



Conclusions and recommendations

The 29th Session of the FAO-OEA/CIE-IICA Working Group on Agricultural and Livestock Statistics for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from 18th to 20th September 2019. The number of participant including delegates and observers was 38, from 23 countries in the region.

FAO activities in food and agricultural statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Secretariat of the FAO-OEA/CIE-IICA Working Group reported on the activities carried out in the 2018-19 biennium and the follow-ups to the recommendations made in the last session, mainly reporting on the support provided to countries to improve food security, agricultural and rural statistics, focused mainly on the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. During this biennium, the following activities were carried out:

1. Technical assistance and individual training were provided to 20 countries in the region on agricultural and food security statistics methodology, which means that several countries now have the capacity to calculate some SDG's indicators under FAO custody, which they did not previously have; including 6 new countries that have incorporated FIES / ELCSA modules to their national surveys (Chile, Costa Rica, Grenada, Honduras, Panama and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines).
2. The implementation of the Regional Public Good Project to improve agricultural and rural statistics in the Region was finalized. Under this project funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, of which FAO was the Technical Secretariat, achieved the following results:
 - 4 publications
 - 2 workshops on: expert opinion and its coordination with the other methods of production of agricultural statistics in September 2018 in Montevideo Uruguay; and the Operational Guidelines of the World Agricultural Census Program 2020 (CAM 2020) in April 2019 in Santiago, Chile.
 - 2 technical visits to the field work of agricultural censuses, one to Brazil and the other to Argentina
 - 1 course on Satellite Information Applications in Agricultural Statistics.
3. A Regional Training Course on the Measurement of Post-Harvest Losses was held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic from 16 to 17 September 2019. Participants expressed interest and satisfaction for the workshop. The workshop was useful to take stock of the data situation in the countries that supposedly have high stakes on food loss reduction policies and monitoring needs. All countries expressed a need for capacity development, financial support for data collection and support in developing a strategy to measure losses in critical loss points.

4. Likewise, during the biennium 2018-19, in-depth evaluations of the Eastern Caribbean Countries (OECS) on their ability to produce agricultural statistics were carried out and national strategic plans to produce agricultural statistics were developed.
4. Under sub-regional projects the following events were done:
 - Expert workshop on indicators of Natural, Agrifood and Water Resources for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for South American countries in September 2018 in Montevideo, Uruguay.
 - Sub-regional workshop for the Caribbean on the SDG indicator 2.a.1, Government investment in agriculture in May 2019 in Georgetown in Guyana.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Methodology latest advancements

The Secretariat of the FAO / OAS-CIE / IICA Working Group reported on the latest developments in the international process for the implementation of the SDGs, including new members of the IAEG-SDG after the last rotation in July 2019; the adoption of the Guidelines on data flows and the global submission of data for the SDGs in March 2018; the agreement on Principles of the Disclosure and Dissemination Platforms of SDG Indicators in January 2018; and the complete 2020 Revision of the SDG indicators framework.

The Group was also informed of the latest methodological advances on the indicators under FAO's custody, highlighting the main methodological aspects of the nine indicators that had been approved since the last meeting, ie 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 (Productivity and income of small producers), 2.4.1 (Sustainable Agriculture), 5.a.2 (Gender equality in access to land under the Law), 6.4.1 (Efficiency in the use of water resources), 12.3.1 (Food Losses), 14.6.1 (Illegal and unregulated fishing), 14.7.1 (Sustainable Fishing as a percentage of GDP), 14.b.1 (Small-scale fishing). Countries were recommended to consult with the most recent metadata documents for these indicators, accessible through the FAO SDG indicator platform: <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/en/>, as well as the set of e-learning courses for different SDG indicators (accessible on the same platform) that are currently being translated into Spanish and French.

Statistical Capacity of LAC countries to monitor the FAO-relevant SDG indicators: the results of the SDG Gap Assessment survey

The Secretariat of the FAO / OAS-CIE / IICA Working Group presented the main results of the Statistical Capacity Assessment for the SDG indicators under FAO custody, for the Latin America and the Caribbean region. The Evaluation was carried out by the Office of the Chief Statistician of FAO through a questionnaire that was sent to all countries in December 2018. In total, 111 countries returned the questionnaire (57%). However, in the Latin American and Caribbean region, the response rate is somewhat lower, at 48%. Specifically, only 16 (of 33) countries in the region answered the questionnaire before the deadline in May 2019.

The results showed that most of the countries in the region do not regularly perform some key data collection instruments, while, on the other hand, some key data sources are available, but

they are not fully used for the production of the SDG indicators, which represents a missed opportunity. It was also noted that some key data sources were not carried out in the last five years or even planned in the next five years in most countries, which calls into question the possibility of producing certain indicators in the short or medium term. Finally, of the 16 countries that responded to the survey in the region, 100% requested some assistance to produce the indicators, and of these, two-thirds requested some form of assistance for at least 10 SDG indicators under the FAO custody.

Countries were assured that requests for assistance received through this survey would be taken into account in FAO's planning of training activities over the next two years, which was already evident in the organization of the training workshop on the indicator 12.3.1 since it had been the most requested indicator in the survey.

The Secretariat also recommended that countries accelerate efforts to strengthen national coordination for the monitoring of the SDGs. Specifically, it was recalled that many countries in the region have not yet named a national focal point for the SDGs in the NSO, a key role in the coordination between countries and international organizations highlighted in the Guidelines on data flows and the presentation of Global data for the SDGs.

The commission recommends that countries identify specific national focal points for each SDG indicator, the absence of which is a major obstacle in the collection of data by custodian agencies such as FAO. This is true for both SDG indicators with reporting mechanisms already established (such as 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 6.4.1, 6.4.2, 15.1.1, 15.2.1) and the other indicators, many of which have a more recent methodology.

Improving agricultural statistics. Work plan for the 2020-2021 biennium

Countries request FAO to continue providing technical assistance and training to gather the necessary data to calculate the SDG indicators under FAO custody, as well as in the methodology for calculating these indicators. This assistance should be a combination of regional workshops and courses, and individual support to countries to allow adaptation to national contexts. This assistance should be continuous to keep the national technicians updated in the latest methodologies and minimize the loss of knowledge due to the high turnover of technicians in the national institutions.

Given the difficulty in obtaining financial resources for these activities, the commission recommends mainly low-cost (virtual) activities, self-financed South-South exchanges by countries, online courses, etc. Likewise, to obtain more funds for the region, it recommends formulating and presenting to the IDB another Public Goods Project proposal in the 2020 call.

Open data policies and dissemination of microdata

General legal and technical challenges were mentioned as reasons why countries may not be able to openly disseminate microdata. The Commission recommends that FAO compile business models and approaches from different countries so that countries can learn from other experiences.

The participants of the commission pointed out difficulties mainly in two areas of data anonymization: geospatial variables and large and/or specialized agricultural enterprises. There is a great demand for geo-referenced data within government institutions and the research community. However, national statistical offices that collect this data are required to eliminate georeferences during the anonymization process. Current approaches that alter this data to protect confidentiality undermine its analytical use. Some suggestions include maintaining geospatial variables in the data and sharing only with users who sign a confidentiality agreement. With regard to large and specialized companies, it was pointed out that this information cannot be shared if it jeopardizes the anonymity of the respondents. This is particularly important for countries where large companies represent a large part of the agricultural sector.

The Commission recommends that FAO provide support in these areas by investing or compiling methodological research that addresses these problems and disseminates it to countries, in addition of providing technical support in the application of these methods.

Another issue pointed out by several participants was the promotion of the use of data and its link with the mobilization of resources for surveys. If governments see that the data produce additional results outside the strict original objectives of the survey, they will begin to see it as an investment rather than an expense for a specific product.

In addition, it was noted that, during the planning process of an agricultural census, consultation with the users of the data indicated that many variables to be collected did not match what was needed. Consequently, an open dialogue with data users of other government institutions, the academic world and the private sector should be initiated in the planning phase to ensure that the data collected is useful for all users.

Food balance sheets

Countries recognize the importance of food balance sheets (FBSs) as a statistical framework to analyze food security and monitor the progress of SDG indicators 2.1.1 (Prevalence of Undernourishment) and 12.3.1 (Post harvest losses). However, they noted that the FBSs published on FAOSTAT are not compiled by national teams. In addition, little information is provided on the imputation models and methods that FAO uses to estimate various FBS variables. Therefore, it recommends that FAO provide more details on the SUA-FBS methodological framework and explore providing adequate technical assistance to train national teams to compile FBSs.

National quality assurance frameworks in Agricultural Statistics

The Secretariat of the Commission summarized the work done by the United Nations Experts Group (re-established in 2017) in the development of the new updated version of the United Nations National Quality Assurance Framework, which is expected to cover all official statistics produced by the National Statistical Office or other national statistical institutions, including statistical processes that involve different types of data sources (surveys, administrative data, geospatial data, etc.) and the processes necessary to compile the indicators of the SDGs.

The new UN NQAF manual has been well received by the audience that thanked the work done, in particular for taking into account the new data ecosystem and the challenges posed by the production of high quality SDG indicators. In line with the guiding principles of the SDGs, the new

UN NQAF manual assigns a key role to the National Statistical Office, which is expected to coordinate the entire National Statistical System and, as a consequence, guide the implementation of the NQAF. The audience emphasized that this last task can be quite challenging in some countries, where official statistics are produced by different agencies that act independently and with weak coordination.

The Secretariat also illustrated FAO's proposal to use the new UN NQAF manual as a general umbrella under which develop specific NQAF for agriculture and food (following the IMF's DQAF development strategy). The proposal has many advantages, since it would take stock of previous efforts made by FAO to develop standards (eg Global Strategy, AGRIS, etc.) and organize them in a coherent framework that would support quality assessment for agriculture and food statistics. The domain of agriculture and food statistics includes many subdomains: crops, livestock, prices, investments, land use, inputs, etc., for this reason, a gradual approach is needed where priorities must be established according to their importance and existing hierarchies (for example, crop statistics serve as inputs for food statistics, etc.).

Country representatives welcomed FAO's proposal for specific NQAF for datasets in the field of agriculture and food, which emphasized the need to involve countries in the development and testing phases to also take into account the heterogeneity of the specific situations of each country.

Countries emphasized the importance of statistical processes from multiple sources in the field of food and agriculture, where IT innovations can facilitate the exploitation of land observation data, as well as administrative data sources. However, the greater complexity of statistical processes from multiple sources may involve increased costs and the need for additional efforts to document and, more generally, assess the quality of the final statistical results. The discussion emphasized that ensuring quality can be a challenge in some particular agricultural subdomains, such as livestock statistics.

Country representatives welcomed FAO's proposal to develop specific NQAFs for databases in the domain of agriculture and food statistics and they recommend:

- Take stock of existing manuals, guidelines and best practices at international and / or national level and consider the various existing national statistical systems.
- These specific NQAFs should emphasize the importance of the statistical production process from multiple sources in the production of agricultural and food statistics, since this seems to be the best approach to improve the quality of the corresponding statistics, particularly those related to the use of Land and crops.
- Although there were no clear indications about the priorities in the development of specific NQAFs (that is, which subdomain should be considered first for their development), most of the discussion focused on crop and livestock statistics so this subdomain could represent a good starting point, since these statistics are also necessary as inputs for the production of statistics in other subdomains (for example, food).