

FAO History Highlights

FAO was established on the understanding that the only way to tackle global challenges pertaining to food and agriculture is through collaboration in the spirit that we are all in this together. In 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, met with representatives of 44 Nations at the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture, and committed to the establishment of a permanent organization focused on food and agricultural issues. An Interim Commission for Food and Agriculture was created which prepared the draft Constitution of FAO and convened a meeting in Quebec, Canada, where the FAO Constitution was signed by 34 Nations on 16 October 1945. On that date, FAO was officially established as a Specialised Agency of the United Nations that would lead the efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security globally.

FAO is the product of decades of evolution enabled by the Basic Texts of the Organization. Comprised of two volumes, these are the legal documents that define FAO's mandate, objectives and functions. This presentation is articulated around three (3) major topics which are addressed in the Basic Texts, "a book" which can actually be found on the internet (<http://www.fao.org/unfao/govbodies/home/en/>) and exist today in 3 official languages, French, English and Spanish. Being a basic reference to the daily work of the Organization, its Members, Associate Members and Staff, it will be translated into Arabic, Chinese and Russian.

A. *"The Basic Texts"*

The Basic Texts laid the foundation for the establishment of FAO as they provide the legal instruments that define its mandate, objectives and functions. The Basic Texts include, amongst others:

- the FAO Constitution
- the General Rules of the Organization (GRO)
- the Financial Regulations
- the Rules of Procedure of the FAO Council and its Committees

➤ *The FAO Constitution:*

The FAO Constitution sets out all the critical elements of how the Organization is organized, its governing structure, functions and oversight by its Governing Bodies. It does not merely describe the rules of the functioning of the Organization, but reflects the hopes and aspirations of its Members, and sets the mission and visions that underline the work of its Members, management and staff. The Preamble to the Constitution captures these fundamental principles and underlying philosophy and embodies the spirit and ideals that led to its creation.

Key provisions of the FAO Constitution include:

- The functions of the Organization
- The conditions for Membership and Associate Membership
- FAO's governing structure
- The appointment and functions of the Director-General
- The appointment of staff, the establishment of Regional and Liaison Offices
- The obligation of the Members and Associate Members to communicate information, reports and documentation pertaining to matters within the competence of the Organization
- FAO's cooperation with Organizations and Persons, Conventions and Agreements and

- The Budget and Contributions

- *The Status of FAO:*

- Like all international organizations, autonomy and institutional independence are essential to give FAO the ability to pursue the international community's general interests in fulfilment of its mandate.
- As a corollary to institutional independence, each Member undertakes to accord to FAO and its staff certain privileges and immunities, in other words, immunity from national jurisdiction and execution, inviolability of archives and documents, and freedom to hold and move funds. Such privileges and immunities are grounded on the international obligation to safeguard the independent exercise of the Organization's functions in the interest of all its Members, so as to prevent any interference by individual States.
- The standards of work expected of staff are contained in the FAO Constitution and in the FAO Administrative Manual. No matter which unit FAO staff are allocated to, and the different nature of their work, or the nature of their contractual obligations, the principles of the FAO Constitution are that staff's responsibilities are exclusively international in character, for which they cannot receive or accept instructions from any third party outside FAO. Everything staff do in the discharge of their official functions must be done for every single Member of the Organization and not just one or two.

- *Rules governing Membership*

FAO is currently made up of 194 Member Nations, one Member Organization, and two Associate Members. The FAO Conference may decide on admission to Membership and Associate Membership by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, provided that a majority of the Member Nations of the Organization is present.

- *FAO's cooperation with other individuals and entities*

We know that it shall be a function of FAO, generally, to take all necessary and appropriate action to implement its purposes as set forth in the Preamble. It is also clear that the fight against hunger can only be won through cooperation between FAO, governments and the public sector, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector. For this reason, Article XIII of the Constitution enables the FAO Conference to enter into collaboration agreements with international organizations that have with related responsibilities and intergovernmental organizations, and to make rules enabling proper consultation with governments concerning the relations between FAO and national institutions or private persons. Volume II of the Basic Texts also provides further guidance on cooperation with international governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations.

B. FAO's governing structure

- *The Governing Bodies*

The role of FAO's Governing Bodies is to ensure that FAO's vision and policies are carried out in an effective and transparent way. Within their respective mandates, the Governing Bodies contribute to the definition of the overall policies and regulatory frameworks of FAO, and to the establishment of the Strategic Framework, the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme of Work and Budget. They also exercise, or contribute to, the oversight of the administration of the Organization. To fulfil their role, the Governing Bodies are assisted by what is referred to as "the Secretariat", composed of all FAO employees around the world. At the head of the Secretariat is the Director-General.

The main Governing Bodies of FAO are the Conference, which is the supreme decision-making body of the Organization, wherein every Member is represented by an equal vote and the Council, which acts on behalf of the Conference between its sessions. The Governing Bodies also includes the Council Committees (The Programme Committee, the Finance Committee and the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters), the Technical Committees (COFO, COFI, etc.) and the Regional Conferences (five formally established).

Lastly, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is an intergovernmental Committee established under the FAO Constitution. It assists the Conference and reports to the Conference and the United Nations General Assembly. It is neither a governing body nor a statutory body. It is a *sui generis* (meaning 'unique') intergovernmental body with a joint Secretariat composed of FAO, IFAD and WFP, and is located in FAO Headquarters. It is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all.

➤ *Statutory Bodies*

Statutory Bodies are established in accordance with Articles VI and XIV of the FAO Constitution to address any technical subject falling within FAO's mandate, from aquaculture to livestock, or from controlling desert locusts to forestry-related issues. There are more than one hundred Statutory Bodies operating in FAO.

➤ *Status of Observers*

The granting of observer status to Members and non-member in sessions of the Governing Bodies is governed by the FAO Constitution, the General Rules of the Organization, and the relevant general rules and policy statements formally adopted by the Conference, such as the "Statement of principles relating to the granting of observer status to nations", and the general rules regarding relationships between the Organization and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

➤ *Voting rights, quorums and majorities*

The Basic Texts, in particular the Constitution and the General Rules of the Organization address voting rights, quorum and majorities. Decisions that require this two-thirds majority include: Admission of Members and Associate Members, Adoption of conventions and agreements, Budget level, Adoption of the Conference and Council Agenda at the start of the session, Amendment or suspension of the General Rules of the Organization and/or amendments the Constitution.

Voting can take place by a show of hands, roll call or secret ballot. The latter is used for the following elections: (i) Appointment of the Director-General; (ii) Admission of new Members and (iii) Any other matter as decided by the Conference or Council.

C. *Programme and budget administration*

➤ *The Budget and the Financial Regulations*

The total FAO Budget comes from assessed contributions and voluntary contributions from Members and other partners. The Financial Regulations govern the financial administration of FAO and its resources, including funds, the regular budget, financial controls and external audits. As a matter of principle, the Organization cannot accept voluntary contributions that imply or impose additional financial obligations on the Members, without the consent by the Conference.

The Financial Regulations should be viewed as a built-in form of accountability for the Organization to its Members, with the Director-General personally liable to the Members, as well as a form of protection for the Members should the Organization incur financial liabilities.

➤ *Programme and budget documents*

As required by the Basic Texts, the FAO's programme and budget documentation consists of three main components: the Strategic Framework, the Medium-Term Plan, and the Programme of Work and Budget. They are presented to the Programme and Finance Committees, Council and Conference for review and approval.

➤ *External and internal oversight mechanisms*

The Basic Texts establish the oversight mechanism, both external and internal, that ensures the transparent, efficient and accountable administration and management of the Organization. Under the Financial Regulations, an External Auditor must be designated in the manner and for the period decided upon by the Council. The External Auditor, who must be a general auditor of a Member Nation, may make observations with respect to the efficiency of the financial procedures, the accounting system, the internal financial controls and, in general, the administration and management of the Organization.

The Internal Oversight functions are entrusted to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Office of Evaluation (OED). The Charter for the Office of the Inspector General sets out the mission and scope of the Inspector-General's work, defines its accountability and authority, and ensures its independence.

The Charter of the Office of Evaluation (OED) can be found in the Basic Texts. That office conducts evaluations of FAO programmes and projects at the global, regional and national levels for increased accountability and learning, focusing on the Organization's strategic positioning and results. The Office of Evaluation reports to the FAO Governing Bodies and to the Director-General.