an evolutionary process and that, based on experience, the criteria for priority-setting presented in *Annex I* would be applied.

10. Over the 2003-2005 period, the Programme Committee examined as specific items on its agenda, various aspects of priority-setting.¹ As regards possible tools to assist in prioritization, the Committee addressed the merits of such supportive information as:

- the results of multi-criteria analysis (including the possibility to apply different "weights" to the criteria being used) especially if they could assist with "relative ranking" of priorities;
- compendia of views expressed by Members at pertinent FAO's inter-governmental instances on the degree of priority they attached to specific programmes and activities; and
- historical patterns of resource allocation to substantive programmes.

11. There was a general feeling that such supportive information had considerable limitations and that it should not, in any event, detract from the recognition that priority-setting was essentially a political process, during which compromises had to be found among Members in seeking to reconcile diverging or different interests.²

¹ PC 89/4, PC 90/4, PC 91/7, PC 93/4a

² CL 124/14, CL 125/3, CL 127/11

12. The Committee also addressed the potential of auto-evaluations in assisting with priority-setting. It recognized the valuable insights which auto-evaluations could provide, at the same time acknowledging their limitations in terms of priority-setting decisions at higher levels of aggregation, since they are generally directed at specific component activities or projects within broader substantive areas.³

13. As regards process, there were many discussions on specific aspects, in particular concerning the format and programme structures used in programme planning and reporting documents, including the messages they could convey in terms of priority-setting. These have now been overtaken by the revised cycle of governing body input to the programme and budget process approved by Conference in the wake of the IPA.

III. The IEE, IPA and new Strategic Framework

14. The IEE recommended the development of a new, clearly enunciated corporate strategy and medium-term plan covering the full range of FAO work. This new strategy was intended to provide a guiding framework to direct the Organization's human and financial resources to a set of priorities reflecting the following criteria, which were applied by the IEE in analysing the FAO technical programme:

- priority in terms of needs expressed by Members, including those from the national medium-term priority frameworks;
- topicality and interest to providers of extra-budgetary funds;
- use of the Organization's potential comparative strengths, considering existing capacity and track record, cross-disciplinarity and integration of advocacy, normative work and technical cooperation;
- potential for partnership – based on FAO's absolute and dynamic comparative advantage;
- set the general magnitude of resource requirements for its objectives, fully integrating extra-budgetary voluntary contributions into the plan.

15. The IPA stipulated that the elements of the new Strategic Framework and Medium Term Plan were to be based on an integrated results-based structure, that would permit prioritising and focusing work in line with Members' needs and clarify the means-ends relationships through which FAO would contribute to agreed impacts in member countries. The enhanced results-based approach to programming consists of a hierarchy of:

- a) Three *Global Goals* representing the fundamental development impacts in the areas of FAO's mandate which the member countries aim to achieve;
- b) *Strategic Objectives* contributing to the Global Goals and expressing the impact, in countries, regions and globally, expected to be achieved by Members with a contribution from FAO;
- c) *Organizational Results* defining the outcome expected from the use by member countries and partners of FAO's products and services in the pursuit of each Strategic Objective; and;
- d) *Core Functions* representing the critical means of action to be employed by FAO to achieve results, drawing on the Organization's comparative advantages.

16. In line with the new results-based hierarchy, the Strategic Framework 2010-19 and MTP 2010-13 elaborated a set of results frameworks with 56 Organizational Results specifying how the Organization would contribute to the achievement of each of the eleven Strategic Objectives and

³ CL 128/11

two Functional Objectives. Each Organizational Result represents a focused “package” of interventions which provide a blueprint for FAO’s actions, providing:

- a limited number of key performance indicators with associated two and four-year targets, to form the basis of accountability for achievements to Members;
- a set of primary tools specifying precisely how FAO would intervene to achieve each outcome; and
- a summary of which of the core functions of the Organization were to be applied.

17. The IPA recognized that prioritization and focusing of FAO’s work is essential at all levels of the results-based framework, but is particularly critical at the level of Organizational Results, whereby:

- absolute priority should be accorded to Members’ existing needs and meeting emerging challenges, combined with
- a structured analysis of the potential for application of the Organization’s strengths, as embodied in the core functions, including considerations such as organizational performance in each area of work; existing technical capacity, including for cross-disciplinarity; and the integration of strengths in advocacy, normative work and technical cooperation.

18. Other major tools stipulated in the IPA to help inform the development of the Organizational Results and Strategic Objectives include:

- a) National Medium-Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPFs) developed with individual governments to focus FAO’s efforts on national needs;
- b) structured and consultative development of sub-regional and regional areas of priority action, including the Regional Conferences in the consultation; and;
- c) at the global level, a limited number of Impact Focus Areas.

19. The National Medium-Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPF) and sub-regional and regional areas of priority action currently represent work-in-progress. The NMTPFs are not yet prepared for many countries or, where available, have yet to be formalized and agreed with national authorities. Initial versions of areas of priority action at regional level are being prepared for the Regional Conferences, but these first iterations are necessarily limited by the quality of the “bottom up” information coming from country level. This illustrates the long-term, iterative nature of the prioritization exercise.

20. Through a revision of the timeline of the major governing body sessions, the IPA set forth a structured process to allow systematic and timely Member review and input on priorities to be used by the Secretariat in developing proposals for the Strategic Framework, MTP and PWB:

- the role of the Regional Conferences has been strengthened to become a full part of the governance process, reporting to the Council through the Programme and Finance Committees on areas of priority action at the regional level to be taken into account in the preparation of the planning, programme and budgetary documents;
- the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP), the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the Committee on Forestry (COFO), the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) (the so-called Technical Committees), whose timing was moved forward from the second to the first year of the biennium to permit timely input into the development of the MTP and PWB, are to advise the Council through the Programme and Finance Committees on programme and budget matters including technical priorities;
- the Programme and Finance Committees will receive the Regional Conference and Technical Committee advice on priorities, and will be required to make clear recommendations on policies, strategies and priorities to the Council;

- the Council will consider the advice of the Regional Conferences, Technical Committees and Programme and Finance Committees in making clear recommendations to Conference on the content of the MTP and PWB, including on the budget level.

IV. Road map to MTP and PWB 2012-13 including prioritization

21. Based on the revised cycle of governance input to the programme and budget process and the calendar of FAO governing body sessions 2010-11⁴, the Secretariat has prepared a draft timeline, shown in *Annex II*, setting out 22 steps in the preparation, approval and adjustment of the MTP and PWB 2012-13. With regard to prioritization, the timeline has five main phases.

- Advice on priorities provided by the Regional Conferences (including regional technical commissions) and Technical Committees to the Council via the Programme and Finance Committees (steps 1-10, 13, 14) from March to Oct 2010. It should be noted that for the cycle of governing body meetings in 2010-11, the sessions of the Regional Conference for the Near East and the Committee on Fisheries will take place outside of this timeframe, while the 30th Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific will take place from 27 September to 1 October 2010.
- Guidance on priorities provided by the Programme and Finance Committees to Council and by the Council to the Secretariat (steps 11 and 12) during October and November 2010.
- Preparation by Secretariat of the draft MTP and PWB 2012-13 (step 15) from October 2010 to February 2011, reflecting guidance provided by the Council on priorities.
- Governing body review of and decision on the draft MTP and PWB 2012-13 (steps 17-20) during March-June 2011.
- Any necessary adjustments to the PWB 2012-13 based on Conference decisions, prepared by the Secretariat (Step 21) during July-September 2011, with review by the Programme and Finance Committees and approval by Council (step 22) in October-November 2011.

22. Recognizing that priority-setting is a long-term exercise, and taking into account past experience and the new results-based Strategic Framework, an approach to providing advice and guidance on prioritization of the technical work of the Organization is proposed within the first phase (Regional Conferences and Technical Committee advice) of preparation of the MTP and PWB 2012-13, based on an overview of requirements for the Programme Committee in the second phase.

23. As regards priority-setting, and as provided in the new cycle of preparation and governing body decision making on programme and budget matters, the Programme Committee, at its session in the second half of the first year of the biennium, would normally review and provide Council with guidance on:

- the performance implementation report for the previous biennium, including performance against indicators (which will only be available in 2012 for the new results frameworks);
- budgetary and implementation performance in the second half of the year, and any necessary adjustments to the agreed PWB;
- the reports of the Regional Conferences and Technical Committees on programme and budget matters, including priorities for the next biennium; and
- major evaluations.

24. In providing guidance to the Council on prioritization, being the relative choices in the technical work of the Organization, the Programme Committee will need to consider any need to adjust the results frameworks of the MTP and PWB, including the application of the core functions and any changes in emphasis between and within Objectives (i.e. between

⁴ Approved by CL 138 for 2010 and noted for 2011

Organizational Results), based on emerging challenges and issues, expressions of technical and regional priorities, and implementation performance to date.

Process for advice on priorities by the Regional Conferences

25. In their new functions, the Regional Conferences will:

- advise on and identify the special problems of their respective regions and priority areas of work which should be taken into account in the preparation of the planning, programme and budget documents of the Organization and suggest adjustments to these documents;
- review and advise on the performance of the Organization in the region in contributing to the achievement of results against relevant performance indicators, including any pertinent evaluations.

26. The Secretariat has prepared, for the first three Regional Conferences taking place during April-May 2010 (LARC, ARC, ERC), a document that presents the issues and priorities that FAO will be addressing in the region during 2010-11 (based on the approved PWB 2010-11) and the proposed priorities for 2012-13. The priorities for the current and next biennium contribute to addressing the regional challenges and needs in food, agriculture and rural development that fall under FAO's Strategic Objectives.

27. In this first experience in advising on regional areas of priority action for FAO, the expectations should be tempered by several factors:

- this is the first year that the regional conference will perform its new mandate and the reform of the ways of working of Regional Conferences have just begun, so that agendas are crowded;
- the likelihood that not all sectors covered by the Strategic Framework will be represented among the delegates;
- varying levels on consultations with regional and sub-regional economic organizations and stakeholders;
- limited number of NMPTF's prepared and available as a major instrument to inform country regional and sub-regional priorities;
- since the new MTP/PWB only started from 2010, there is no basis to take into account performance in this context;
- the challenge in focussing the global priorities while preserving the regional perspective.

28. The aim, therefore, should be for the Regional Conferences to provide advice in their reports on the priorities for technical work proposed by the Secretariat for action within and among the Strategic Objectives.

Process for advice on priorities by technical committees

29. In line with the Conference Resolution 1/2008 on the IPA, some of the technical committees (COAG, COFI, COFO) were asked to provide advice on priorities during preparation of the MTP 2010-13 and PWB 2010-11 during 2009. Lessons can be drawn from this experience to inform the process for advice on priorities in 2010.

30. At its 100th session in October 2008, the Programme Committee recommended that technical committees provide advice on prioritization based on drafts of the results frameworks, in the format agreed in the IPA, for the Strategic Objectives most relevant to each Technical

Committee.⁵ At its 101st session in May 2009, the Committee recognized the constraints experienced with regard to advice on priorities, due in part to the novelty of the enhanced results-based approach and also to timing constraints. The advice was generally more in terms of calling for additional activities and resources, without indication of areas of lower priority, although useful guidance for further refinement of the results frameworks was provided. The Committee recommended that the documentation for future sessions of Technical Committees be conducive to greater input on priority-setting, and that guidance to the Technical Committees should be more specific in the next round.⁶

31. In preparing such guidance to the Technical Committees, the Programme Committee may wish to take into account the following factors and suggestions:

- the MTP/PWB presents indicators of achievement with four- and two-year targets at the level of Organizational Results, for which the Organization is held accountable;
- since the new MTP/PWB only started from 2010, there is no basis to take into account performance against the indicators and targets in the Organizational Results frameworks at sessions of the Technical Committees in this first biennium of the new cycle;
- thus the basis for changing priorities within and among the results frameworks will be changes in the external environment, refinements being undertaken by the Secretariat within Organizational Results during operational planning for 2010-11, the results of evaluations, and views expressed by Members;
- the Technical Committees will advise on priorities on a limited set of Strategic Objectives within their mandate and thus do not have the basis for advising on priorities among Strategic Objectives as a whole. In fact, when considering the draft MTP/PWB in July 2009, the Committee recognized that the set of Organizational Results presented in the MTP was a first attempt to express the substantive priorities of the Organization, and that advice from the Technical Committees had been applied at this level.⁷

32. Therefore, it is proposed that the Technical Committees consider priorities at the level of Organizational Results within pertinent Strategic Objectives, providing advice on relative shifts of emphasis within and among the Organizational results, taking account of emerging challenges, in particular those of a cross-cutting nature, refinement of indicators and targets, and the results of evaluations.

⁵ CL 135/5 paragraphs 9-14

⁶ CL 136/9 paragraphs 10-13

⁷ CL 137/3 paragraphs 11-13

Annex I: Criteria for Priority Setting of the Strategic Framework 2000-15

33. Criteria will be used to determine the priority to be accorded to the medium-term programme entities that will contribute to achievement of the strategic objectives. The development of practical and effective criteria will be an evolutionary process. The following criteria, based on experience, will be applied:

- conformity to the Organization's mandate and relevance to the strategic objectives of the Organization as specified in the Strategic Framework, keeping in view the need to maintain a balance between normative and operational activities;
- expressed priority and usefulness to a broad section of the membership or to special groups identified by the governing bodies (least-developed countries, the small island developing states, etc.);
- justification, in terms of FAO's comparative advantage, potential for synergies through collaboration with partners, and avoidance of duplication with the work of other institutions;
- quality of programme design, including clarity of the causal link between the inputs provided and the planned outputs and objectives;
- probable cost-efficiency of the programme entity in mode of operation, including the use made of internal and external partnerships;
- likelihood of achieving desired objectives and substantive and sustainable impact;
- extent to which the achievement of objectives can be evaluated through the criteria and indicators proposed.

Annex II: Draft Timeline of Preparation, Approval and Adjustment of the PWB 2012-13

Step	Process/Milestones	Timing
1	Preparation of documents on regional areas of priority action – for review and advice by Regional Conferences	March 2010 for LARC, ARC and ERC; August 2010 for APRC; October 2010 for NERC.
2	Preparation of documents on priorities under Strategic Objectives – review and guidance by the technical committees <i>(103rd Programme Committee and 132nd Finance Committee meetings 12-16 April)</i>	April 2010 for CCP and COAG; August 2010 for COFO and CFS; December 2010 for COFI
3	<i>31st Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC)</i>	<i>26-30 April 2010</i>
4	<i>26th Regional Conference for Africa (ARC)</i>	<i>3-7 May 2010</i>
5	<i>27th Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)</i>	<i>10-14 May 2010</i>
6	<i>68th Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP)</i>	<i>14-16 June 2010</i>
7	<i>22nd Committee on Agriculture</i>	<i>16-19 June 2010</i>
8	<i>30th Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC)</i>	<i>27 Sept – 1 Oct 2010</i>
9	<i>20th Committee on Forestry (COFO)</i>	<i>4-8 October 2010</i>
10	<i>36th Committee on World Food Security (CFS)</i>	<i>11-14 October, 2010</i>
11	<i>104th Programme Committee and 133rd Finance Committees – review recommendations of the Regional Conferences and technical committees to-date and provide advice on priorities to be taken into account in the formulation of the MTP and PWB 2012-13</i>	<i>25-29 October 2010</i>
12	<i>140th Council – review of the advice of the Regional Conferences, technical committees, Programme/Finance Committee; advice to the Secretariat on priorities for the MTP and PWB 2012-13</i>	<i>29 Nov-3 Dec 2010</i>
13	<i>30th Regional Conference for the Near East</i>	<i>4-8 December 2010 (possible change compared to calendar approved to 138th session of Council)</i>
14	<i>29th Committee on Fisheries</i>	<i>31 Jan – 4 Feb 2011</i>
15	Strategy Teams and Organizational units prepare revisions to MTP 2010-13 and contributions to PWB 2012-13	November 2010-February 2011; dispatch to Programme and Finance Committees by 21 February 2011

Step	Process/Milestones	Timing
16	<i>Informal meeting of interested Members and other potential sources of extra-budgetary funds and partnership, to exchange information on extra-budgetary funding requirements</i>	<i>First quarter of 2011</i>
17	<i>105th Programme Committee and 134th Finance Committee – review of MTP and full PWB 2012-13</i>	<i>21-25 March 2011</i>
18	Dispatch of full PWB 2012-13 to Members (90 days before Conference)	<i>25 March 2011</i>
19	<i>141st Council – review of MTP and full PWB 2012-13; recommendation of budget level to Conference</i>	<i>11-15 April 2011</i>
20	<i>37th Conference – decision on budget level 2012-13</i>	<i>25 June – 2 July 2011</i>
21	Preparation of 2012-13 results-based work plans based on Conference- approved budget.	July-December 2011
22	<i>106th Programme Committee and 135th Finance Committee – review of PWB adjustments</i> <i>143rd CL – approval of PWB adjustments</i>	<i>10-14 October 2011</i> <i>21-25 November 2011</i>