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# COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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### Progress in the Implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics

#### Introduction

1. The Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (hereafter, Global Strategy) is arguably the largest global effort ever attempted to improve agricultural and rural statistics in developing countries on a sustainable basis. The Global Strategy was prepared by the World Bank in collaboration with FAO and underwent an extensive consultative process that involved national and international statistical organizations. The Global Strategy was endorsed by the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference (18–23 November, 2009) and by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in February 2010. The UNSC also urged the development of an implementation plan (hereafter, Global Action Plan) aimed at strengthening the national agricultural statistical system, with the necessary steps to develop the master sample frame, the integrated survey framework and data management system. The Global Action Plan was presented at the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference, June 25–July 2, 2011 and was fully endorsed at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UNSC, in February 2012.

2. While the Global Strategy has a long-term perspective (10–15 years) the Global Action Plan was developed to cover the first phase of implementation (2012–2017). The Plan provides the methodological framework and governance structure that helps to guide global and regional statistical capacity-building efforts for the establishment of improved national statistical systems. The Plan is articulated in three main components, a technical assistance programme, a training programme, and a research agenda. A country assessment programme is also an integral element of the plan, as it serves to identify gaps and set priorities. The Plan seeks to establish synergies and complementarities with other statistical capacity development activities already under way in many countries as well as with other global initiatives, such as the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) recently adopted by the G20 ministerial meeting.

3. The Global Strategy is also an innovative international partnership programme, implemented on a global scale across five developing regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Near East, and East Europe and Central Asia)<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with key regional organizations, mainly the UN Regional Commissions and the Regional Development Banks.

<sup>1</sup> The definition of regions does not always coincide with the regional groupings used by FAO due to the need to take into consideration regional partners' membership.



Following this approach, each region has developed its own regional action plan identifying the specific technical assistance and training activities that address its specific needs.

4. In the new FAO Strategic Framework the Global Strategy initiative falls under Objective 6, a cross-cutting objective on technical quality and knowledge fundamental for the achievement of the Organization's strategic objectives. The role of statistics in performing this function is fundamental. One of the most important and visible aspects of the statistical work undertaken by FAO under Objective 6 relates to the support provided to improve developing countries' information systems on agricultural and rural statistics and to use them to design more effective food security, agricultural and rural development policies.

### **Implementation Framework**

5. The implementation of the Global Action Plan is led by the Global Office, which plays a critical role in ensuring technical coordination across the regional action plans. Besides its coordinating role, the Global Office provides overall strategic direction and develops new cost-effective statistical methodologies, guidelines and training materials to support the implementation of the global action plan at regional and country level. The Global Office is hosted by the Statistics Division of FAO (ESS), in line with FAO's mandate and its role as a knowledge organization.

6. The work at regional level is led by the regional partners and the FAO Regional Offices, who provide technical assistance and training to countries and liaise with regional and national stakeholders. To date, formal partnerships have been established with the African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) through Memorandums of Understanding.

### **Governance of the Global Strategy**

7. The Global Strategy is coordinated through governance structures that operate at all levels. The Global Steering Committee (GSC<sup>2</sup>) is the ultimate decision-making body at the global level, providing strategic guidance and oversight on the execution of the Global Action Plan. The Global Executive Board (GEB<sup>3</sup>) serves as an executive committee of the GSC and facilitates its day-to-day decision-making process. The Global Office acts as the secretariat of the GSC and the GEB.

8. Governance at regional level follows the same governance structure: each region has a Regional Steering Committee, a Regional Executive Board (optional) and a Regional Office.

### **Resources Mobilization**

9. Rebuilding the national agricultural statistics system in developing countries, in order to address both ongoing and emerging data requirements, is a long process that will last several years. The Global Action Plan was designed to cover the initial five-year phase of the implementation of the Global Strategy, expected to end in 2017. This first phase targets a total of 90 developing countries, and requires USD83 million for its implementation. A total of USD45 million has been mobilized so far thanks to the contribution of the UK's Department for International Development, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Italian Cooperation.

10. The contributions are channelled through a Global Multi-donor Trust Fund (GTF) which was established to consolidate contributions from the resource partners and to ensure a stream of funding to support the implementation of the strategy at global, regional and country level. The GTF is managed by FAO, acting as Fund Administrator, which receives, manages and disburses the contributions received from donors to implementing partners.

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<sup>2</sup> The membership of the GSC comprises two country representatives per region, representatives of international and regional organizations including FAO, the Resource Partners, representatives of farmer associations, and other key users.

<sup>3</sup> The GEB has seven members appointed by the GSC from GSC Members. These include two country representatives of beneficiary countries, two representatives of the regional partners, two representatives of Resource Partners of the Global Trust Fund, and a representative of FAO (ex officio).

## **Main Achievements**

11. Despite the short life of the programme, which commenced in August 2012, the Global Strategy is already considered as the main framework for strengthening coherent statistical capacity in developing countries.

12. During the inception phase of the programme, remarkable efforts were made to establish the foundations of the programme, including the creation of a global governance structure, the development of administrative standards acceptable to all partners, the financial mechanism for transferring funds to the implementing partners and the set-up of the Global and Regional Offices.

13. The regional action plans for Africa and Asia and the Pacific were endorsed by the Global Steering Committee and the associated regional offices were established. Regional action plans for Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East and East Europe and Central Asia (with the Commonwealth of Independent States Secretariat as a participating partner) are at an advanced stage of development.

14. The first stage country assessments, which allow the identification of priority countries in each region and provide an indication of the major needs for technical assistance at country level, have almost been completed in all five regions. This first assessment is to be followed by an in-depth country assessment, which is the basis for developing national statistical plans. To date, the FAO Regional Office for Africa has completed in-depth country assessments of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. The preparation of Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS) has already been carried out in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania, while support for the SPARS process has started in Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Senegal. In Asia and the Pacific, the FAO Regional Office is currently finalizing the in-depth country assessments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Samoa and Sri Lanka. FAO is also supporting Fiji, Georgia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Myanmar, Oman and Qatar. Burundi, which is being directly assisted by the Global Office, will be the first country to roll-out the guidelines for the development of SPARS. This will provide an innovative approach for integrating the results of the in-depth country assessment in the statistical plan formulation, thus allowing a faster provision of technical assistance to countries.

15. The research agenda implemented by the Global Office has started to produce the first important results, which will be progressively translated into guidelines and training materials for the benefit of countries. Methodological papers are already available for the following research topics: development of an integrated survey framework, establishment of a master sampling frame, improvement of cost of production estimates, improvement of crop forecasting, methods for small-scale fisheries and use of remote sensing for agricultural statistics. Furthermore, guidelines have been recently finalized on the following topics: use of the Global Positioning System for land area measurement, nomadic livestock estimates, use and dissemination of agricultural micro-data, greenhouse gas emissions estimates and adoption of new product classifications. Guidelines on the System of Environmental Economic Accounting for Agriculture and Food Balance Sheets are currently under development. A pre-release of a software for Computer Aided Personal Interviews is already available and has been tested in several countries. Training material on linking population and agricultural censuses is expected to be released soon. Finally, strong progress has been made in collaboration with the World Bank on improving the measurement of food consumption in household surveys while research work is about to start on important topics such as post-harvest losses, livestock and livestock products estimation and use of administrative data.

16. The implementation of training activities, which includes the development of curricula for regional training, assessments of training needs and the strengthening of existing training institutions, is also well advanced, particularly in Africa. In this region, the provision of scholarships through the regional action plan and the regional implementation partners has proved to be a great success (44 students have started a training on agricultural statistics at Masters level granted by the best Universities specialized in Agricultural Statistics in Africa). Furthermore, work also is under way on the harmonization of curricula and syllabuses in support of regional training institutions in Africa.

### **Main Challenges**

17. Some delays in the implementation of the regional activities have occurred during the inception phase due to the complexity of the process to establish common administrative standards acceptable for all partners. There have also been difficulties in recruiting high quality technical experts for the Global Office, which has had an impact on the implementation of the research agenda and subsequently on the delivery of guidelines and training materials. In order to overcome this challenge, the research agenda has been reorganized and some research topics assigned through a competitive process to external research institutions in order to ensure the rapid production of methodological documents to be used both by regions and countries.

18. The lack of funding for Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East and Central Asia, together with the need to bridge the existing funding gaps for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Global Office are still pending issues. In order to ensure the sustainability of the programme, meetings with resource partners at regional level are envisaged in the second half of 2014.