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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Hundred and Twenty-eighth Session

Rome, 18-22 May 2020

**Evaluation of FAO's statistical work -
Management Response**

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- FAO welcomes the *Evaluation of FAO's statistical work* and commends the evaluation team for the comprehensive review of FAO's statistics.
- FAO welcomes the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in the evaluation, highlighting their usefulness and, in particular their timeliness, as FAO is currently developing its new Strategic Framework, and in concomitance with the implementation of the repositioning of the UN Development System.
- Management fully accepts three of the six recommendations and partially accepts the remaining three.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee may wish to provide its views and guidance on the key issues in the Evaluation report, and to the response to the recommendations and proposed follow-up actions by Management.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- a) welcomed the *Evaluation of FAO's statistical work*;**
- b) supported the conclusions and recommendations from this evaluation report; and**
- c) agreed with the measures proposed in the Management Response to improve FAO's statistical work.**

1. FAO welcomes the *Evaluation of FAO's statistical work* and commends the evaluation team for the comprehensive review of FAO's statistics. FAO welcomes the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in the evaluation, highlighting their usefulness and, in particular their timeliness, as FAO is currently developing its new Strategic Framework, and in concomitance with the implementation of the repositioning of the UN Development System. FAO is also currently rolling out its Strategy for the Modernization of FAO Statistics, in full alignment with UN system-wide plans to develop a Roadmap on Innovating Data and Statistics, placing focus on the capacity to respond to increased data demand, driven by the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, as well as by organizational priorities, such as the Hand-in-Hand initiative.

Comments on Recommendations

2. Management fully accepts three of the six recommendations and partially accepts the remaining three. Specifically:

- a) *Recommendation 1* is partially accepted. FAO agrees that statistics governance needs further improvement to ensure adequate oversight and accountability and clear responsibilities and reporting lines for the divisions and offices involved in statistical production and reporting. However, the suggestion of having the functions of Chief Statistician and Director of the Statistics Division merged into one position is not supported. A similar arrangement already existed in the period 2012-2016, resulting in a number of shortcomings, which led the FAO Council to support the separation of the two functions in December 2016¹ for reasons which remain valid today.
- b) *Recommendation 2* is partially accepted. FAO appreciates that increasing the role of regional statisticians and decentralized offices is crucial, however transferring positions from headquarters to decentralized locations would result in weakening central capacity. Management supports instead the need to further clarify responsibilities and reporting lines and provide adequate resources to allow a meaningful contribution to statistics-related objectives.
- c) *Recommendation 3* is partially accepted. While the need to strategically embed the use of extrabudgetary funding in a more integrated and comprehensive statistical programme of work is recognized, Management believes the recommendation to reprioritize Regular Programme resources for statistical activities lacks clarity. Management will undertake a detailed assessment of staffing and other resources currently dedicated to FAO's statistical activities, as well as data system gaps so as to better assess the most appropriate funding sources and modalities.
- d) Management fully agrees with *Recommendation 4* to accelerate actions to improve the quality of data and IT infrastructure support. The Organization is fully committed to intensify its actions to modernize IT infrastructures, adopt more innovative solutions for data production and improve the quality of its statistics. All these actions are included in the Strategy for the Modernization of FAO Statistics being rolled out.
- e) Management welcomes *Recommendation 5* to increase the coverage of its statistical capacity-development initiatives to enable countries not only to collect, produce and disseminate accurate, reliable and timely statistics, but also to increase the use of statistical information, including gender-disaggregated data in decision-making, noting this recommendation is already implemented in FAO's largest statistical capacity development programmes, and it is planned to extend it to all statistical capacity development activities coupled with systematic integration in FAO's policy and normative programmes.

¹ CL 155/7 Annex 1; CL 155/7–Inf.1; CL 155/REP paragraph 18

- f) Management also agrees with *Recommendation 6* recognizing the importance of Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS) and their integration in National Strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS) and to the need for decentralized offices to systematically contribute to the development and implementation of relevant SPARS/NSDS at country level.
3. Further information is provided in the Matrix.

Management response to the Evaluation of FAO's statistical work Matrix

| Evaluation Recommendation | Management response Accepted, partially accepted or rejected | Management plan | | | |
|--|--|---|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| | | Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection | Responsible unit | Timeframe | Further funding required (Y or N) |
| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) | (f) |
| <p>Recommendation 1: FAO should revise its statistics governance to ensure better coordination and coherence of its statistical work. It will need to (1) ensure that one entity has sufficient authority to ensure oversight and accountability; and (2) clarify and concretize responsibilities and reporting lines for the divisions and offices responsible for producing and disseminating statistics.</p> <p>To implement this recommendation, the Evaluation Team suggests the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) elevating the oversight and responsibilities of the Chief Statistician; b) merging the functions of Chief Statistician and Division Director of Statistics into one, while allocate to this entity | Partially accepted | <p>Management agrees with the need to allow the Chief Statistician sufficient authority to ensure oversight and accountability and the need to clarify responsibilities and reporting lines, noting the oversight responsibilities of the Chief Statistician should encompass all statistical activities currently undertaken by statistical units throughout FAO, seeking a further consolidation of functions, such as by strengthening oversight over statistical programming or reengineering existing statistical governance and other coordination mechanisms.</p> <p>However, the suggestion of merging the positions of Chief Statistician and Director of the Statistics Division is not supported, noting that the reasons and shortcomings which led to separating the functions in 2016 remain valid and also that the Chief Statistician must have adequate time to exercise the coordination role, international mandate, coherence and quality assurance responsibilities and oversight functions.</p> | DDG, ODG, OCS, Chief Economist | 2020 | N |

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| broader responsibilities for managing the statistical activities currently undertaken in other statistical units/divisions. | | | | | |
| <p>Recommendation 2: FAO needs to strengthen and redefine the function of regional statisticians by allocating sufficient resources to allow them to contribute to strategic activities at headquarters level and to operational activities at country level.</p> <p>One model could be to decentralize more positions from statistical units to the neediest regions. This would reduce the workload of the current regional statisticians and strengthen links. Another option would be to use the Junior Professional Programme and South–South Cooperation as forums for assistance.</p> | Partially accepted | <p>Management agrees with the need to strengthen the statistical capacities in decentralized offices, and during the past few years, three subregional statistician positions were established by decentralizing posts from headquarters. Management also recognizes that the current environment, UNDS repositioning and shift of priority for resources partners toward more focus on country and regional level projects might add pressure to the current demand on country offices and regional and subregional statisticians. Yet decentralizing even more positions would weaken core technical expertise and capacity at headquarters and at the global level.</p> <p>In addition to improved communication with country offices, and clarity on the reporting lines between regional/subregional statisticians and the Chief Statistician, consideration will be given to identifying alternative supporting modalities (e.g. South-South and Triangular Cooperation) to provide additional resources for regional and subregional statisticians.</p> | DDG, ODG, OCS, Chief Economist, RR/ADGs, OSS, OSP, OHR, Technical Statistical Units | 2020-2021 | N |
| <p>Recommendation 3: FAO needs to reprioritize regular programming resources for statistical activities and maximize the effective use of extrabudgetary funding by having a</p> | Partially accepted | Management partially agrees with this recommendation. A comprehensive needs assessment of the actual resources, as well as funding, data systems and skill gaps of FAO statistics needs to be carried out together with other priorities of FAO's work. Management commits to promptly initiating such assessment with a view to better identifying | DDG, ODG, OCS, Chief Economist, OSP, PSR | 2020-2021 | Y Estimate USD 6.8 million (majority expected from |

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| <p>more strategic capacity-development plan.</p> <p>FAO could consider several options to maximize the use of funding by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) reprioritizing resources within the current regular budget to establish a fundraising and resource-mobilization position using cost-share bases between divisions and/or funds; b) creating a rolling plan that sets: (a) long-term strategic objectives, (b) a medium-term plan for priority actions for, say, three years and (c) a multi-year workplan that feeds into a realistic financial plan; c) setting up an internal trust fund; d) leveraging extrabudgetary resources to create a continuity plan to resolve uncertainties in capacity development under regular programmes; and | | <p>core statistical activities that should be anchored in Regular Programme funds, and other statistical activities stemming from the effective use of extrabudgetary funding. The outcomes of the assessment will assist in fine tuning the best modalities for managing extrabudgetary funds.</p> <p>The Strategy for the Modernization of FAO’s Statistics, for which Initial resources have already been secured, will include a set of priority actions and initiatives.</p> | | | extrabudgetary resources) |

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| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) | (f) |
| e) negotiating extrabudgetary funds in a timely manner. | | | | | |
| Recommendation 4: FAO needs to accelerate actions to improve the quality of its data and IT infrastructure support (including information technology). | Accepted | <p>Management is already taking action to improve data quality using IT and quality assurance tools, building on substantial efforts made in recent years.</p> <p>In terms of data quality, (i) for data produced by FAO, data quality assessments are based both on self-assessments² and in-depth assessments led by the Office of the Chief Statistician; (ii) for data generated by countries (i.e. data collected and reported to FAO), FAO plans to set data quality standards for key food and agricultural statistics and assist countries in developing and implementing National Agricultural Data Quality Assurance Frameworks, as approved by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020.</p> <p>FAO already has in place a strategy to improve the quality of the input data coming from countries through capacity development activities. Projects such as AGRIS, the 50x2030 Initiative and the Voices of the Hungry are at the core of this effort.</p> <p>FAO will also introduce an innovative statistical data management system that ensures high quality data and consistent application of international standards across the entire statistical value chain. To this end, FAO will accelerate the implementation of the Statistical Working System (SWS) focusing on optimizing performance, enhancing user interface and functionalities, developing a new corporate open data strategy, and defining roles and responsibilities.</p> | ODG, OCS, CIO, Chief Economist, Technical Statistical Units | 2020-2022 | Y Estimate USD 7 million (USD 4.4 million to be proposed for CapEx funding and USD 2.6 million from extrabudgetary resources) |

² Quality and Planning Survey (QAPS)

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| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) | (f) |
| | | In addition, FAO will encourage the use of alternative sources of data and innovative methods to process unstructured data in order to fill data gaps and improve the quality of FAO statistics. A Data Lab for statistical innovation will be strengthened to create new and more granular statistics by making use of geospatial data and data already available on the web. | | | |
| Recommendation 5: FAO should increase the coverage of its statistical capacity-development initiatives to enable countries to collect, produce and disseminate accurate, reliable and timely statistics and to use statistical information, including gender disaggregated data. This second strand could be done by blending FAO's capacity development activities into country-level sectoral plans and by bringing the broader group of (internal and external) stakeholders together early in the process. | Accepted | <p>Management has already taken concrete actions towards placing more emphasis on the use of statistics. The three FAO main statistical capacity development initiatives adopt a holistic approach which integrates specific objectives related to data use and data disaggregation with more conventional objectives related to data generation. Over the last few years, FAO has also systematically monitored the impact of its work programme on the use of statistics through the Corporate Outcome Assessment and confirmed that the effective use of data and statistics has improved in many policy areas under FAO's mandate at local level.</p> <p>This approach will be included in all other statistical capacity development activities conducted through increased cooperation in project formulation and implementation between statistical and technical units responsible for policy analysis, both at global and at country level.</p> <p>Regarding gender-related data, FAO plans to scale up investment on data disaggregation as the new principal methodological work area for SDG indicators, in full alignment with the evolving priorities of the UN Statistical Commission and IAEG-SDG. This year FAO reported data for Goal 5 SDG indicators for the first time, aided by a number of promising partnerships with other international institutions.</p> | ODG, Chief Economist, OCS, Technical Statistical Units | Ongoing | Y Estimate USD 1.2 million (from extrabudgetary resources) |

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| (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) | (f) |
| Recommendation 6: FAO decentralized offices should aim to contribute systematically to the development and implementation of relevant NSDS sectors at country level. | Accepted | <p>Management agrees that the design of Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS) and their integration in National Strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS) are key to guaranteeing a better alignment between data needs and data production, as well as strengthening national statistical systems.</p> <p>FAO agrees that decentralized offices should aim to contribute systematically to the development and implementation of SPARS and NSDS, and it is expected that the implementation of recommendations 2 and 3 will also inform how to best decentralize support on SPARS/NSDS.</p> | OCS, RR/ADGs, OSD, country offices | A continuous activity | Y |