“Challenges and Opportunities for reporting on SDG indicators”

Information Seminar for Permanent Representatives

Monday, 11 May
14:00 – 15:30
Part I – Latest developments on the SDG indicators and the main challenges in global reporting

(Pietro Gennari,
FAO’s Chief Statistician)
Latest developments on SDG indicators: The Global context

• In March 2020, the UN Statistical Commission ratified the outcomes of the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework conducted by the IAEG-SDG.

• In the context of the Comprehensive Review, the IAEG-SDG approved minor methodological revisions to three SDG indicators under FAO custodianship (2.4.1, 2.5.2 and 5.a.2).

• Minor annual refinements are still possible, whereas the next Comprehensive Review is scheduled for 2025.

• With the end of this initial phase of development and testing of indicators, FAO is now shifting focus to frontier methodological areas such as data disaggregation, the use of new data sources, as well as the acceleration of capacity development initiatives.
The Challenge of global reporting

• To achieve the SDGs, high quality data (relevant, timely, reliable and internationally comparable) are needed in order to identify development bottlenecks and inform policies & investment decisions.

• The world is currently not on track to meeting the 37 out of 38 SDG targets. One key factor is the lack of relevant data. Only 44% of SDG indicators have sufficient data for proper global monitoring (‘Tier I’ indicators). The main explaining factors are the following:
  • Extensive nr. of indicators: 4 times more indicators than in the MDG era, many of them completely new or produced outside of the NSS
  • Low capacity of national statistical systems and technical skills of official statisticians
  • Non-alignment of national/regional indicators with global SDG indicators;
  • Low investments by donors and national governments in SDG data production & use
  • Insufficient coordination among national data producers.
Current Gaps in SDG reporting: Results of the 2019 SDG Gap Assessment

The recent FAO’s SDG Capacity Assessment shows that data gaps are pervasive. The main results highlight that:

• Some essential data collection activities are not carried out regularly, without external support. 63% of countries required assistance to strengthen institutional & technical capacity to design, compile and use these data on a regular basis.

• Even when surveys are regularly conducted, they do not cover many SDG indicators: 73% of countries required assistance to upgrade existing data sources.

• In some cases, data are available but not reported, analyzed and used.

• 61% of countries required assistance to improve their institutional coordination mechanisms on data reporting, while 62% of countries required assistance on the analysis/interpretation of the SDG indicators.
Alignment between national and global indicator frameworks

Another major threat for global SDG reporting, is the common practice among countries to use proxies and “alternative” indicators to the global official ones.

• Few countries use SDG indicators systematically in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Often, countries use different, incomparable indicators (especially for reporting food insecurity)

• A similar situation is found in countries’ National Reporting Platforms; very few distinguish between national and global SDG indicators.

• Many regional indicator frameworks are also not well aligned with the global SDG indicator framework. Such frameworks often exclude a large portion of global SDG indicators, discouraging countries from reporting them.
Benefits of aligning national and global indicator frameworks

FAO has provided assistance to numerous countries, as well as some regional organizations, to foster greater alignment between national/regional and the global indicator framework. There are a number of benefits to be gained:

• Clear, consistent assessments of progress, which can lead to effective evidence-based policies;

• Benchmarking of performance with other countries, guiding national policy decisions and attracting development assistance;

• Reduced data requirements and reporting burden on countries;

• Opens the possibility of benefitting from statistical technical assistance programs of international agencies.
Frontier Methodological Areas: Data disaggregation

- New challenges for global SDG reporting are data disaggregation, the use of new data sources, as well as the assessment of SDG progress.
- Data disaggregation is key for “leaving no one behind”. FAO is a member of the workstream on data disaggregation of the IAEG-SDG.
- Available statistical data, in general, lack the level of detail necessary for identifying key inequalities across different population groups and territorial areas.
- FAO is working to harness new data sources to enhance data disaggregation of SDG indicators, in particular using Earth Observation data and administrative data.
- FAO is also adapting innovative statistical methods, such as small-area estimation, to improve the availability of more disaggregated data from surveys.
Frontier Methodological Areas: Timeliness

• Most SDG data are still produced with a large time-lag, thus being unable to provide actionable information for decision-makers.
• FAO is investing in nowcasting/forecasting and other techniques that could help provide more timely estimates of SDG indicators.
• FAO is partnering with the Data4Now initiative aiming to strengthen existing systems and institutional capacity, and develop new data solutions for more timely SDG data.
• FAO is also investing in innovative tools to reduce the data collection time from National Statistical Systems to mainstream.
• FAO is implementing automatized statistical procedures to reduce reliance on manual input, improve interoperability, and therefore shorten the duration of the data processing time.
Frontier Methodological Areas: New Data Sources & Data ownership

• New or alternative data sources and innovative statistical methods can complement traditional data sources to reduce the time and resources needed for data production and fill key data gaps.

• To this end, FAO has created a Data Innovation Lab to serve as a hub for developing the capacity of FAO statistics units on all innovative solutions.

• The use of alternative “non-official” sources, however, raises questions of data ownership; under what circumstances can data be published?

• FAO’s 2-pronged strategy: a) knowledge transfer to countries so that they can adopt these methods themselves; b) validation of all new data generated with non official sources

• FAO is currently piloting a new simplified data validation mechanism to streamline this process, and reduce countries’ response burden.
Frontier Methodological Areas: Assessing progress

• With only 10 years more to go, it is becoming urgent to gain a clearer picture of how far countries are progressing towards the SDG targets

• The programme of work of the IAEG-SDG for 2020-21 identifies progress assessment and trend analysis as a key priority work area, and FAO has aligned its own work plan accordingly.

• FAO is leading the IAEG-SDG task force on the SDG Progress Chart, which aims to improve the consistency among international organizations of the methods for assessing progress towards the SDGs

• At the same time, FAO is working on enhanced trend analysis techniques for its own annual progress report and the monitoring of hunger and food security targets in its flagship SOFI report.
Part II – Factsheets on the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship

(Dorian Navarro,
Programme Advisor to FAO’s Chief Statistician)
Factsheets on the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship

The objectives of this publication are to provide a compact and accessible source of information on:

- data availability and country coverage;
- the methodology for the compilation of the SDG indicators and the process for establishing it as an international standard;
- data sources and main constraints faced by countries in reporting on the FAO-relevant SDG indicators;
- FAO’s main tools and initiatives for providing technical support to countries and related online resources.
Factsheets on the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship

- Whereas information on methodology is also elaborated in each indicator’s metadata document, this is the first publication that systematically charts data reporting rates by indicator and by country.

- The table on page 3 provides the global reporting rate by indicator (i.e. the percentage of countries that have at least one data point published within a given reference period): For almost all indicators, there has been a positive increase in the reporting rate, thanks in large part to FAO’s comprehensive set of capacity development activities rolled out since 2016.

- The tables on page 4 indicate, for each country, its status in terms of reporting on the 21 indicators (along the x axis) as well as the progress it has made since 2017 (along the y axis).

- In most individual factsheets, a choropleth map provides a graphical illustration of data gaps by distinguishing between reporting and non-reporting countries.
Factsheets on the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship: SDG indicator 2.1.2

- A relatively new indicator that was included in the SDG indicator framework to complement the traditional indicator on the prevalence of undernourishment

- Despite the fact that it has already been established as an international standard and approved by the IAEG-SDG several years ago, many countries are still reluctant to use it.

- This is reflected both in the small number of countries that have already generated the indicator with national data, and the large number of countries that have not validated FAO estimates based on an external service provider (Gallup World Poll).
Factsheets on the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship: SDG indicator 2.1.2
The Office of the Chief Statistician apprised the Programme Committee, at its latest session in November 2019, of recent developments regarding the methodology of SDG indicator 2.4.1.

Since then, FAO has piloted a questionnaire with a group of 45 countries that have been most involved in the process of methodological and/or capacity development for this indicator.

The results of this exercise, which have only very recently become available, reveal that of the 45 questionnaires dispatched, 32 countries acknowledged receipt (71%), of which only 7 (16%) provided actual data.
Factsheets on the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship: SDG indicator 2.4.1
Part III – Political engagement, capacity development and resource mobilization - The FAO Strategy to address transversal constraints in country SDG reporting

(Panel discussion)
Question 1: Why are statistics so important for the achievement of the SDGs and why should resource partners and national governments invest in SDG data generation and use?

Marie-Therese Sarch

(Ambassador,
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to FAO)
Why are statistics so important for the SDGs?

- The obvious reasons... to set direction, to monitor progress, to know when things aren't working and learn lessons, to make comparisons.

- Many MDGs were achieved, and lessons were learned.

- The SDG's are especially important because we have all agreed them; and at FAO (and other UN organisations) we have the opportunity review and advocate for progress together.

- To achieve SDG2, the RBAs need to collaborate and so do we. The SDGs provide the framework for that
Challenges

- Resources
- Politics
- Unintended consequences
- Recent evaluation of FAO's statistical work
Opportunities

- Methodology largely agreed

- Timing... FAO Strategic Plan and Results Framework; IFAD 12 replenishment; WFP Mid-Term Review

- Partnership between FAO and member states; but also with others working towards SDG2

- What can we do as permreps?
Question 2: What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them?

Etambuyu Lukonga,

(Zambia Statistics Agency)
What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them? (Zambia)

- **Institutional coordination:** A functioning institutional environment that facilitates formal cooperation and collaboration between key institutions in a National Statistical System is key. As a National Statistical Office, we cannot meet all of the statistical and informational needs for SDGs as we need access to a wide range of data and subject matter expertise.

  ✔ Therefore there is need to link and integrate data and thus we need a coherent mechanism that facilitates the safe sharing or linking data between institutions for statistical and administrative data for SDGs to be easily accessible.

- **Strengthening the National statistical System is key:** especially considering that up to 85% of SDG data could come from Administrative data.
  ✔ How can the quality of administrative data in the sectors be improved?
What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them? (Zambia)

**Steps**

- **Planning indicators** will help us measure how we organise ourselves to produce statistics for SDGs. A strong, coherent, feasible and politically backed national statistical plan can guide a country in developing statistical capacity across the entire national statistical system (NSS).

- The preparation of the Second generation of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) is underway.

- A Coordination Unit has been created within the NSO that will coordinate the other institutions. There is need to train staff under this unit so that there are able to create an integrated statistical system and be able to obtain data for SDGs with ease.
What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them? (Zambia)

- **Data infrastructure:** In order to have a well organised and coherent NSS that is able to provide data for SDGs, a national data infrastructure is Key. There is need to have a properly designed data infrastructure
  
  - SDG data is derived from both surveys and administrative records.
    - If we have a good National Data Infrastructure, it means all administrative data from different sources will be properly organised and thus maximise the potential value and interoperability of those data.
    - All data generated for SDGs by different institutions are supposed to be organised in a coordinated way using the permanent identifiers and internationally agreed classifications and codes. Once we move in this direction, this design will ‘de-silo’ existing systems.

- The only step taken is where the NSO in collaboration with line Ministries compiled a Compendium of Statistical concepts and definitions.
What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them? (Zambia)

- Reporting on the 21 Indicators under FAO Custodianship.
  - A training on the 21 indicators was conducted in October 2019. However some Ministries did not send focal point persons for the training
  - There is need to have dedicated focal points from line Ministries on each indicator be trained and the National Statistical office to be able to produce the data for the indicators. (letters have been sent to Ministries to appoint Focal point teams)

- During the training that was conducted in October 2019, there were some indicators that did not have data but could be easily generated by the National Statistical System based on the training provided. All that was needed was to add questions to already existing surveys
  - (some questions were added to some surveys to collect data for these indicators e.g Crop Forecasting Surveys)
What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them? (Zambia)

- Then there were indicators that were identified and did not require any additional investment for data collection but could be generated from already existing data. (These need remote assistance from FAO)
- Some indicators require in-depth capacity building to generate data. The SDG team has the metadata and is collecting raw data needed for the indicators. (Thus, Technical Assistance will be required).
Statistics are so important for the achievement of SDGs because for us to make the ambitious agenda of SDGs come true, we need reliable, timely and quality data to show where we are making progress and where we are lagging behind and which groups are being left behind and why.

Resource Partners and Governments should invest in SDG data generation and its use because it is imperative to have a solid framework of indicators and statistical data to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability of all stakeholders.
Thank you

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Question 3: What are the main initiatives of capacity development that FAO has already launched or is about to launch that can respond to these needs on a global scale?

Pietro Gennari

(FAO’s Chief Statistician)
Overview of recent and new FAO capacity development initiatives

- Since 2016, a series of interventions and ongoing programmes of technical assistance on specific indicators have been implemented.
- These initiatives provided a critical initial impetus and contributed to raising the overall reporting rate of countries (see factsheets).
- However, these programs were generally limited in terms of funding, time horizon (usually focused on covering the most urgent needs) and scope (targeting a small selection of countries or of indicators).
- To reduce the fragmentation of efforts and further capitalize on synergies, FAO is moving towards a new model for Statistical Capacity development with an integrated set of four novel and complementary initiatives that target key aspects of the data production cycle and country-specific statistical development needs.
The Umbrella Programme on Measuring SDG data

1. Development, testing & documentation of data disaggregation techniques

2. SDG Data gap assessment and development of Statistics Strategic plans

3. Supporting the adoption of new & cost-effective data

4. Upgrading existing survey to produce FAO-relevant SDG indicators

5. Improving data dissemination, analysis & use of FAO-SDG indicators for decision-making
The 50by2030 initiative

• This initiative will support, both technically and financially, the implementation of Integrated Agricultural Surveys in 50 low-income and lower middle-income countries over the 10 years leading to 2030.

• The initiative thus aims to build strong national agricultural data systems that produce and use high quality and timely agricultural survey data for informing national policies, and for reporting on a number of SDG indicators, namely 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.4.1, 5.a.1, and 12.3.1.

• The initiative will scale up the experiences of FAO’s AGRIS Programme and the World Bank’s Living Standards Measurement Study-Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA).

• AGRIS in particular is modular agricultural survey programme, implemented over a 10-year cycle, which collects information on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the agricultural activities of the farm.
The Second Action Plan of Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics 2020-25

This will support countries across five main areas:

1. Expand the use of the innovative tools developed during the Phase 1
2. Additional research to bridge remaining methodological gaps and respond to new demands from countries;
3. Better use of data and sensitizing policy makers on how to read, interpret and use statistics;
4. Innovative capacity development strategies, using lessons learned from the Phase 1;
5. Improved advocacy, communication and dissemination for building greater awareness
Implementing FAO’s capacity development strategy for SDG indicators: Resource Mobilization

• Some initial resources have already been secured for the above three initiatives, although still well below their full funding envelope.

• The Umbrella Programme on SDG indicators is relatively the most underfunded initiative, although it is the only programme that provides support to the whole range of SDG indicators under FAO custodianship in a balanced way.

• FAO will continue its efforts in attracting the remaining funds necessary for the full implementation of all initiatives, despite the unfavourable global context where investment in statistics has perennially been low and currently attracts a mere 0.3% of ODA.

• Investing in better data and investing in SDG implementation are not in competition; rather, they are synergetic and ensure that scarce resources are put to good use and achieve the desired targets.
Question 4: How FAO can help countries monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress towards the SDG food insecurity target? Measuring food insecurity at the time of COVID-19

José Rosero Moncayo

(FAO’s Director of the Statistics Division)
I. The Voices of the Hungry initiative tailored to the COVID-19 pandemic

- The initiative successfully developed the Food Insecurity Experience Scale as a global standard and SDG indicator (2.1.2)
- Through the initiative FAO has collect FIES data for 140 countries since 2014 via the Gallup World Poll that have informed the SOFI since 2017.
- FAO has provided support to dozens of countries to integrate the FIES in their national surveys and an increasing number of countries is already reporting their own national FIES data.
  - 13 countries are already using and reporting FIES data
  - 56 countries have included the FIES in national surveys but still require training
  - 30 more countries are planning to include the FIES in national surveys
II. The Voices of the Hungry project tailored to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Voices of the Hungry Second Phase. Objective is:
  - Accelerate the data collection, analysis and reporting of Food Security Indicators, by enhancing capacities at country level.

- Aims to provide training and technical assistance to 20 additional countries in the next 2 years

- The outbreak of the COVID has introduced a new challenge: To measure the impact of the pandemic on food insecurity
  - The pandemic is disrupting food supply
  - The pandemic is causing the collapse of the global economy.
  - The pandemic is causing a surge in prices in countries dependent on food imports
III. The Voices of the Hungry project tailored to the COVID-19 pandemic

- In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, FAO has already used a special FIES module to monitor changes in food access: Recently, FAO conducted a mobile phone-based rapid panel survey covering households in Wuhan and other regions of China.

- FAO has launched an initiative to collect data at global scale to address the food insecurity impact of the COVID epidemic, using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).
  - Why global?. The COVID crisis is not a typical one. It is one that is impacting all countries and, within countries, not only the most vulnerable.
  - Why FIES?. The FIES tool is designed to measure FI at different levels of severity, not only in the most severe levels (hunger related), but at a more moderate levels which might compromise people’s ability to obtain a healthy diet.
IV. The Voices of the Hungry project tailored to the COVID-19 pandemic

- FAO aims to cover more than 100 countries in 3 rounds of data collection making use of remote data collection tools such as telephone surveys and computer or mobile phone based surveys.

- The initiative also promotes the use of the data by proposing to work closely with at least 20 national institutions for the join analysis of the data and the write up of national reports.

- FAO is already in consultations with resources partners to mobilize resources for this initiative.
Question 5: How can we increase political commitment on SDG monitoring?

Jenna Slotin

(Senior Director of the Policy and Strategy for the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data)
Why does political support matter?

Underinvestment leads to sub-optimal outcomes

- Piecemeal & unsustainable support
  - Data is patchy, poor quality, out-of-date
  - Weak data systems
    - Decrease trust in data
    - Decrease demand for data

Sub-optimal decisions & Sub-optimal outcomes
COVID-19 and Food Security Response in Kenya

**Need**
- Monitor availability of staple foods at sub-national level
- Identify and map food insecure households

**Gap**
- Lack of timely data on food availability and food insecurity

**Response**
- MoA set up a multi-stakeholder Situation Room
- Built a tool that pulls in timely data and presents it in a dashboard.
- Activate officials in all 47 counties to collect and validate data

**Future**
Establish sustainable system for collecting timely data on food availability and security connected to periodic surveys for
Make data a political priority

What systems, tools, capacities and partnerships are required at global and national level?

How can stakeholders here in Rome ensure that global institutions are supporting the data needs of the food and agriculture sector in the most strategic way?
Thank you

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Part IV – Questions and answers
Thank you

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