Global strategy plays leading role in agricultural statistics in target countries

The Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics programme of FAO is helping countries to develop statistics systems for agriculture, but it may suffer a setback due to funding gaps, says a recent evaluation by the Office of Evaluation.

The Strategy is a ground-breaking five-year global action plan to strengthen agricultural and rural statistical capacities and develop sustainable statistical systems in 90 countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Commonwealth of Independent States and the Near East regions.

The mid-term evaluation, which was conducted between August and December 2015, assessed the achievements and sustainability potential of the programme and reviewed cases in Bangladesh, Ghana, Indonesia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Thailand.

The evaluation found that the Strategy was well conceived and that it will continue to facilitate and support harmonisation of agricultural statistics systems at the global, regional and country levels. Its institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms ensure participation at all levels and have contributed significantly to capacity development of partners in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Near East. In addition to producing a large number of technical reports and guidelines, training courses have been conducted in more than 50 countries in Africa and Asia-Pacific.

Stakeholders interviewed appreciated the Strategy and said it is a very important and unique initiative that can help meet data requirements for the agriculture-related Sustainable Development Goals. They said the Strategy is already becoming an international reference point and is beginning to play a catalytic role in increasing stakeholders’ awareness and contribution to agricultural and rural statistics.

The evaluation however notes that the overall target of the programme is ambitious given the timeframe for completion and the available funds. Only 60 percent of the total budget has been realized and only three governments
have agreed to provide additional funding to support the initiative. The 40 percent funding gap is already affecting research activities at the global office and could have a significant impact on field testing, dissemination and other aspects of the work planned for 2017.

It notes that successes and lessons from the initiative are less likely to be institutionalized for scale-up and follow-up by partners because activities are being implemented largely by consultants and because there is no clear strategy to ensure that the knowledge acquired transcends the primary beneficiaries.

The evaluation highlights the need to improve strategies for the dissemination and use of available programme publications and the development of a detailed phase-out plan including specific timeframe, clear actions and identification of those responsible for implementing the actions. It requests implementing partners, especially in Africa, to improve vertical coordination and communication in order to increase awareness and involvement at the sub-regional and country office levels.

It recommends that for long-term sustainability of the benefits of the capacity building efforts, the programme should involve sub-regional training institutions and statistical commissions in the training activities and develop technical guidelines that will help improve validation processes and consequently data quality. It recommends that the programme strengthen its human resource strategy to reduce reliance on consultants and consider alternative funding plans such as allowing countries in partially and non-funded regions to participate at their own cost or mobilising funds from development partners independently.

For further information on this evaluation, please contact:

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