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Progress in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator Reporting

Executive summary

In its capacity as the custodian agency for 21 SDG Indicators and contributing to an additional five, FAO recognizes the importance of enhancing the capacity of Member countries for effectively measuring and reporting on SDG indicators. Central to this endeavor is the monitoring of progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which stands as a paramount priority within the purview of FAO's mission.

This paper delves into the progression of Asian and Pacific countries' reporting capabilities and data availability on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO's custodianship, by assessing how the average reporting rate¹ in the region compares to the world average over time.

Suggested actions by APCAS

The Commission is invited to provide guidance on recommended actions and priorities for technical support on:

- APCAS members' capacity to produce, disseminate and use the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship and to monitor the implementation of SDGs more generally;
- possible solutions to significantly increase reporting rates in the Asia-Pacific region for under-reported SDG indicators (i.e. SDG indicators 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.4.1, 5.a.1, 5.a.2, 12.3.1a and 14.4.1) or for indicators where the world reporting averages are significantly higher (i.e. SDG indicators 14.6.1, 14.7.1, 14.b.1, 15.2.1 and 15.4.2), as well as for most SDG indicators under FAO custodianship in the Oceania sub-region (excluding Australia and New Zealand).

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¹ The reporting rate is calculated based on the criterion that a country is considered to have reported on a specific indicator if it has provided data for at least one year within the five years prior to the reference year.

I. Introduction

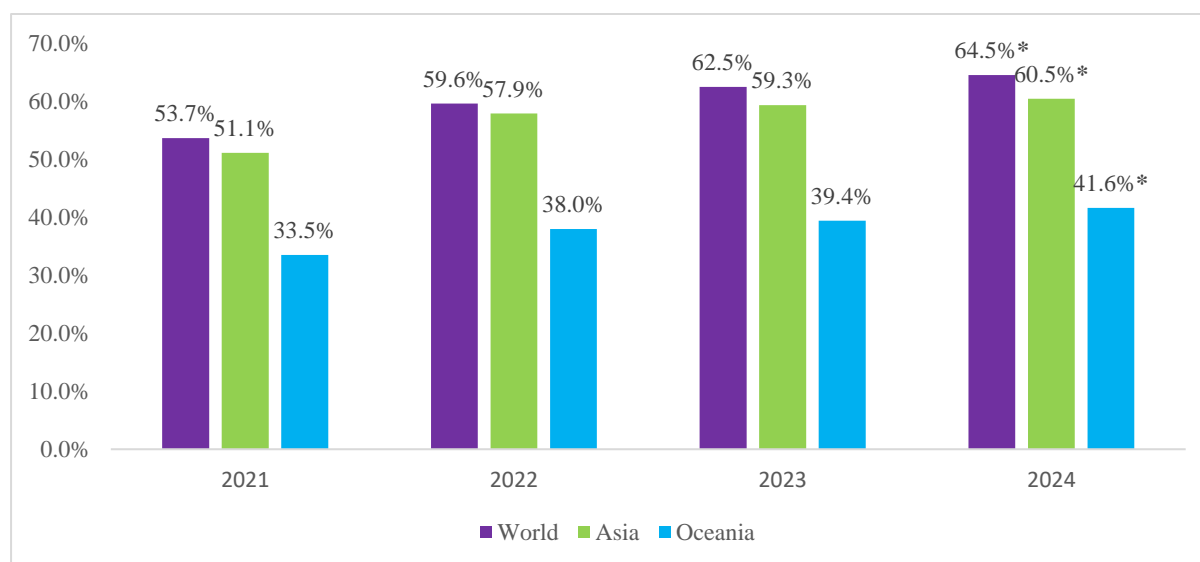
1. The Statistics Division at FAO, as the responsible office for the Organization’s work to monitor SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, coordinates the development of methods and standards for those indicators, and provides technical assistance and capacity development support to member countries. In order to implement its tasks effectively and efficiently by providing comprehensive guidance to member countries and FAO technical units in charge of the compilation of SDG indicators, the Statistics Division assesses countries’ statistical capacity on SDG indicators related to food and agriculture chiefly by tracking the number of indicators that countries are able to report on (referred to as “reporting rate”).

2. The Statistics Division, alongside other statistical units and the FAO Regional Office Asia-Pacific, has collaborated closely with countries in the region to bolster their capacities in collecting, processing, analyzing, and disseminating data related to food, agriculture, and rural sectors. This collaborative effort encompasses a spectrum of activities, including the collection, processing, analysis, validation, and dissemination of food and agricultural statistics.

II. Recent developments in SDG reporting in Asia-Pacific region

3. The average reporting rate for all countries has grown over time in all regions, including Asia, Oceania and the world as a whole (Figure 1). Nonetheless, the reporting rate for Asia has consistently lagged slightly behind the global average. In Oceania, also encompassing Australia and New Zealand, the average reporting rate trails significantly behind both the global and the Asian aggregate by about twenty percentage points. In simple words, whereas the average Asian country is currently able to report on three fifths of the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, the average Oceanian country is only able to report two fifths.

Figure 1. Average country reporting rate on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship



* Provisional rates subject to revision; final rates calculated in July of every year.

4. The observed disparity in the average reporting rates within the Asia-Pacific region, relative to the global average, is contingent upon the individual reporting rates associated with each of the 21 SDG indicators under the custodianship of FAO. Figures 2.a and 2.b below illustrate the average reporting rates for 2024 pertaining to each of the 21 SDG indicators in Asia, Oceania and the world.

5. In Asia, the reporting rate exceeds the world average only for SDG indicators 2.c.2 (food price volatility), 6.4.1 (water use efficiency) and 6.4.2 (water stress). Conversely, the average reporting rate for Asia falls short of the world average for SDG indicators 2.1.1 (prevalence of undernourishment), 2.1.2 (prevalence of food insecurity), 2.3.1/2.3.2 (productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers), 2.4.1 (productive and sustainable agriculture), 2.5.1.a/2.5.1.b (plant and animal genetic resources conserved in gene banks), 2.a.1 (public expenditure in agriculture), 5.a.1 (women's ownership of agricultural land), 5.a.2 (protection of women's land rights), 14.4.1/14.7.1 (fish stock sustainability and sustainable fisheries contribution to GDP), 14.6.1/14.b.1 (international instruments combatting IUU fishing and promoting small-scale fisheries), 15.2.1 (sustainable forest management), and 15.4.2 (mountain health and degradation).

6. On a concerning note, the average reporting rate for Oceania significantly lags behind both the world and the Asian averages across all SDG indicators under FAO custodianship. More specifically, Oceania falls notably behind the world's reporting rate average for SDG indicators 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 by 38.1 and 31.7 percent, respectively. Moreover, there is no country in Oceania that has reported on SDG indicators 2.3.1, 2.3.2, and 2.4.1, rendering the measurement of productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers infeasible. This hinders the ability of countries in the region to develop evidence-based policies for promoting sustainable agriculture and smallholder productivity. Similarly, no country in Oceania has reported on SDG indicator 5.a.2. Data on this indicator is key to understanding the extent to which national legal frameworks safeguard women's land rights, thereby enabling the promotion of gender-responsive policies, programs, and legal reforms aligned with SDG target 5.a.

Figure 2.a. Comparison of the average reporting rate in Asia-Pacific and the world as a whole for SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, 2024 (indicators 2.1.1 through to 5.a.2)

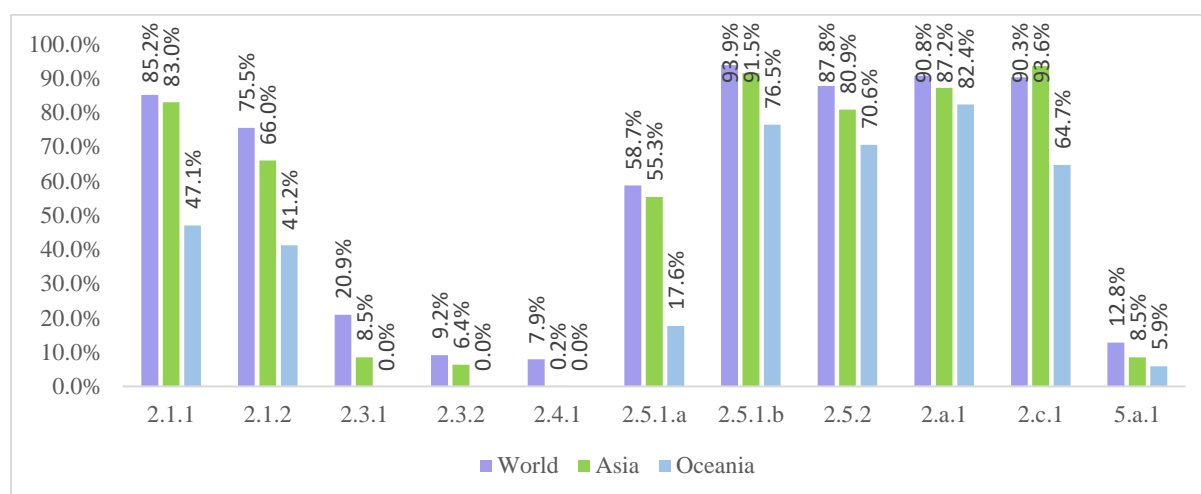
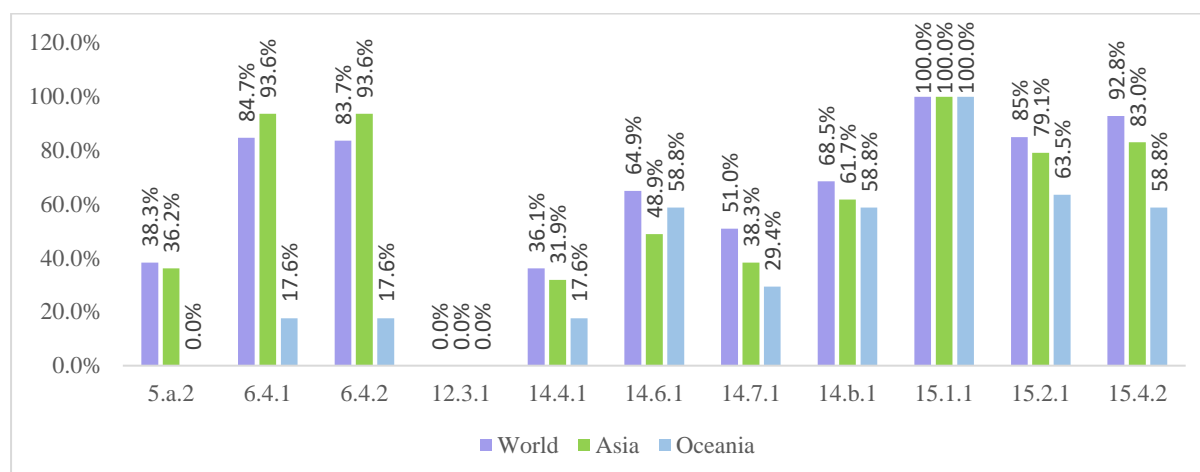


Figure 2.b. Comparison of the average reporting rate in Asia-Pacific and the world as a whole for SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, 2024 (indicators 6.4.1 through to 15.4.2)

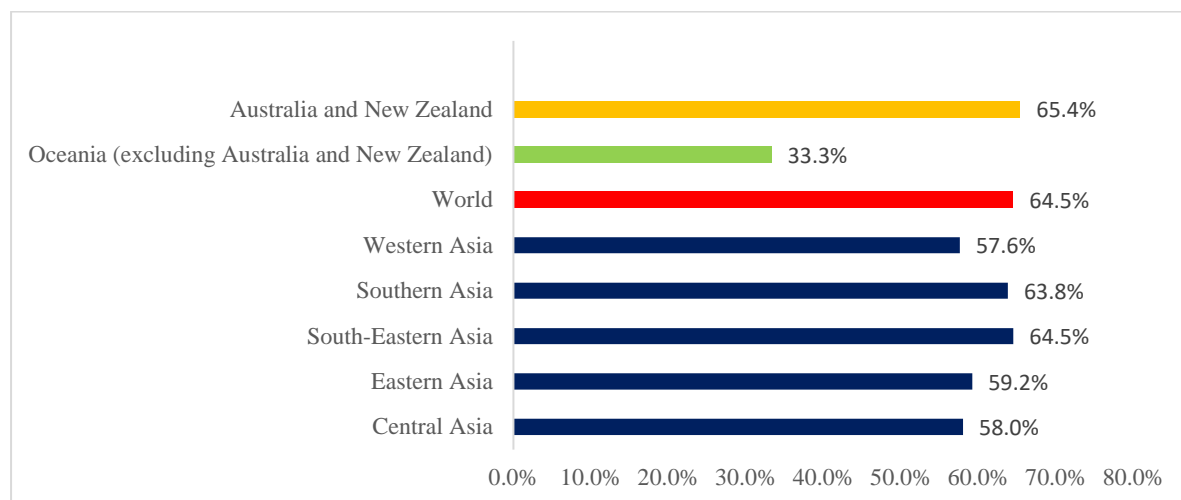


7. Highlighting the overlooked potential for Asian countries, it is evident that the indicators where the average reporting rate in Asia is greatest compared to the global average are 14.6.1 (international instruments combating IUU fishing) and 14.7.1 (sustainable fisheries contribution to GDP), with gaps close to 15% percentage. Whereas indicator 14.7.1 requires a combination of economic data and fish stock sustainability data that is often difficult to collect, SDG indicator 14.6.1 does not require countries to conduct any statistical surveys or similar operations, but rather involves determining whether the provisions of relevant international instruments have been integrated into the national legal framework. As such, it relies on self-reporting regarding the implementation of relevant international measures, and is collected from countries through FAO's biennial Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries questionnaire (which also supplies data for SDG indicator 14.b.1). As such, it constitutes a relatively straightforward indicator to report, suggesting that Asian countries could expedite reporting it with minimal additional costs.

8. For their part, Oceanian countries are clearly in need of additional support on undernourishment and food security data; plant genetic resources data; food price volatility data; and water stress and water use efficiency data. Oceania also lags behind the global average reporting rate on SDG indicators 14.6.1 – and 14.b.1 – though by a smaller margin compared to Asia. Nonetheless, these are two indicators that are highly relevant to Oceania, one dealing with IUU fishing and the other with small-scale fisheries. Bearing in mind, once again, the relatively simple reporting procedure for both of these as outlined above, it is a missed opportunity that Oceanian countries are not reporting these indicators in greater numbers. A similar consideration also applies to indicator 5.a.2 on the legal protection of women's land rights – a legal indicator with a somewhat similar methodology to 14.6.1 and 14.b.1. Here too, Oceanian countries could quickly close the reporting gap with a minimal effort that involves completing a detailed FAO questionnaire, but not requiring the deployment of new survey instruments.

9. It is possible to further disaggregate the average reporting rate for Asia-Pacific by sub-region, as well as calculate the reporting rate for Oceania separately from Australia and New Zealand. Figure 3 presents a comparative analysis of the latest average country reporting rates on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship across the five Asian sub-regions, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), and Australia and New Zealand. South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia are close to the world average reporting rate, as is Australia and New Zealand. In contrast, Eastern and Central Asia lag behind the world average by 5.3 and 6.5 percentage points, respectively, while Western Asia registers the lowest reporting rate, 6.9 percentage points behind the world average. Furthermore, the reporting rate for Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) drops even lower, to only 33.3 percent, with a staggering difference of 31.2.8 percentage points behind the world average.

Figure 3. Comparison of the 2024 average country reporting rate for the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship across Asian sub-regions and Oceania



10. These findings yield one inescapable conclusion. While differences in reporting rates among Asian sub-regions are rather minor – with all of them being fairly close to the world average – Oceania as a whole faces the risk of being left behind in SDG reporting and missing out on the benefits of enhanced data availability in SDG indicators related to food and agriculture. Such data can serve as a vital catalyst in the transformation of agrifood systems aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition. Consequently, there is an urgent need for increased efforts from donors, the international community, and FAO to invest in statistical capacity development initiatives in this region. Even if there have been historical tendencies or practical reasons to allocate more capacity development resources to other subregions, it is imperative to boost and scale up investments in Oceania to foster better data collection and reporting capacities.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

11. In conclusion, the disparity in reporting rates across Asia and Oceania for the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship underscores the urgent need for enhanced efforts to bridge these gaps. While Asia-Pacific trails slightly behind the global average, Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, faces a more pronounced lag in reporting rates. These differences can be attributed to specific gaps in reporting certain SDG indicators. Despite minor variations among subregions within Asia, the collective challenge remains significant for Oceania as a whole.

12. Addressing this situation requires concerted action at both national and regional levels. The recent calls from the UN Secretary General and the High-Level Political Forum emphasize the imperative of increasing the availability of SDG-related data. FAO's commitment to supporting countries in this endeavour is evident through its comprehensive capacity development initiatives, outlined in various other APCAS background papers. Moreover, FAO's online e-learning Academy offers countries accessible opportunities for enhancing their understanding and reporting of SDG indicators under FAO's purview. By embracing these resources and collaborative efforts, countries in Asia-Pacific can strive towards fulfilling the global commitment to SDG reporting and advancing sustainable development agendas.