

Web Annex 1:

The UN Secretary-General's Data Strategy adopted by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the implications for FAO

Introduction

1. The Secretary-General launched, on 8 June 2020¹, the “*Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere*”², a long-term agenda for the UN’s data-driven transformation. Making better use of data is a vital change management initiative to protect and strengthen the UN’s relevance in the 21st century. The Secretary-General’s Data Strategy promotes a vision that stresses the power of UN data assets and stimulates the UN System to embrace a more coherent and modern approach to data production and use.

2. This document presents the links between the overarching UN framework and FAO’s *Strategy for the Modernization of Statistics*, which was endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2020³. It also presents an update on the main common elements of this new set of strategies for innovating data and statistics, how they relate to each other, as well as how they will impact on FAO’s own work in this area.

Data Strategy for Action by Everyone, Everywhere

3. The Secretary-General’s Data Strategy represent an essential component of the UN reform, which aims at building a comprehensive UN data ecosystem to unlock full digital, technological and innovation potential for better decisions. The Data Strategy aims to foster stronger decision-making and policy advice, greater data access and sharing, improved data governance and collaboration, robust data protection and privacy, enhanced efficiency across UN operations, greater transparency and accountability, and better services for people and the planet. FAO is one of 50 UN entities that jointly designed this Strategy based on global best practices.

4. At the core of the Data Strategy is the notion of data action that adds immediate value for organizations, for the people and the planet. The Strategy adopts a problem-driven approach that emphasizes the value of developing portfolios of “data use cases” addressing current priorities. The necessary prerequisite is to build the capabilities and organizational enablers we need in order to empower the UN’s data potential and advance a transformation in people and culture, partnerships, data governance, and technology – so that data can thrive as a strategic asset in the UN System. The two key new capabilities that this initiative will nurture are *data analytics* (using data to better understand “what happened”, “why it happened”, “what may happen next”, “how to respond”) and *data access* (ensuring everyone, everywhere can discover, access, integrate and share the data they need).

Data Strategy Implementation

5. The Data Strategy proposes an implementation roadmap with a 2030 horizon that starts with an onboarding period, followed by three implementation stages that will bring the data-driven transformation to maturity.

- The onboarding period, estimated to last from six to eight months, has the objective to design and set the foundations for the implementation of the strategy in each UN organization. During this

¹ Following its approval by the Executive Committee in April 2020 and its presentation at the Chief Executives Board in May 2020.

² See <https://unitednations.sharepoint.com/sites/DataStrategy>

³ See the « Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics» <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-13-AgriculturalStats-E.pdf>

period, FAO will be invited to establish a *Strategy Support Team*, pursue quick action on immediate priorities, set up the enabling governance framework and assess gaps across enablers and across capabilities.

- The first full implementation stage (2020-22) will hence aim to assemble and deliver key data, with an emphasis on priority themes, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Decade of Action, climate change, gender equality, human rights, peace and security, and the UN reform. Delivery modalities will focus on people, training and culture, centres of excellence and collaboration, partnerships, the technology environment, and improving data governance and stewardship. The Strategy will aim to leverage pooled funding to bring initiatives to scale, and will use scorecards to track implementation.
- The second, or “differentiating” stage (2022-25) will focus on implementing the long-term recommendations in the Strategy, prioritize SDG data action portfolios, while the final stage (2025-30) will fully focus on making the most of the use cases to drive the transformational changes required to achieve the SDGs.

Implication for FAO Statistics

6. While the Data Strategy envelopes the entire data ecosystem and not just statistics, it provides an important impetus for the transformational changes needed to improve FAO statistical system. Read in conjunction with the results of the Evaluation of FAO Statistics, it serves as a basis to inform the modernization process of FAO statistics in terms of governance, priorities, capabilities and enablers.

7. Regarding **governance**, the comprehensiveness of the Data Strategy reinforces the need to strengthen FAO governance on statistics and data to ensure greater coherence, and strengthened managerial support to data innovations. In addition, and in conformity with the first recommendation of the Evaluation on Statistics, the oversight and responsibilities of the Chief Statistician would aim to ensure proper quality assurance standards become even more salient in the context of the Data Strategy.

8. FAO is committed to implement the **priorities** identified in the Data Strategy, namely the SDG Decade of Action, climate action, gender equality, human rights, peace and security, and UN reform. In fact, its roadmap to statistics modernization already foresees a prioritization of data initiatives that will ensure a greater impact. For example, the Innovation Data Lab, created in the context of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, has a specific work-stream that focuses on closing the data gaps for achieving the SDGs through the use of new/alternative data sources, such as Big data, and Earth Observation data, combined with the development of innovative data production methods and disaggregation techniques. Another key priority currently being implemented is the development of data products (e.g. country profiles on SDGs, food and agriculture), specifically designed to support the work of the UN Country Teams.

9. The two key **capabilities** foreseen by the Data Strategy, i.e. data analytics and data access, are also closely aligned with FAO’s strategy for the modernization of statistics: To ensure that statistics can be widely discoverable, accessed, used and re-shared, the creation of a unique *Statistical Data Warehouse* that integrates all 15 FAO data platforms and is compatible with the data.un.org portal has already being identified as a key priority. Moreover, FAO has already advanced and will continue to improve its corporate open data policy to allow free and open use of FAO data, including from the private sector. FAO will also conduct more systematic survey-based user consultations in order to produce more relevant statistical outputs and tackle data access issues, as well as integrate data use cases in upcoming capacity development initiatives and improve efforts to mainstream data and statistics in policy interventions.

10. Finally, FAO is already taking actions across all four Data Strategy’s fundamental **enablers**: people and culture, partnerships, data governance, and technology. Building data skills, promoting

talent and spreading a culture of collaboration, excellence, openness and sharing, in the spirit of the **people and culture** enabler, is at the heart of the concept of FAO's Data innovation Lab. The Lab will act as a centre of excellence for accelerating the development of the capacity of FAO statistics on all innovative solutions, and then redistributing the knowledge acquired to relevant Units to ensure proper transfer of technical know-how. In addition, FAO is expanding its involvement in UN Staff Capacity Development through initiatives such as the Digital Technology Network, UN HR- Professional Training Programmes, Global Pulse, and UN Staff College.

11. Similarly, in terms of **data governance and strategy oversight**, FAO is taking concrete measures to reinforce its governance mechanisms to manage data as a shared strategic asset in accordance with the recommendation of the Evaluation on Statistics and the Management Response. This will ensure proper data oversight from a quality perspective and a better integration of the work of the IDWG on Statistics with higher level governance structures.

12. **Partnerships** have long been viewed as key enabler for FAO statistics. FAO particularly values partnerships as a way to connect sustainably to data ecosystems across and outside the UN family, to jointly unlock the value of data at greater scale. To this end, FAO is already actively engaged in the main global coordination mechanisms, including the UN *Committee of Chief Statisticians* and *Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities*. Other partnerships in the context of statistics includes: partnerships for increasing data use (e.g. with the Committee on World Food Security's data stream); technical partnerships (e.g. with the European Space Agency, the UN Global Platform, the Interagency and Expert Group on Food Security, Agricultural and Rural Statistics); data sharing partnerships (e.g. with Eurostat, the African Union Commission, and accredited private sector entities); and knowledge-sharing partnerships (e.g. with the World Data Forum).

13. With regard to the **technology environment**, FAO fully embraces the Data Strategy's impulse to effectively empower all users with tool sets and processes, so that data can turn into insights and actions. Besides the work of the Data Innovation Lab, already mentioned above, FAO will need to continue investing in improving its IT infrastructure and data dissemination tools. As it was also noted by the Evaluation on Statistics and Management Response, this will be vital to improving FAO data quality, relevance and timeliness, while decreasing data management and administrative costs through improved IT infrastructure supporting statistical work. Furthermore, the integration of statistical data collection and dissemination platforms will allow FAO to better respond to the needs of countries and users more broadly, reducing the response burden and increasing data accessibility.

14. The implementation of the Data Strategy will be fundamental in accelerating the data-driven transformation that will add immediate value to UN organizations and the people they serve. It comes with several challenges in terms of financing, governance, capacities and IT infrastructure, particularly because it considers all types of data assets. On the statistical side, however, FAO has already a clear vision on the way forward with at its centre its Strategy for the Modernization of Statistics and the implementation of the management response to the Evaluation.