

February 2016



منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة للأمم
المتحدة

联合国
粮食及
农业组织

Food and
Agriculture
Organization
of the
United Nations

Organisation des
Nations Unies
pour
l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная
организация
Объединенных
Наций

Organización
de las
Naciones Unidas
para la
Alimentación y la
Agricultura

E

Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics

Twenty-Sixth Session

Thimphu, Bhutan, 15-19 Feb 2016

Agenda Item 5

Global Strategy: An Overview and Summary of Progress

Contributed by: *Allan Nicholls, Regional Coordinator,
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
allan.nicholls@fao.org*

Abstract

This document provides a brief overview of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, including some background to the need for such a strategy and a summary description of the strategy. The expected impact and outcomes are described, as well as the three pillars on which the strategy is based, and the four components of the strategy. A summary of Regional Office activities is provided and progress is also described. An overview of Training and Research activities and progress is also given, while technical assistance activities are covered in a separate document (APCAS/16/5.1.2). Finally, a summary of challenges faced is presented, as well as significant impacts of the Global Strategy to date.

I. Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics

1.1 The need

Policy makers and development practitioners who are responsible for developing investment strategies to promote economic growth find many challenges in the changing face of agriculture in the twenty-first century. In addition to its productive role of providing food, clothing, fuel, and housing for a growing world population, agriculture assumes other roles, the importance of which has more recently been recognized. In addition to its essential role in food security, agricultural development is now seen as a vital and high-impact source of poverty reduction. It is also seen as a source of environmental problems and a contributor to global warming, water scarcity and pollution, and land degradation. At the same time its potential as a source of environmental services needs to be defined, monitored, and evaluated. Many of the issues facing the sector transcend national boundaries.

Decisions about aid and investments that are intended to foster agricultural growth need to be based on sound information about land use, factors of agricultural production, the prevailing economic and social situations that producers face, and the interaction of these with issues concerning climate change. The impacts of these factors can only be effectively measured and evaluated with appropriate statistics. However, at present there is a serious paucity of statistical data on which to base marketing, investment, or policy decisions, or with which to assess the efficacy of current commitments or policies.

The reasons for this paucity of statistical data are many and varied, but problems common to many developing countries include:

- Limited staff and capacity of the units that are responsible for collection, compilation, analysis, and dissemination of agricultural statistics.
- Lack of adequate technical tools, statistical methodology, and survey framework to support data-production efforts.
- Insufficient funding allocated for agricultural statistics from development partners and national budgets.
- Inadequate integration of agriculture into the National Statistical Systems
- Uncoordinated and duplicated efforts in data collection and dissemination
- Limited use in planning and policy formulation

1.2 The Global Strategy

The Global Strategy is an initiative of the United Nations Statistical Commission. It was developed through an extensive consultation process with national and international statistical organizations as well as with agriculture ministries and other governmental institutions represented in FAO governing bodies.

The purpose of the Global Strategy is to provide a framework for national and international statistical systems that enables them to produce and to apply the basic data and information needed to guide decision making in the twenty-first century.

The Global Strategy covers a broad scope including aspects of forestry, fisheries, land and water use in order to address the emerging and closely related economic, social and environmental issues faced by policy makers.

The Action Plan for the Global Strategy provides for implementation in 90 countries in the world in the period 2013-2017, including 20 countries in Asia Pacific. While the focus of the Global Strategy is on strategic planning and capacity building, it is also intended to be the basis for a renewed mobilization of resources to enable capacity building into the future.

1.2.1 Impact and Outcome

The Impact of the Global Strategy is to improve evidence-based decision making for poverty reduction, increased food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development.

The Outcome is to enable target countries to develop sustainable statistical systems for production and dissemination of accurate and timely agricultural and rural statistics, comparable over time and across countries.

1.2.2 The Three Pillars

The First Pillar – Establish a minimum set of core data that countries will disseminate on a regular basis to meet current and emerging demands.

Because the complete set of data requirements identified in the conceptual framework exceeds the existing statistical capacity of many countries, a minimum set of core data is to be used as a starting point upon which to develop the Global Strategy. This core set of data will provide national and international policy makers necessary information that goes across national boundaries. The Global Strategy provides a framework for countries to add items of national interest to the set of core data and to determine the frequency with which they will be provided. The set of core data provides the beginning point for the improvement of agricultural and rural statistics.

The Second Pillar – Integrate agriculture into National Statistical Systems to meet the emerging requirement that statistical information be linked across the economic, social and environmental domains.

Overlapping data requirements and the need to improve underlying statistics and methodology point directly to the need to integrate agriculture into the national statistical system. Incorporating agriculture into national statistical systems will facilitate the concentration of resources from multiple sources, and remove the duplication of efforts in producing statistics that is so common in developing countries. The Strategy provides the framework to achieve the integration based on the development of a master frame for agriculture, its use in an integrated survey system, and the implementation of a data management system.

The Third Pillar – Foster the sustainability of agricultural statistical systems through governance and statistical capacity building.

The conceptual framework leading to the integration of agriculture into national statistical systems points to requirements for governance that bring together the efforts of the different stakeholders, especially the national statistical institutes and ministries of agriculture. While the Strategy provides the framework for integration, it leaves the implementation to each country to decide and suggests they do so by forming national statistics councils. Other issues addressed are the steps needed to implement the Strategy, including the inclusion of the fundamentals of the Strategy in the national strategies for the development of statistics.

II. Implementation of the Global Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region

Implementation of the Global Strategy in the Asia Pacific region involves four components:

- Regional Office
- Technical Assistance
- Training
- Research

A regional structure has been set up to ensure appropriate implementation of the Global Strategy in the regions. This structure includes a regional office based in Bangkok at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), responsible for coordination and technical assistance issues, a training component which is the responsibility of the Statistical Institute for Asia & the Pacific (SIAP), and a Regional Steering Committee to guide implementation decisions. The research component is primarily the responsibility of the Global Office. While not a formal part of the partnership, the Asian Development Bank is funding and undertaking research activities related to the Global Strategy. A Regional Action Plan (RAP) has been developed to guide implementation in the region.

2.1 Regional Office

The main roles of the Regional Office are to

- Provide secretariat services to the Regional Steering Committee
- Coordinate activities among implementing partners and other stakeholders
- Provide communication and advocacy activities
- Report regularly against Monitoring and Evaluation indicators
- Develop annual workplans and budgets
- Provide six-monthly reports of activities and progress
- Provide six-monthly financial reports
- Provide logistical support to staff and consultants undertaking work relevant to the Global Strategy in the region

2.2 Regional Steering Committee (RSC)

The Regional Steering Committee (RSC) is the ultimate decision-making body at regional level. The RSC provides guidance and oversight, within the framework defined by the Global Steering Committee (GSC) and consistent with relevant funding agreements, for the implementation of the regional and country activities defined in the Regional Action Plan. Examples of decisions made by the RSC include:

- Selection of participating countries
- Allocation of funds to country activities
- Advice and endorsement of workplans and budgets
- Advice and endorsement of other governance reports

In addition, the RSC seeks to achieve coordination of activities and interventions that are not funded through the Trust Fund, but are of significant relevance for the implementation of the Global Strategy. Interventions of this nature include all relevant interventions that are funded through bilateral arrangements, self-funding modalities or any other activities outside the Trust Fund mechanism.

The RSC is comprised of eight country members as well as members representing donors, implementing partners, resource partners and training and research institutions related to agriculture.

The RSC has met five times since the start of Global Strategy activities in the region.

The RSC also recently established a Technical Working Group to provide advice to the RSC on relevant technical issues raised before the RSC. The Technical Working Group has met once to discuss aspects of development of Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS), which are one of the key outputs of Global Strategy country activities.

2.3 Other Regional Office Activities

2.3.1 Coordination among implementing partners and other stakeholders

This activity is mainly devoted to ensuring the coordination of the Global Strategy's implementation among partner agencies at regional level. To achieve this goal the following activities are undertaken:

- Regional Office staff attend all relevant meetings within the scope of the Global Strategy, particularly meetings organized by ESCAP. Regional office staff also participate in important regional meetings to advocate the Global Strategy and to build synergies with the work of other development partners not directly involved in the Global Strategy. Participation in these meetings enables the RO to report on the progress of the Global Strategy, share the main achievements and explore other areas of collaboration. It also facilitates resource mobilization.
- The training component of the GS in the region is implemented by the Statistical Institute for Asia Pacific (SIAP), while the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is actively collaborating. In order to improve communication and enhance open discussion and collaboration between the regional partners and at regional level, a Task Force meeting is held regularly and regional coordination meetings are held periodically.
- Regional office staff participate in coordination meetings organized by the Global Office.
- Technical officers in the RO coordination role are prominent during the interventions at country level. Officers coordinate among partners in order to ensure the best result for each country and avoid duplication.
- Regional Office staff maintain regular liaison with
 - Organisations such as the World Bank and PARIS21
 - Sub-regional organisations such as ASEAN, SAARC and SPC
 - Related projects such as AMIS and AFSIS

2.3.2 Communication and Advocacy activities

This activity is mainly devoted to increase the promotion and visibility of the Global Strategy at regional level and support the Resource Mobilization efforts:

- A regional communication plan was finalised in 2015. During 2016, the regional office will continue with implementation of this plan. Promotional materials, using the newly established visual identity, will be developed.

- Resource mobilization efforts, both at regional and country level, will be continued in 2016. These activities will be mainly oriented to cover the funding gap in the region. The advocacy activities will be focused on the identified technical assistance needs.
- Officers in the Regional Office will establish new contacts and consolidate relations with donors in the countries while on missions to provide technical assistance.

2.4 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance in countries is organised by the regional office and delivered by RO staff and International Consultants.

Details of Technical Assistance activities are provided in a separate paper, APCAS/16/5.1.2

2.5 Training

Training activities are the responsibility of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) based in Japan.

Main training activities consist of: regional and country-level training courses/workshops for priority countries with the following objectives:

- In coordination with the series of regional workshops (8 – 10 scheduled in 2016) by the Global Office Research Component to ensure an appropriate transfer of know-how when technical reports and guidelines are disseminated, follow-on training-of-trainers regional courses will be conducted. Topics include: master sampling frame, cost of production, CAPI, AGRIS toolkit, improving quality and use of administrative data; fisheries and aquaculture census framework; food balance sheets; estimating post-harvest losses; estimating production of mixed, repeated and continuous crops; estimating livestock and livestock products
- Continue to strengthen basic statistical skills of statistical staff in agriculture by working with national training institutes and universities in providing training-of-trainers courses in countries
- Introduce the SDGs and indicators relating to core data sets for agricultural and rural statistics
- Support the outcomes of the SPARS and IdCA through targeted training for countries
- Continue to strengthen technical capacity to use data for policy analysis for food security and sustainable agriculture
- Continue to strengthen technical capacity for communication and advocacy, including use of data visualization tools and archiving and dissemination

The training activities also continue to strengthen training institutions through:

- Making available training resources (training needs assessment tools, curricula and syllabuses, training materials) and providing assistance, including dedicated training-of-trainers courses to national and regional training institutions to utilize the tools
- Instituting a certification programme for trainers
- Facilitating training coordination and collaboration through meetings of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in the Region and subgroups of its experts

2.6 Research

The Research component is primarily the responsibility of the Global Office. There is a very extensive program in place and a number of key research topics will be discussed during this meeting. As reports become available they are released on the Global Strategy website at www.gsars.org

The Asian Development Bank also undertakes some related methodological research and training, including

- Examination of available data sources for Agricultural Statistics
- Comparative analysis of existing surveys to understand characteristics of urban and rural households
- Methods of improving administrative reporting systems
- Exploring the use of optical satellite imagery to supplement land use data
- Pilot testing the Agricultural Land Information System
- Design of a Livestock Production Probability Survey
- Pilot emerging technologies such as remote sensing for the estimation of rice area and production
- Relevant training to assist country staff involved in the above programs

III. Overall Progress

Initial work on the Global Strategy in the region mainly involved the establishment of a range of guidelines and procedures, so progress (in terms of country level activity) was quite slow. Over the last two years, the pace of implementation has increased and we are on schedule to meet the expected outcomes of the project.

3.1 Progress with the Regional Office

The Regional Office is set up and fully functioning. However, recruiting and retaining both staff and consultants continues to cause challenges.

The Regional Steering Committee is well established and working effectively.

3.2 Technical Assistance

More details are provided in a separate paper, APCAS/16/5.1.2, but we are now active in 15 countries in the region. In terms of the three main outputs from Global Strategy work,

- An In-depth Capacity Assessment (IdCA) has been substantially completed in eleven countries,
- A Country Proposal Paper has been prepared for eight countries and technical assistance on specific topics is underway in four countries
- A Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS) has been substantially drafted in seven countries

3.3 Training

The key areas of progress in respect of training are:

- Syllabus, curricula and training materials have been produced on nine priority topics
- 15 regional/country training workshops have been conducted
- Agricultural statistics training network has been established
- Capacity of Regional and national training institutions is improved

3.4 Research

The ADB is active in developing and piloting new methodologies as indicated in section 2.6 above.

Several countries in the region are involved in pilots of new methodologies and technologies developed under the Global Office Research Program, and workshops on specific methodologies are planned for the region.

IV. Challenges

Now that a range of guidelines and procedures have been established and refined, the key challenges faced by the Global Strategy in the region are:

4.1 Availability of suitable international consultants is very limited

Consultants are required on both a long-term basis for work in the Regional Office and on a short-term basis for country level work.

There is an urgent need for an additional long-term consultant to work in the Regional Office, but despite approaches to a range of potential candidates, the position has not been able to be filled.

As the number of participating countries increases, so too does the need for short-term consultants, with a range of different skills. A number of potential candidates has recently been identified and several have indicated they are available. Matching of their skills to our needs is yet to be undertaken.

4.2 Turnover of focal points in some countries

The focal point in a country is a key link between the Regional Office and the country and plays a key role in progressing activities in country between missions. In a few countries, turnover of the focal point has been high and this has resulted in delays as new focal points become established in the position.

4.3 Scheduling of missions and workshops

As indicated above, global strategy activities are occurring in 15 countries. It can be a difficult task to schedule missions at appropriate times to suit availability of regional office staff, international consultants and country stakeholders. On a number of occasions there have been last minute changes to timing and this has inevitably delayed progress to some extent.

V. Impact of the Global Strategy

While Global Strategy activities are not yet completed in any of the 15 countries, there are a range of impacts which can already be observed.

- One of the early tasks in a country is to establish a formal group of stakeholders for discussions on a range of issues. It is clear that coordination arrangements between stakeholders has substantially improved as a result.
- Training at various levels has improved the capacity of relevant staff from both producer and user organisations
- There is an increased awareness in governments of the need for agricultural statistics, and in several cases, increased funding has been provided
- Technical assistance on specific issues has started and improvements to methodologies are in place or being tested in several countries