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# FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

## Thirty-second session

**Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 10–14 March 2014**

## Information note

### Regional action plan for the global strategy to improve agricultural and rural statistics

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## **I. Introduction**

1. In several international fora, concern has been expressed over the declining quantity and quality of agricultural statistics which are fundamental for policy-makers to take sound decisions on food security-related issues and to plan future food and agricultural development (e.g. ICAS, 2007; FAO's Independent External Evaluation, 2008; UN, 2009; OECD, 2009). There is also growing demand for data for developing policies to address issues like food price volatility, the transformation of agriculture, climate change, use of food for biofuels, food insecurity, sustainable agriculture development and the role of women in agriculture.
  
2. Against this backdrop, in 2009 the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), having representation from heads of National Statistical Offices, requested the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and the Friends of the Chair of UNSC to formulate a strategic plan to strengthen agricultural statistics. In response, the partners proposed the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.<sup>1</sup> The Strategy was developed through an international participative process involving the heads of the National Statistical Offices in the UNSC, the Ministers of Agriculture in the FAO Conference, the UN Regional Commissions and the regional development banks.
  
3. Following endorsement of the Strategy at UNSC in 2010, a global and regional approach was adopted to formulate a plan to implement the Strategy.<sup>2</sup> In the Asia and the Pacific region, FAO was joined by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in preparing a regional action plan for Asia and the Pacific in consultation with member countries. The Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics (SGAS) completed the draft of the regional action plan in September 2012, and the plan was subsequently endorsed by the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS) at its 24<sup>th</sup> session in October 2012, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its third session in December 2012 and the Global Steering Committee of the Global Strategy on 26 February 2013. This paper presents the progress made in the development of the Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific in the first phase of its implementation. This is a follow-up paper to the information paper presented at the 31<sup>st</sup> Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC/12/INF/7).<sup>3</sup>

## **II. The Global Strategy**

4. The ultimate goal of the Global Strategy is to contribute to greater food security, reduced food price volatility and improved income and well-being for rural populations through evidence-based policies in line with MDG 1, which aims to “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”. In addition, improved policies will contribute to the sustainable use of land and water resources and the adaptation of agricultural activities to meet the challenges of climate change and MDG 7, which aims to “ensure environmental sustainability”.
  
5. The Global Strategy provides a framework to enable national and international statistical systems to produce the basic information needed to guide decision-making in the twenty-first century. The Strategy also addresses emerging data needs, such as those caused by the recent spikes in food prices, and the growing concern over the impact of agriculture on the environment and climate change. The Global Strategy is based on three pillars:

- establishing a minimum set of core data that countries will disseminate on a regular basis to meet current and emerging demands;

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<sup>1</sup> Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics  
(<http://www.fao.org/docrep/015/am082e/am082e00.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Action plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics  
(<http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i3082e/i3082e.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/024/mc836e.pdf>

- integrating agriculture into national statistical systems in order to meet policy-makers' and other data users' expectations by linking statistical information across the economic, social and environmental domains; and
- fostering the sustainability of agricultural statistical systems through improved governance and statistical capacity development.

6. The Global Strategy defines a comprehensive conceptual framework for the production and use of agricultural and rural statistics, keeping in view the requirements of diverse data users. The main plank of the conceptual framework of the Strategy is to establish integrated systems to collect and disseminate data and focus on the minimum set of core data. The Global Strategy identifies the tools to be used to achieve this integration. The foundation for all data collection will be the development and establishment of an integrated survey framework and "master sample frame" for agricultural statistics in each country. The integration of data across economic, social and environmental domains will also be ensured by an integrated database and data management system for all official statistics related to agriculture.

### **III. Global Action Plan and its components**

7. UNSC, while endorsing the Strategy in February 2010, urged FAO and the Friends of the Chair of UNSC to develop a Global Action Plan aimed at strengthening national agricultural statistical systems. It recommended that the plan include the following components:

- a comprehensive technical assistance programme;
- an articulated training programme; and
- a well-targeted research agenda.

8. In view of regional specificities, varying levels of statistical development and operational issues, a global and regional approach was used to prepare the Action Plan(s). FAO has been leading the preparation of the Global Action Plan, which was undertaken in parallel with the development of the regional plan for Africa, the pilot region.

9. The Global Action Plan defines the steps to be taken and the overall responsibilities at the global, regional and national levels, with the understanding that each region will need different levels of support. The Global Action Plan sets a global framework, norms and statistical standards which will avoid duplication and facilitate the establishment of links and synergies with other global and regional initiatives on statistics.

10. The Global Action Plan was presented at the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the FAO Conference, held from 25 June to 2 July 2011, where it received strong support from FAO member countries.

11. The Global Action Plan recommends that regional implementation plans have a long-term perspective (i.e. from 10 to 15 years) and follow a phased approach, with the first phase covering the period 2011–2017. The implementation of the Global Action Plan is guided by the Global Steering Committee, comprising resource and implementing partner institutions,<sup>4</sup> country representatives, and representatives of farmers' organizations.

### **IV. Development of the Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific**

12. At its second session in December 2010, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics unanimously endorsed FAO's proposal to develop an Implementation Plan for Asia and the Pacific. The Committee established SGAS as a subgroup under ESCAP's Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics to provide guidance on the development of the Regional Implementation Plan, identifying short-term and long-term priorities and establishing milestones. It reported regularly to member countries through APCAS and ESCAP's Committee on Statistics.

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<sup>4</sup> Partners are the UK Department for International Development (DfID), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The World Bank Group, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, PARIS21, Eurostat and the Italian Corporation.

13. Under the SGAS, a drafting committee was formed in 2012 to outline the framework for a Regional Action Plan (renamed from the earlier Regional Implementation Plan) that would list the key outputs to be accomplished in the first phase from 2013–2017. The committee decided upon a set of 11 regional outputs that match with the four overall outputs of the Global Action Plan. The 11 regional outputs include:

- formation of a regional governance structure;
- identification of a country-specific minimum set of agricultural and rural statistics by each country based on the minimum set of core data contained in the Global Strategy;
- creation of sector strategic plans for agricultural and rural statistics (SSPARS) as a component of the national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS) to provide a national framework for implementation;
- improved political support by decision-makers for agricultural and rural statistics as shown by providing budget and resources;
- strengthened legal and coordination mechanisms and frameworks for agricultural and rural statistics;
- enhanced capacity of National Statistical Systems (NSS) to advocate for adequate resources to develop and compile a country-specific minimum set of agricultural and rural statistics;
- increased ability of NSS to access and use information and communication technology to produce and disseminate a minimum set of agricultural and rural statistics;
- improved competencies of the NSS to produce and disseminate a minimum set of agricultural and rural statistics in accordance with international standards and good practices through training and technical assistance;
- strengthened capacity of national and regional training institutions to develop and deliver relevant, efficient and effective training in agricultural and rural statistics;
- improved capacity of countries to adopt cost-effective and reliable methods for producing a minimum set of agricultural and rural statistics; and
- increased capacity of countries to use agricultural statistics to meet priority needs for policy-making, operating efficient markets and fostering sound investment.

14. The drafting process for the Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific was a collaborative effort among implementing partners (FAO, ESCAP), ADB (as an associated partner contributing to the implementation of the Global Strategy) and member countries in the region. The technical assistance and training components of the Plan are being led by FAO and ESCAP, while ADB is contributing to the development of research activities. In preparing the Plan, consideration was given to the results of assessments of country capacity to produce agricultural statistics. In September 2012, the final draft of the Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific was completed and distributed for review and further endorsement to relevant regional bodies for agricultural statistics. Based upon the guidance received during the 24<sup>th</sup> session in the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agriculture Statistics of FAO in Da Lat, Viet Nam in October 2012, the revised Regional Action Plan was presented to the ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its third session in December 2012 and was appropriately endorsed. Ultimate approval of the Regional Action Plan was subsequently given by the Global Steering Committee of the Global Strategy on 26 February 2013.

## **V. Implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific**

### Regional governance under the Global Strategy

15. The first envisaged output of the Regional Action Plan was to establish a regional governance mechanism for the Global Strategy. Since December 2012, a Regional Office in FAO-RAP in Bangkok, Thailand has been leading the implementation of the Regional Action Plan and coordinating activities of partners.

16. A Regional Steering Committee (RSC) was constituted in April 2013. It serves as the ultimate decision-making body for the implementation of the Regional Action Plan and oversees the use of funds from the Global Trust Fund allocated to the region in February 2013. The RSC is composed of

representatives from member countries (two countries from each of the four subregions – East and Northeast Asia, the Pacific, Southeast Asia and South and Southwest Asia), implementing partners, the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC), one donor representative (DfID), one training institution (Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute) and one research institution (Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions). Country representatives serve for five years, with half the membership being replaced every 2.5 years. The current membership is: China, Fiji, India, Japan, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. The RSC makes every effort to take decisions by consensus. Failing that, a simple majority vote is used.

#### Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific

17. The first meeting of the RSC was held from 9–10 April 2013 at the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand. It endorsed the work plan and budget for 2013, and approved the selection of the initial set of countries for implementation of country-level activities in 2013. Those countries, which included Bhutan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, were selected based upon criteria developed by the RSC. The criteria included the country's current capacity to produce agricultural statistics and its commitment to improve the range and quality of its statistics, among others. Samoa was later included for implementation in 2013, following further discussions with the donor, DfID and the SPC.

18. A second meeting of the RSC was held on 1 November 2013 at the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand. Participants at the meeting endorsed progress made and also approved the selection of another set of countries to participate in the activities of the Regional Action Plan in 2014. Those countries are Fiji, Georgia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar.

#### Implementation of the Regional Action Plan in Asia and the Pacific

19. Initial country assessments were carried out during late 2011 and early 2012 in Asia and the Pacific through a self-reported standard questionnaire, and results were presented in APCAS in October 2012. Capacity indicators were built based on information furnished by many countries, and they were validated with national counterparts. The governments of the initial four countries and Bangladesh (an anchor country in the inception phase of another project) designated National Focal Points to start country-level activities, and expert missions are being organized to carry out in-depth assessments of the agricultural statistics systems in these countries.

20. The assessments began in November 2013 and are being carried out with full partnership of all stakeholders following a standard methodology. The results of the assessments will be the basis for further technical assistance to countries to build Sector Strategic Plans for Agriculture and Rural Statistics (SSPARS) and, subsequently, a national framework for implementation. The output of the in-depth assessment process is expected to culminate in a country assessment report which will be reviewed by the RSC to consider what further work should be undertaken in the country under the Global Strategy initiative. These assessment reports and the strategy documents prepared at the country level will be accessible to all of the resource partners. They could provide a sense of direction and convergence in development planning and funding.

21. In the latter half of 2013, two regional workshops were organized by the Statistical Institute for Asia and Pacific (SIAP), ESCAP (with technical contributions from FAO and the ADB).

22. The first workshop – “Building Training Resources for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics: Towards Country-specific Minimum Set of Core Data” – was held at Daejeon, Republic of Korea, during 5–9 August 2013. The workshop aimed to train trainers to be part of the capacity-building effort at the national level. It focused on understanding data items in the minimum set of core data and being able to identify and prioritize a minimum set of core data at the country level. The workshop was attended by participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

23. The second regional workshop – “Building Training Resources for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics: Sampling Methods for Agricultural Statistics – Review of Current Practices” – was held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran during 10–17 September 2013. The workshop aimed to train trainers to be part of the capacity-building effort at the national level. It focused on practices and

issues in applying sampling methods to collect data on agricultural statistics. It was attended by participants from Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

24. The ADB has undertaken and funded a range of activities at regional and country levels which contribute to the overall objectives of the Global Strategy. It has worked in four Asian countries – Bhutan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives and Viet Nam – to assess the statistical needs of each country and to prepare Country Action Plans. ADB is also conducting a number of methodological studies. These include:

- Use of an Agricultural Land Information System developed by AFSIS to derive land-use statistics (Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Philippines).
- Comparative Analysis of Rural and Urban Households (Bhutan).
- Comparative Analysis of Estimates from Household Surveys, Agriculture Census and Administrative Reporting Systems (Lao People’s Democratic Republic).
- Innovative Techniques to Derive Rice Area and Production Estimates, including improved crop-cutting techniques (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam).

## **VI. Southwest Pacific**

25. In terms of the implementation of the Regional Action Plan, Samoa was selected for inclusion as one of the initial countries for In-depth Country Assessment, while Fiji has been selected for inclusion in 2014. Samoa also participated in each of the two regional training workshops referred to in paragraphs 22 and 23 above. Both Samoa and Fiji are expected to participate in training workshops to be held in 2014.

## **VII. Conclusion**

26. Given the long-term nature of this project (10-15 years) and the critical importance of in-depth country assessments to the process, considerable effort has been expended to develop and document detailed procedures to assist the consultants undertaking these assessments and to ensure a consistent approach to the assessments across countries and over time. These efforts and resource constraints delayed the start of the in-country work.

27. The pace of implementation activities under the Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific is expected to increase substantially, as soon as results from the in-depth assessment reports of selected countries become available. These reports are expected to attract greater government attention and donor funding to improve the current situation in the short run, as well as build sustainable capacity to produce agricultural statistics in the long run.

28. The Global Strategy is a long-term effort to improve statistical systems. Tangible impact can be expected in due course. A system to monitor and evaluate the impact of the activities is being developed. Methodological work to develop a framework and suite of indicators for monitoring the progress in building country capacities has been completed. Planned periodic assessments will track progress over time in various dimensions and elements of capacities. Sector Strategic Plans for Agriculture and Rural Statistics will provide a sense of direction to the statistical system and avoid dispersal of scarce resources.