

FAO Regional CountrySTAT Advanced Administrator Training Workshop, Lusaka-Zambia

DAY ONE: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2012

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The day started with introductions from all participants. Each delegate identified themselves as well as the institutions they represented and their nationalities. They included officials from the different FAO country offices in the English-speaking sub-region, the FAO headquarters in Rome, and representatives from the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

SESSION 1: Workshop objectives and activities status (Paul N’Goma-Kimbatsa/Julia Stone)

PAUL NG’OMA-KIMBATSA

Paul gave the introductory remarks on the five-day training programme. He outlined the workshop objectives as well as what was expected of all the participants.

JULIA STONE

Julia outlined the historic perspective of the programme. She also gave a progress report on each member country and tabulated the countries that had expressed interest in joining the programme. She touched on some of the key benefits of the new CountrySTAT system, including new/ more functionalities, easy usage for administrators and absence of constraints surrounding software license issues.

SESSION TWO: Presentation on the new FAOSTAT (Fabio Grita)

Fabio’s presentation was online-based; live on the internet as he demonstrated how the FAOSTAT appears on the website. He explained why the site is very interactive, citing the presentation of dynamic charts and maps of the member countries as being among the factors.

He ran through the step-by-step process of how to use the site on the internet. There are downloads that you can interactively select as a user, he said, while the Compare Data function enables the users to compare countries' domains and resources.

You could check for statistics for each commodity in the region, or the commodity by country. You can build your food security indicators and you are able to plan for food security.

The session was highly interactive, with participants asking several questions. Prominent ones evolved around the usage of the data analysis tool, how reliable it was and whether many people understood how to use it.

SESSION THREE: CountrySTAT IT Module - Fabio Grita and Massimiliano Solina

This session was initially billed to be co-hosted with Yann Laurent, but Fabio presented it with Massimiliano as Yann had not yet joined the workshop. Fabio explained in detail the IT module for the CountrySTAT programme and outlined the advantages of the new system, the FENIX architecture.

While presenting a diagramme for the high-level FENIX architecture stage by stage, he argued that we don't need to structure our data base in a way that includes all the information but we can add more programmes for other issues.

He also explained the symbiotic relationship between the high level and the low level data base. He provided a list of all the technologies used in FENIX to make the architecture of CountryStat; among them, OpenLayers, eclipse Birt, GVVT, Java, Hibernat, Continuum.

Massimiliano explained the countrySTAT user interface; how all the components feed into the countryStat database.

It was another in interactive session. Main questions included how to link useful tables to the CountrySTAT database, the need for a document to explain how to go about accessing the API and how many users visit the site per day.

SESSION FOUR: Official opening of the workshop

The official opening was initially scheduled to take place in the morning but was deferred to the afternoon. It started with Julia giving a brief introduction of the delegates in terms of which countries were represented at the conference.

FAO Country Representative AD SPIJKERS: In a speech he read for FAO director general, Joze Grenziano da Silva, the country representative said FAO

attaches great importance to statistical information and capacity-building programmes in member states.

Agriculture and Livestock deputy Minister NICHOLAS BANDA: In a speech he read for his minister, Emmanuel Chenda, Mr Banda pledged the government's continuous commitment to building capacity to facilitate easier access to agricultural statistics and enable evidence-based decision-making.

DAY TWO: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2012

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SESSION ONE: Statistics module (Angela Piersante)

Angela highlighted a number of issues pertaining to the Statistics module, explained the Statistical Reference Manual and also spoke about the basic concepts in the Statistics module.

There were no questions from the delegates.

COUNTRIES' EXPERIENCES

ABNER INGOSI – KENYA: Spoke on the best practices in Data Harmonisation and disclosed that his country has an operational structure in place, comprising a Secretariat and a Technical Working Group.

He explained that all submissions are made by data producers prior to the meeting of the Technical Working Group and the Secretariat. The meeting only serves to harmonise the data.

BENJAMIN BANDA – MALAWI: The Technical Working Group is basically there to help harmonise national information communication and make comparisons for key data such as prices. It is also there for reviewing data.

The Secretariat draws a draft agenda or correspondence and sends it the members of the Technical Working Group before the meeting. Other experts in the field of statistics can also be contacted. The common rule is to ensure we give the most detailed classification from the group.

MONASSE JORGE NGULUVE – MOZAMBIQUE: With the assistance of a translator from Portuguese to English, Monasse gave an overview of the CountrySTAT website in Mozambique. A national Secretariat of six members and the Data Reference Group of 12 members have since been created. The data is supplied by the Data Reference Group comprising members from various

stakeholders, including the Customs Authority, and compiled by the Secretariat. There are now 56 data sets available on the Mozambique CountrySTAT site.

No questions were asked over the three country experiences, except one delegate wanted to find out what challenges had been encountered during the CountrySTAT programme implementation in Mozambique.

SESSION TWO: E-LEARNING MODULE ON STATISTICS (Angela Piersante)

Angela started by defining e-learning as the application of computer-based education or knowledge. It involves the usage of the internet where materials are exchanged with the learners and presents a real opportunity for people to learn from published data and metadata. She also highlighted some key lessons learnt from e-learning.

Participants were challenged to ensure they created links to the CountrySTAT website on all their data websites, be it the Central Statistical Office, the Customs and Revenue Authorities or the Agriculture ministry. This would help raise the visibility of CountrySTAT and ensure wider usage by the population.

There was also a suggestion for the need to create a BLOG on the internet for all CountrySTAT members where they could share experiences on various issues. A question could be popped on the blog and each CountrySTAT member would be expected to give their country's experiences. It would greatly contribute to e-learning.

DAY THREE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2012

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SESSION TWO: DRAFT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY (Julia Stone)

Julia gave a general framework of the communication strategy, and defined the importance of communication to CountrySTAT. It ensures co-ordination and efficiency. Co-ordination is the basic part of almost everything that you do in CountrySTAT; from organising to working within the technical groups and secretariats. We should learn to create awareness, to deal with the media, to ensure in each country there is a one-stop centre for official statistics on food and agriculture.

She gave a situation analysis of the CountrySTAT communication department. From inception of CountrySTAT, she said, co-ordination and communication have been major challenges. We had communication officers who were working within

the framework of CountrySTAT or the ministry of Agriculture but would disappear after developing strategies for the project.

She challenged delegates to identify the most effective communication channels in their countries. Radio may be useful in one country but may not be as much in another country; it may be the newspaper or the website. We need to identify these and focus on what works for our countries.

Further, there is need to develop strong relationships with private stakeholders and engage all stakeholders. We need to raise visibility at both national levels and at FAO level. We have to make use of our focal point persons in the ministries.

Participants complained of lack of reliable access to the internet as the main factor hampering their effectiveness. They called for financial support to the national technical working groups to ensure the work was done efficiently. The delegates also requested for some interactive country meetings with communication specialists within the FAO as a practical tool for understanding the intricacies of the communication strategies.

DAY FIVE: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2012

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SESSION ONE: WORK PLANS FOR 2013 - Julia Stone

She outlined key activities for the new year. Some are new, some have already been seen. They include national refresher training of focal points, national user seminars for a day, advocacy sensitisation seminar for a day or two, raising visibility through communication activities. Kenya had a recent successful case with a lot of photos and activities, she disclosed.

She provided a specimen for the work plan, with columns outlining a number of activities, the expected results for each activity and the resource persons required. This helps you to be able to plan, to look forward a little bit and make the data a little bit more useful to every user.

Constantly looking at your site and reviewing your time line should be a continuous process. She commended countries whose secretariats meet at least once a month saying it is a good practice. She ended by asking delegates to come up with valid suggestions on the work plans and timings: when would the figures be ready, when would particular data be uploaded, etc.

Julia's presentation and template were generally lauded by the delegates as a job well-done. But they expressed misgivings on the implementation due to the absence of a budget, the intricacies of arranging logistics and the attendant 'bureaucratic' procedures.

Who pays for the meetings? At times, in countries like Kenya, all invited officials to a meeting must be paid a sitting allowance; there is nothing for free.

An appeal was sent by the delegates to FAO Rome to step into the problem of logistics and start allocating a specific budget to CountrySTAT meetings. Every time the CountrySTAT meeting is called, participants complained that they are asked to look for the cheapest hotel which they said takes away from the quality of the meetings.

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