79th Plenary Meeting – Virtual

MINUTES

Steering Committee

11:14 am (GMT-5) to 12:10 am, Thursday 9 December 2021
Chairman: Mr Anshul Sharma, Chair of the Standing Committee

The meeting started at 11.14 am.

Mr Anshul Sharma, Chair of the Standing Committee, chaired the meeting.

1. Adoption of the Agenda

ICAC Executive Director Kai Hughes asked if anyone had any additions to the agenda. The delegate from the USA, Mr Patrick Packnett, asked whether it would be possible to discuss plans to change the drafting committee process. It was agreed to try and cover this issue if time permitted. The agenda was approved.

2. Election of the Standing Committee Officers – Working Paper 1

The Executive Director requested that the Steering Committee approve the recommendation of the Standing Committee to appoint the following:

- Mr Patrick Packnett, USA, as Chair
- HE Aly Touré, Côte d’Ivoire, as Vice Chair

The recommendation was approved by the Committee.


The Executive Director explained that three topics were considered during the Plenary Meeting:

1. Regenerative agriculture: Which practices can combat climate change most effectively?
2. Will cotton production be viable without government subsidies?
3. The sustainability challenge of biotech genetically modified cotton.

After discussion at the Plenary Meeting, it was decided to adopt topic 1.

The Delegate from Russia, Ms Victoria Kardash, raised concerns that the subtext focuses on climate change which is not in line with the mandate of ICAC. It was suggested that this could
be expanded to explore the effect of climate change on cotton revenues, production or industry development.

Chief Scientist Dr Keshav Kranthi explained that the topic would be expanded once speakers are appointed.

After some discussion, The Steering Committee approved the general topic of ‘Regenerative agriculture’ and a suggested title of ‘How Can Regenerative Agriculture Contribute to a Sustainable Cotton Industry’ was agreed. The Secretariat was entrusted to use this or a close variation of this title and to incorporate the concerns and concepts approved by the Steering Committee when designing the presentations and format of the day.


The Executive Director presented a summary of his report on the Strategic Away Day held in July. He began by summarising performance against the Strategic Plan.

Membership continues to be critical to the future of ICAC. In the last financial year, Zimbabwe was suspended but Sudan rejoined. He said he is confident that Zambia will also return.

The Private Sector Advisory Council was formed this year to replace the Private Sector Advisory Panel. The Executive Director explained that this means the ICAC now has international, regional and national associations, with producers through to retailers and brands all under one umbrella.

Some gaps were identified in governance and he highlighted that this year there would be an emphasis on reviewing the ICAC Rules and Regulations and introducing more policies to ensure greater transparency.

A review of the staffing structure began earlier this year and four new roles were created. Dr Keshav Kranthi became Chief Scientist; we appointed Kanwar Usman as the new Head of Textiles and Data Scientist Matthew Looney replaced the old Statistician position. A part time Regional Coordinator, Emmanuel Mukua, was appointed on a trial basis, addressing issues on the ground in South and Southeast Africa.

The Executive Director summarised the key partnerships that we have developed and the importance of these partners when delivering projects.

He added that outreach and promotion were strong, partly due to the continued growth of World Cotton Day, and said the ICAC will be working closely with CIRAD to set up a world cotton research centre in Africa.

The Committee was told finances are healthy due to extra funds from projects and that while assessment fees continue to be an issue, the financial impact is lessened because projects are bringing in revenue.

The Executive Director said the Data Scientist is exploring better technologies that could improve the ICAC’s databases. The Soil and Plant Health app will be available in 2022 and the Virtual Reality Cotton Training Programme will also be available free of charge to all Members.

He pointed out that 80% of objectives identified in the Strategic Plan were achieved despite the impact of the pandemic during the Strategic Away Day, attendees discussed:
1. The ICAC value proposition,
2. The Plenary Meeting and
3. How to engage with delegates in meetings.

As a result of the discussions, he explained, Coordinating Agencies will be invited to meetings along with delegates beginning in January 2022; the number of Standing Committee meetings will be reduced to three and administrative items will be dealt with outside the meeting when practical. An attendance summary will be available at the end of each year.

The delegate from Russia asked why the next Plenary Meeting will be virtual when in-person meetings are much more inclusive. The Executive Director replied that we do not have a willing host country and it is likely that there will still be some uncertainty due to the pandemic. As planning begins a year in advance, he explained, we would need a host country in place now to hold an in-person meeting in 2022.

5. Uncollected Assessments of the ICAC Members – Working Paper 4

The Executive Director drew the attention of the Committee to working paper 4. As of 8 December, 17 governments have not paid their assessment fees and $1,182,474 is outstanding. There is a particular concern when a country has more than one year outstanding as they are at risk of suspension in April. The Executive Director pleaded with countries to pay their outstanding fees to avoid potential suspension and to ensure the ICAC has sufficient cash flow.

Any Other Business

The Executive Director outlined the issues with holding the Drafting Committee meeting during a Plenary Meeting. It is particularly difficult to produce the draft statement and give sufficient time for delegates to review and consult prior to the Drafting Committee meeting. Furthermore, he said, there has been some discussion about reducing the length of the Plenary Meeting and including the Drafting Committee meeting makes this difficult. It had been proposed that the Drafting Committee meeting could move to the week after the Plenary Meeting. He pointed out that it would need to be a virtual meeting and would incur costs as interpreters would need to be sourced for an additional day.

The Russian Delegate expressed support for the proposal.

The Committee approved the proposal and the Executive Director was asked to investigate the process further and present his findings at the next Standing Committee meeting.

6. Renewal of the Executive Director Contract

The Steering Committee approved the recommendation of the Standing Committee for a one-year extension of the contract of the Executive Director.

There being no further comments, the meeting was closed at 12:10.