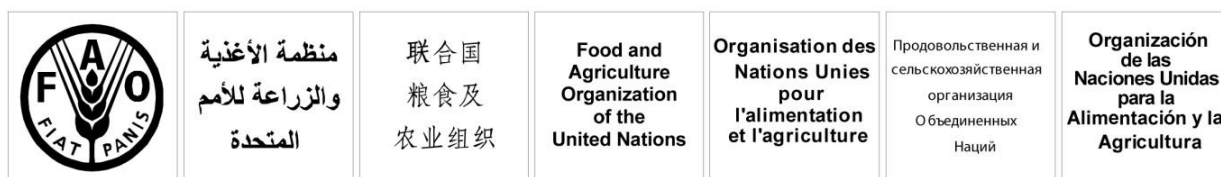


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CountrySTAT framework in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) countries

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Good information infrastructure is a prerequisite of effective and efficient policy decisions. The ability to easily access key information is critical for decision makers. CountrySTAT addresses these needs by providing a framework and the tool to compile, organize and disseminate food and agriculture statistics via the internet. CountrySTAT is driven by country ownership and partnership among stakeholders (both users and suppliers) in the form of a Technical Working Group. CountrySTAT allows for the integration of:

- different subject domains;
- of agricultural statistics to the rest of the statistical system in the countries and;
- of the national statistics to the international statistical system.

CountrySTAT is operational in the Philippines, Bhutan, 20 countries and 2 Regional Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa, and most recently in Afghanistan and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The project is constantly evolving and providing improved tools to support the efforts of countries to disseminate statistics that are internationally comparable and easily accessible. During 2012 notable developments in the CountrySTAT project are 1) the development of e-learning tools to support the dissemination of data using FAOSTAT Standards, and 2) the migration of CountrySTAT to the FENIX platform which is also used by FAOSTAT. One of the many benefits of the new CountrySTAT will be that it is based upon open source technologies. Therefore countries do not have to concern themselves with licensing constraints.

ECO is an organization that is thriving and growing. It was established in 1985 as an intergovernmental regional organization. Its purpose is to promote economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states which include the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz

Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The role of statistical information is crucial for assessing achievements in priority sectors, such as agriculture. The ECO Framework of Cooperation in Statistics, under the ECO Plan of Action on Statistics, provides clear objectives in the regional cooperation in statistics to support ECO's regional initiatives, planning and policy-making through the provision of comparable and timely statistics; to harmonize classifications, concepts, definitions; to adopt international best practices; and to promote improvements in the official statistics. Over the past decade the member countries have been working to harmonize measurements, classifications and methodologies in an effort to ensure consistency regionally.

In 2010 ECO expressed an interest to work with FAO in order to develop capacity of their staff to use and implement a harmonized regional platform for the dissemination of agricultural statistics. A concept project proposal was considered in detail at a series of high level expert meetings of ECO National Statistical Offices, consecutively, thorough 2009-2010. The draft project proposal was considered and approved by ECO during the 3rd Meeting of Heads of NSO of ECO in 2011. The project "Support for the implementation and development of the CountrySTAT Framework in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) countries" was approved in March 2012 under the Technical Cooperation Programme.

The project will operate for 2 years with the following objectives:

- Strengthening of technical capacity of national staff of ECO HQ and in member countries on the principles of using CountrySTAT;
- Implementation and development of the CountrySTAT system in Afghanistan which will serve as the pilot country and resource basis for the expansion to other countries;
- Preparation of a full-fledged project proposal for implementation and development of CountrySTAT in all remaining countries over a period of 3 to 5 years.

Members of the CountrySTAT Team travelled to Afghanistan from 24 – 28 August 2012 to launch project activities and meet with officials from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). Government has nominated Mr Abdul Munir as CountrySTAT National Coordinator. He is the Head of Management Information System (MIS), Economy and Statistics Department of MAIL. The nomination of the CountrySTAT Technical Working Group (TWG) members are forthcoming, and the first TWG meeting should take place in November 2012 with support from members of the HQ based CountrySTAT Team. In January 2012 a regional training will be held in Tehran, Iran in an effort to introduce the CountrySTAT Framework to the other 9 ECO countries.

Each CountrySTAT system is nationally owned and managed. The focal institution in Afghanistan, MAIL, will lead data coordination, technical working group meetings, and trainings to ensure that the system has reliable data. Afghanistan will lead the way in demonstrating their success in the dissemination of agricultural statistics that respects regional objectives. The further improvements to statistical capacity on agriculture in Afghanistan will allow the country with its recent positive economic developments to be truly engaged in regional statistics due to improved access to data that is comparable, accessible and supports the objectives of the ECO Framework for the Cooperation in Statistics. The project will support training in the use of CountrySTAT for ECO countries at the regional level. The national and regional staff will be trained for effective control of tools, concepts, methods and classifications developed by FAO.