FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

Countries: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Republic of Uzbekistan

Project Title :

Support for the implementation and development of the CountrySTAT Framework in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) countries

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The statistics and data information systems for some countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member countries in the agriculture sector are archaic and fail to capture vital statistical information with regard to vulnerability, food security and livelihood related elements. In most countries several national bodies are involved to varying degrees in the collection and dissemination of statistical data on the rural sector. Thus, the lack of an integrated and efficient system for the collection and dissemination of statistical information from the rural sector, as well as data from various sources, upon which many decisions on agricultural policy are based, sometimes proved divergent, even contradictory. This situation is disadvantageous to decision making across the agricultural sector.

In recent years, Afghanistan has seen significant changes in its Central Statistical Organization. This includes the expansion of its staff and improved statistical skills as a result of collaborations with ILO, UNECE and OECD. There is however a need to ensure that the resulting strengthened statistics are accessible. This requires improving the delivery and access to statistics related to food and agriculture to inform national planning policies related to the country's agricultural development. It is to address these problems that the high level authorities of ECO Headquarters requested support for the establishment and development of a system for the harmonization, integration and dissemination of agricultural statistics of good quality in ECO member countries.

The project will focus on the three following areas:

- Strengthening of technical capacity of national staff of ECO HQ and in member countries on the principles of using CountrySTAT.

- Implementation and development of the CountrySTAT system in Afghanistan which will serve as the pilot country and resource basis for the expansion to other countries.
- Preparation of a full-fledged project proposal for implementation and development of CountrySTAT in all remaining countries over a period of 3 to 5 years.

The third stage will be used as the basis for mobilization of donor funds to expand the assistance and implement CountrySTAT in other countries. ECO will also deploy every effort to secure donor commitment for funding of follow-up projects and activities.

The project will cover the services of international experts on the three pillars of CountrySTAT (Statistics, IT and Communications) and national consultants. It will also cover the costs of Technical Support Services (TSS) from FAO including through field missions, temporary secretarial support, national and regional training, contracts, materials and equipment.

The project is expected to contribute to help Governments of the participating countries to strengthen their statistics and information systems, for better decision making and to participate in sharing information and data in agriculture at the regional as well as global level.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Context

The Economic Cooperation Organization, (ECO) which was established in 1985, is an intergovernmental regional organization. Its purpose is to promote economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states which include the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan. ECO's successor was the Regional Cooperation for Development which was founded in 1964 and ceased to exist in 1979. All the ECO states are also member-states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), while ECO itself has observer status in the OIC since 1995.

ECO is an organization that is thriving and growing. The member states have been collaborating over the past 12 years in order to accelerate the pace of regional development through their common endeavours. ECO has embarked on several projects in priority sectors of its cooperation including energy, trade, transportation, and agriculture. Over the past decade the member countries have been working to harmonize measurements, classifications and methodologies in an effort to ensure consistency regionally.

This presents an excellent opportunity for staff to gain capacity on using and implementing a harmonized regional platform for the dissemination of agricultural statistics. The concept project proposal has been considered in detail at a series of high level expert meetings of ECO National Statistical Offices, consecutively, thorough 2009-2010. The draft project proposal has been

considered and approved on ECO part by 3rd Meeting of Heads of NSO of ECO in 2011. It has also been approved and recommended for implementation by 21st RPC of ECO.

1.2 Sectoral Context

1.2.1. Development priorities and the MDGs

The project is in line with the ECO Framework of Cooperation in Statistics, which was adopted during the first meeting of the ECO Heads of National Statistical Offices in January 2008, which aims at reinforcing regional cooperation in statistics in order to facilitate planning, policy-making and regional initiatives through the provision of comparable and timely statistics; to harmonize classifications, concepts, definitions; to adopt international best practices; and to promote improvements in the official statistics. Based on this framework, regional cooperation in statistics will be intensified and guided by principles of practical utility, quality, transparency, and accessibility, in conformance with international standards. [1]

The specific objectives of the Framework are the following:

a. to enhance and intensify statistical cooperation among ECO National Statistical Offices (NSOs);
b. to harmonise the definitions, classifications and measurements of statistics in ECO region
c. to promote the production of comparable statistics and the development of regional statistical indicators;
d. to promote adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission.
e. to support ECO policy-making bodies (e.g COM, RPC, CPR) through the provision of comparable, updated and timely statistics and to coordinate and promote ECO Secretariat positions on statistical issues in relevant international fora;
f. to enhance the technical and management capabilities of ECO NSOs;
g. to promote statistical professionalism;
h. to advocate greater governmental support and commitment to the priority statistical programs, projects and activities of the member ECO countries;
i. to promote improvements in the official statistics generated by the member countries.

The project is linked to the Strategic Objective *H – Improved Food Security and Better Nutrition* of the FAO's Strategic Framework. More specifically, the assistance to be provided will directly contribute to the FAO's Organizational Result *H4 – Strengthened capacity of member countries and other stakeholders to generate, manage, analyse and access data and statistics for improved food security and better nutrition*.

1.2.2   NMTPF/CPF and UNDAF

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[1] ECO Plan of Action for Statistics

There is no regional FAO medium term priority framework that covers all ECO countries. Some countries have developed national Medium term priority frameworks which include improved agricultural statistics and information as an area of priority.

Namely, Afghanistan's NMTPF was formulated for the period 2009-2013. Although it is currently being updated, the proposed project would directly contribute to the implementation of *Output 4.3: Enhanced government capacity to collect, analyze and disseminate information on agriculture production, markets, price, inputs and household access to food*.

Similarly, for Azerbaijan, the proposed assistance would contribute to the NMTPF 2010–2012 and in particular to the activity *3.4.6. Capacity building in data collection/analysis in the areas of agriculture and food security.*

2. RATIONALE

2.1 Problems/Issues to be Addressed

Considering the importance of the agriculture sector, which is important to the GDP in many of the ECO member states (32% for Afghanistan), a system for dissemination is lacking which would provide a comprehensive and current view of statistics on food and agriculture for the region. Knowledge and information sharing on agriculture data and information in the ECO region has been low during the past decade due to technological gaps and lack of funding. An agricultural statistical database could have helped highlight specificities of agricultural commodity markets in the region.

Currently the role of statistical information is crucial for assessing achievements and the institution of choice can inform better decision making for the allocation of resources. A deeper understanding of the agricultural sector is needed to meet the information needs which are constantly growing and urgent, in quantity and quality, of individual economic actors to base their intervention strategies on reliable and current statistical data.

Moreover, it could enable regional farmers to easily access a wide range of data. Sharing such knowledge and disseminating accurate and reliable statistical data and information to remote farmers would help them to effectively market their produce, make good use of a modern supply chain system, and wold bring more dynamics to rural farming, whilst creating more jobs and reducing the poverty level in the agricultural sector.

Furthermore, it should be noted that new types of data needs have emerged in recent years, particularly those related to issues including poverty, food security and vulnerability, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of mainstreaming gender, etc.. Regionally and internationally, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member countries have made commitments related to food security and the fight against poverty. These include:

> ➢ The World Food Summit (WFS) and the WFS after 5 years;
> ➢ The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Indeed the various institutions in ECO countries collect and carry out the primary data processing, analysis and dissemination of data for the parameters within their respective areas. However, the various departments work in isolation, the information is scattered and no comprehensive synthesis is carried out at national level. Thus policy makers receive only fragmentary data, difficult to use for rational and quick decision-making. This situation is unsatisfactory both for the Governments and for the various stakeholders.

The entities that are directly affected by the problem are the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and regional end users of statistical data and information on agriculture, including on food security, livelihood and pricing on agricultural commodities. The end users are farmers; institutional entities working in the field of agriculture, as well as entities whose activities are linked to agriculture. Indirectly, the problem affects donors, international partners, UN agencies whose activities are involved in the agricultural sector of the ECO region.

In the specific case of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, after almost two decades of war and conflict and the ensuing devastation, the Government in collaboration with its development partners is attempting to rebuild and rehabilitate the nation and its institutions. Economic dynamics are gradually changing, and economic growth for 2010/2011 stands at an impressive 8.2% of the GDP. To pursue an evidence based approach to making far reaching decisions covering the entire span of economic and social dimensions, the Government needs reliable, comprehensive and timely data.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is the central agency responsible for the collection and dissemination of data in Aghanistan. The CSO was established in 1973. At the time of its establishment the CSO was assigned the responsibility for the collection, analysis and publication of secondary data - largely administrative data provided by sectoral ministries. At a later date it took on the task of compiling key statistical series such as National Accounts, Consumer Prices Indices and Population and demographic data. It took on the role of coordinating statistical activities across all agencies of government. CSO benefited of donor support, advice and training. Following the Soviet take over in 1979, the emphasis shifted to the collection of data on agriculture, transport and communications and statistics on the internal movement of food and non food items throughout the country. The organization of the CSO was largely patterned on the Soviet statistical structures, emphasizing a compartmentalized and top down system where concepts and methods focused on complete reporting.[2] As with most government agencies and institutions in Afghanistan, the CSO has suffered and is attempting to rebuild itself under difficult circumstances. This has included the expansion of its staff and improved statistical skills as a result of collaborations with ILO, UNECE and OECD. To keep this momentum it is important for the country to continue to move forward and work toward having a well coordinated system for the dissemination of agricultural statistics to ensure the continued harmonization of concepts and methods on agricultural data within the country, and for the ECO region as a whole.

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[2] International Activities of UNSD with ECO

The main issues and constraints to be addressed are building capacity for the management of agricultural statistics using international standards and methods that would allow for improvements in the quality of data disseminated and directly impact comparability of data and the level of analysis that can be performed related to food security in the member countries.

CountrySTAT is a web-based information technology system for food and agriculture statistics at the national and sub national levels. It provides decision-makers access to statistics across thematic areas such as production, prices, trade and consumption. This supports analysis, informed policy-making and monitoring with the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

Each CountrySTAT system is nationally owned and managed. The focal institution in each national government leads data coordination, technical working group meetings, and trainings to ensure that the system has reliable data.

The project will thus support training in the use of CountrySTAT for ECO countries at regional level. The national and regional staff will be trained for effective control of tools, concepts, methods and classifications developed by FAO. The project will also establish a functional system in Afghanistan who can lead the way by demonstrating success in the area of dissemination of agricultural statistics that respects regional objectives. The further improvements to statistical capacity on agriculture in Afghanistan will allow the country with its recent positive economic developments to be truly engaged in regional statistics due to improved access to data that is comparable, accessible and supports the objectives of the ECO Framework for the Cooperation in Statistics.

With the ECO region's unutilized potential of USD 320 billion capital inflows in the regional agriculture sector, the importance of the implementation of this project is considered critical.

It is expected that the project will be able to catalyze the mobilization from Governments and donors of follow-up funds and investments for the implementation and development of the CountrySTAT system in other ECO Member States with the final objective of:

- Helping create a database at the regional level which will combine statistical data from Member States;
- Facilitating collaboration, sharing and exchange of data;
- Ensuring the archiving and dissemination of statistical data;
- Responding to requests for complex data from different areas;
- Enabling data exchange among member states, between member states and the Secretariat of ECO, FAO and the Member States.

2.2 Stakeholders and Target Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries of the project are:

- ECO and the national Statistical Institutions which will benefit from increased technical capacity of their staff to run CountrySTAT.

- The Central Statistical Organization and CountrySTAT team in Afghanistan which will benefit from advanced training in FAOSTAT and be supported in the establishment and running of the system in a way that is cost effective, timely, and uses reliable methods and technologies for producing and disseminating better quality food and agriculture statistics.

The indirect beneficiaries will be:
- ECO regional networking partners with which ECO may effectively share the agricultural data and knowledge to be obtained from the present project.
- The policy makers, researchers, private sector and other users who will be able to easily access available country data.
- The Governments in ECO countries will be better positioned to attract development investment with improvements in access to a wide range of data of good quality directly related to the countries' agriculture sector.
- The private sector, donors, and NGOs can make evidence-based and improved investments decisions.
- The farmers of the ECO countries will benefit from improved policies and investments in agriculture for increased productivity.
- The people of the ECO countries who will have increased food security due to increased food availability from increased productivity.

The project will promote a broad partnership/alliance with both technical and financial partners of CountrySTAT (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation BMGF, UEMOA, EAC, AfDB, IFPRI, OECD/PARIS21, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark, Statistics Finland, Statistics Iceland, Cooperazione Italiana, World Bank, WFP, AOAD, European Union, African Union, UNSD, UNECE, DevInfo, etc.).