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THE AGRICULTURAL MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM (AMIS)

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I. Introduction

A. Background and structure of AMIS

1. The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) was launched by the G20 under the French Presidency in June 2011 as part of the Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agricultureⁱ. The initiative came in response to sharp price spikes and swings in international prices of basic food commodities, which exposed a number of weaknesses in market information systems and the coordination of actions and policy responses. Weaknesses included lack of up-to-date and reliable data and information on crop production, utilization, stocks and export availability.
2. AMIS held its inception meeting on 15 and 16 September 2011 at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, which concluded with the adoption of the AMIS Terms of Referenceⁱⁱ and the Rules of Procedureⁱⁱⁱ. The meeting elected France as the first Chair of AMIS and Mr Abdolreza Abbassian, from FAO, as Secretary.
3. AMIS was tasked to monitor the global supply and demand situation of key food commodities (wheat, maize, rice and soybeans) and to promote policy coordination when global markets indicate a high food security risk. This dual objective led to the creation of two groups within AMIS:
 - i) The Global Food Market Information Group, composed of technical experts from AMIS participant countries to assemble relevant market and policy information; and
 - ii) The Rapid Respond Forum, composed of senior representatives of AMIS participant countries to facilitate policy discussions in times of market uncertainty with the objective to enhance policy coordination.
4. Both groups are supported by an inter-agency Secretariat, hosted by FAO in the Trade and Markets Division (EST), which is composed of several international organizations and entities.¹ The work of the Secretariat is governed by a Steering Committee, chaired by FAO.
5. In order to ensure that AMIS participant countries represent a large share of global food markets, G20 members and Spain (as a permanent G20 observer) invited seven additional countries to participate in AMIS. These are Egypt, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Philippines, Thailand, Ukraine and Viet Nam. As a group, the 28 AMIS participant countries (with the European Union representing all its member states collectively) account for at least 80 percent of global production of the covered crops.

II. Results Framework of AMIS

6. The work of the Secretariat is guided by an Umbrella Programme^{iv} that provides the strategic framework of AMIS activities, as approved by AMIS participant countries and the Secretariat Steering Committee.
7. In line with the AMIS Terms of Reference, this work consists of enhancing the quality and availability of data and information on global markets of the four covered commodities; analysing the global market situation and outlook; engaging in capacity building activities at country level; and promoting policy dialogue among AMIS participants, especially in times of market uncertainty.

¹ Apart from FAO, the Secretariat currently includes the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Grains Council (IGC – joined in 2012), the Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM) (joined in 2016), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Food Program (WFP), the World Bank Group, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the United Nations High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (UN HLTF).

8. The results framework of AMIS for the period 2011–2019 recognizes five main objectives:
- a) **Collection of available market and policy information**, including the construction, maintenance and continuous improvement of three collaborative databases for commodity balances, policy information and market prices. Main outputs are the [AMIS Market Database](#); the [AMIS Policy Database](#); and the update of selected price series of the [GIEWS Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Tool](#).
 - b) **Development of relevant methodologies and indicators** through research on estimating crop production, stocks and utilization as well as on market and policy drivers to better understand global market developments. Main outputs include a [harmonized methodology](#) for the collection of AMIS commodity balances; the [AMIS Indicator Portal](#); as well as several research studies (see list of documents below).
 - c) **Strengthening of market information systems in participating countries** by providing guidelines, training materials and hands-on support to national focal points and other stakeholders to generate good market information and implement new methodologies and indicators. Under this objective, the Secretariat has engaged in continuous exchanges (via phone, email or personal visits) with AMIS focal points for their monthly data submissions; [two multi-year capacity building projects](#) (targeting India, Nigeria, Philippines and Thailand) to improve data collection and monitoring systems; and an [Exchange Programme](#) with selected AMIS participants (targeting China, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Thailand and Viet Nam) to train focal points in compiling AMIS commodity balances.
 - d) **Information dissemination for improved policy making** by helping policy makers and other stakeholders to better assess the global market situation and outlook. Main outputs include the [AMIS Market Monitor](#); two meetings per year of the [Global Food Market Information Group](#); and various types of outreach events organized by the Secretariat (see list of events below).
 - e) **Promotion of policy dialogue** by ensuring regular exchanges between AMIS participants and the sharing of knowledge and best practices. Main outputs that have been organized or facilitated by the Secretariat include one meeting per year of the [AMIS Rapid Response Forum](#); informal policy dialogue among AMIS participants in the case of market uncertainty; and country-to-country exchanges on specific technical issues.
9. The Secretariat has regularly presented progress reports of its operations to the Global Food Market Information Group and the AMIS Rapid Response Forum. In addition, two independent evaluations^v have been conducted for externally funded projects that both found the work of AMIS to be highly relevant and of excellent quality.
10. Finally, the Secretariat has conducted two user surveys for its main publication, the AMIS Market Monitor. Both surveys confirmed the relevance of the report for monitoring global food markets.

III. Activities and outputs

11. In delivering the programme of work of AMIS, member organizations of the Secretariat have contributed to the operation of the initiative both by providing in-kind support (estimated at around USD 5.5 million, mostly staff time, IT infrastructure and meeting logistics since 2011) and financial contributions (totalling USD 1.6 million as of January 2018). Participant countries have also supported the work by seconding staff (estimated at around USD 1 million) and providing project funding (totalling USD 1.7 million as of January 2018). Of the six countries that granted financial support, four agreed to pool their resources in a multi-donor trust fund to reduce administrative costs and facilitate longer-term planning.

A. Meeting and events

12. The AMIS Secretariat organizes several types of events. It is mandated to convene two meetings per year of the Global Food Market Information Group, which are usually held at FAO headquarters in Rome. The Secretariat also organizes, in close collaboration with the respective Chair, at least one meeting per year of the Rapid Response Forum. Apart from these regular events, the Secretariat organizes various types of research seminars, expert meetings and training workshops.

13. The Secretariat has organized the following meetings and events since the establishment of AMIS in 2011.

Global Food Market Information Group:

- [First session](#): 9-10 February 2012, Rome
- [Second session](#): 2-4 October 2012, Rome
- [Third session](#): 23-24 April 2013, Paris
- [Fourth session](#): 1-2 October 2013, Rome
- [Fifth session](#): 20-21 May 2014, Mexico City
- [Sixth session](#): 9-10 October 2014, Rome
- [Seventh session](#): 14-15 May 2015, Rome
- [Eighth session](#): 19-20 October 2015, Milan
- [Ninth session](#): 22-23 June 2016, Rome
- [Tenth session](#): 6-7 October 2016, Rome
- [Eleventh session](#): 22-23 June 2017, Rome
- [Twelfth session](#): 13 November 2017, Geneva

AMIS Rapid Response Forum:

- [First session](#): 11 April 2012, Mexico City
- [Second session](#): 20 Feb. 2013, Washington DC
- [Third session](#): 6 March 2014, Canberra
- [Fourth session](#): 26-27 March 2015, London
- [Fifth session](#): 10 March 2016, Washington DC
- [Sixth session](#): 27 Feb. 2017, Berlin

AMIS research seminars, expert meetings and training workshops:

- [Improving rice data in Thailand and the Philippines](#): 16-17 December 2013, Bangkok
- [Expert meeting on stocks measurement](#): 21 November 2014, London
- [Training Workshops on Data Documentation and Archiving Standards and Tools](#): 1 December 2014 and 25 May 2015, Abuja
- [Improving Rice Data in Thailand and the Philippines](#): 3-4 December 2014, Manila
- Three training workshops on [Improving access to existing data, through the design and implementation of a user-friendly access policy in Nigeria](#): 29 January to 6 February 2015, Abuja
- [Training of relevant staff from federal and state agencies in Nigeria on SDMX tools and practices](#): 13-14 May 2015, Abuja
- [Strengthening Agricultural Market Information in Bangladesh](#), 30 June 2015, Dhaka
- [Expert workshop on stock and utilization measurement in China](#): 6-7 July 2015, Beijing
- [Training Workshop on Production of Market Prices of Agricultural Commodities](#): 5-8 October 2015, Abuja
- [Expert workshop on market indicators](#): 12-13 November 2015, Washington DC
- [Final workshop on improving rice market statistics in Thailand and the Philippines](#): 23-26 November 2015, Bangkok
- [AMIS mobile tool for market price data collection](#): 4-7 April 2016, Abuja
- [Approaches and Methodologies for Crop Monitoring and Production Forecasting](#): 25-26 May 2016, Dhaka
- [Artificial intelligence for market intelligence](#): 14 November 2017, Geneva

B. Reports and studies

14. Apart from its regular publications, such as the AMIS Market Monitor, which is produced ten times a year, or occasional progress and monitoring reports, the AMIS Secretariat prepares

meeting documents for each session of the Global Food Market Information Group and the AMIS Rapid Response Forum. These documents are available to meeting participants through a restricted website.²

15. In addition, the Secretariat has released several research papers, guidelines and literature reviews that are available on the [public website of AMIS](#). A complete list is provided below.

- [Review of changes in domestic cereal prices during the global price spikes](#) (November 2011)
- [Futures markets signal change: Interpreting price behaviour](#) (November 2011)
- [Stocks-to-use ratios as indicators of vulnerability to spikes in global cereal markets](#) (October 2012)
- [Structural change in the agricultural futures markets?](#) (October 2013)
- [Improved methodology for estimation of food stocks](#) (November 2013)
- [Nonlinear co-integration in the food-ethanol-oil system: Evidence from smooth threshold vector error correction models](#) (December 2013)
- [Improving feed use estimations: Data, methodology and challenges](#): Global scoping report and country case studies (April 2014)
- [AMIS Nigeria data assessment report](#) (May 2014)
- [International commodity benchmarks and producer prices](#) (October 2014)
- [Crop yield forecasting: Methodological and institutional aspects](#) (February 2016)
- [Developing a set of early warning global market indicators](#) (March 2016)
- [Guidelines for designing and implementing grain stock surveys](#) (March 2017)
- [Assessing volatility patterns in food crops](#) (March 2017)
- [Building agricultural market information systems - A literature review](#) (June 2017)
- [Recent practices and advances for AMIS crop yield forecasting at farm and parcel level: A review](#) (July 2017)
- [AMIS supply and demand balances manual](#) (November 2017)

IV. Main achievements

16. AMIS was established with the aim of reducing the likelihood and impact of food price crises. In the absence of major market turbulence since the launch of the initiative, it is of course difficult to judge whether AMIS has achieved this objective. There are, however, some indications that AMIS might have had a calming effect on markets. This section discusses three main achievements that the Secretariat and other market observers consider as key.

A. Enhanced market data

17. Information on the global supply and demand situation of main food commodities had obviously existed before AMIS was created. However, data published by the main providers of global market information (FAO, International Grains Council and the United States Department of Agriculture) were sometimes incoherent and occasionally even contradictory. By working closely with these data providers, AMIS has gradually improved the reliability of available information, as illustrated by a general convergence of key indicators.

18. This convergence is particularly visible as regards stocks information, where the differences across sources have become noticeably smaller. Striving for greater convergence, however, does not mean that figures will ultimately become the same. Indeed, one of the merits of AMIS has been

² For login information, please contact the AMIS Secretariat (AMIS-Secretariat@fao.org).

increased consultation to openly present remaining differences and explain why these different viewpoints provide a valid assessment of the global market situation.

B. Strengthened national capacities

19. AMIS has arguably had the greatest impact on strengthening national capacities to monitor food markets. For some AMIS participant countries, the very concept of supply and demand balances was new, so these countries greatly benefitted from the guidance received for their monthly data submissions as well as targeted training activities. Others with already functioning monitoring systems broadened the scope of their analysis from national to global, for example to assess their position in global markets as a food importer or exporter.

20. Specific examples include the Russian Federation and Ukraine greatly improving their commodity balances; Indonesia adjusting its maize production forecasts; China gaining a better understanding of its supply situation; South Africa introducing a regular assessment of the country's market situation; and the European Union starting to produce monthly balances in response to AMIS requirements.

21. In addition, collaboration between the national focal points of AMIS and those of the Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM) has enhanced the uptake of satellite information for better agricultural monitoring, as exemplified by Canada.

C. A network of trust

22. Perhaps most importantly, AMIS has built a network of trust among the main producing and consuming countries of food commodities. Only a few focal points have changed since AMIS was created, so essentially the same group of country representatives has met numerous times at both technical and policy level, which furthered a sense of community and common purpose.

23. The network was put to test very early in the life of AMIS when in 2012 a sudden drought in North America led to sharp downward adjustments of the maize and soybean yield while hot and dry conditions in Southern Europe raised concerns over wheat yields. Given the importance of both regions for global food markets, many observers feared another food price crisis. However, unlike in 2007/08, countries were able to revert to AMIS for providing a forum to analyse the market situation and discuss adequate responses. Despite pressure on the G20 to take action, AMIS participants decided against holding an emergency meeting, which in their view would have further destabilized markets. AMIS also argued against hasty policy action that had exacerbated crises in the past, such as export bans. The 2012 episode illustrated that AMIS can avert market instability.

V. Next steps

24. Over the past six years, AMIS has achieved considerable recognition as an authoritative platform for market information and policy dialogue. This is evidenced by repeated calls for AMIS to expand its coverage to other food commodities and possibly even broaden its mandate, for example by including the monitoring of the physical trade flows of food commodities in strategically important trade junctures in its work programme.

25. While AMIS might venture into new work streams, enhancing collaboration with and among countries will still constitute the most important focus area. AMIS can only thrive if all its stakeholders remain committed and engaged, for example by sharing regular market and policy information; participating in AMIS meetings; and actively contributing to the network of trust. The AMIS Secretariat and all its member organizations are ready to serve the needs and expectations of countries, and, to this effect, it is exploring a number of funding options with potential donors to support the initiative.

References

ⁱ G20 Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture:

www.amis-outlook.org/fileadmin/user_upload/amis/docs/2011-agriculture-plan-en.pdf

ⁱⁱ AMIS Terms of Reference:

www.amis-outlook.org/fileadmin/user_upload/amis/docs/Inception_meeting/AMIS_TERMS_OF_REFERENCE.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ AMIS Rules of Procedure:

www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/amis/docs/Inception_meeting/AMIS_RULES_OF_PROCEDURE.pdf

^{iv} AMIS Umbrella Programme Document:

www.amis-outlook.org/fileadmin/user_upload/amis/docs/Secretariat/AMIS_Multi_Donor_Trust_Fund_Document_updated_2017.pdf

^v Evaluation of the AMIS project “Strengthening Agricultural Market Information Systems Globally and in Selected Countries Using Innovative Methods and Digital Technology”:

www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/1099034/, and Evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), Development Grant Facility: available soon from www.fao.org/evaluation