



Expert Meeting 1
**Assessing Country Capacity to Produce
Agricultural and Rural Statistics**
3- DECEMBER 2012
WFP, RED ROOM

**Discussion Paper on
Scope, Coverage and Methodology of
In-depth Assessment of the
National System for Agricultural Statistics[¥]**

1. Introduction

The implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (FAO/UN, 2011) began with the initial country assessments carried through a self-reported questionnaire sent to data producing agencies in the countries. Such assessments have been carried out in Asia, Africa, CIS and Latin America, and are at different stages of implementation in these regions. The country responses to these questionnaires will be converted to a set of indicators characterizing the dimensions and elements of the country capacity to produce agricultural statistics. These indicators will support the choice of target countries for priority action.

Action Plan of the Global Strategy envisages that once the target countries have been selected, an In-depth Assessment will be carried out in each selected country to provide the baseline information for monitoring the impact and outcome of the activities for improvement in agricultural and rural statistics system. This assessment should provide an insight into the issues and constraints in the domain of agricultural and rural statistics faced by the country.

Unlike the initial assessments which are to be carried out in all countries to group countries according to level of development of their agricultural statistics system, and to identify countries with weak agricultural statistics system and the particularly weak dimension(s) of the system, the in-depth assessment are foreseen as the starting point of the remedial actions. In this sense, it is a diagnostic tool for experts to zoom-on the weak dimensions and identify issues, prioritize them and suggest possible remedies. Yet another distinction between the two assessments is that while the initial assessment may reflect the perceptions of the data producers on specific aspects such as “Quality of data”, the in-depth assessment will try to obtain a balanced and objective

[¥] This discussion paper has been prepared to obtain expert views on the scope, methodology, content and reporting format for the in-depth assessments to be carried out in target countries. On the basis of the expert inputs received on this note, a reference guide for the experts responsible carrying out the assessment will be prepared.

view of the situation, incorporating the views of key stakeholders including data users, as these are to be carried out through a participative process at country level.

2. Objectives of the in-depth assessment

The main objectives of this assessment are to:

- ✓ provide a thorough “diagnostic report” which could be the basis for developing a Sector Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SSPARS) for the country. The Assessment Report will also identify a set of nationally owned priorities which should be addressed in the preparation of the SSPARS, and should be taken up for providing assistance to the country under the Action Plan for Implementation of the Global Strategy (FAO, 2012).
- ✓ serve as the basis for preparation of country proposal for seeking support by way of technical assistance and/or training for implementation of new methodologies/ technologies.

Besides serving as the basis of activities of the Global Strategy at country level, the report will be an authentic reference document for wider national and international community interested in the development of agricultural statistics. In the short run, it should obviate the need of another assessment by a resource partner interested in funding development of a specific aspect of agriculture statistics system.

3. Scope and coverage of the assessment

As the main plank of the Global Strategy is to mainstream the agricultural and rural statistics within the national system of collection of statistics, the assessment will not confine to only the system of collection of statistics on agriculture sector *per se*; rather it will be carried out in a wider context of collection of statistics on social, economic and environmental domains of human activities, exploring and evaluating the potential and existing linkages of agricultural statistics with other activities within the National Statistics System (NSS).

The wider focus of the assessment is particularly important because the economic activities within the agriculture sector have environmental and social implications too. For policy and decision making in agriculture sector one needs to take into account the statistics on all the related sub-sectors and sectors in an integrated manner. The integration of data collection and dissemination systems is thus crucial for responding to the future development challenges in agriculture and allied sectors. This approach not only ensures cost-effectiveness of statistical operations but also has the added advantage of increasing the scope of analysis of available data.

It is thus necessary that the in-depth assessment should:

- ✓ ***be carried out keeping in view the wider definition of agriculture***, i.e., including activities relating to fishery, aquaculture and forestry, rural activities, besides crop and livestock. For further details refer to the Conceptual Framework for the Collection of Agriculture Statistics (Chapter 2, FAO/UN, 2011);

- ✓ *focus on verification of existence of means to produce the minimum the core data* item identified in the Global Strategy (Chapter 3, the FAO/UN, 2011) while taking into account the data needs of the users, particularly those relating to current development priorities. In cases where non-agricultural rural economic activities are important in a country and are the focus of attention in the economic and welfare policies of the government, it will be desirable to extend the scope of assessment to the data needs for the policies and programmes related to these activities as well;
- ✓ *comprehensively cover statistical activities at all stages:* from availability and use of statistical infrastructure to methodologies in use to field operation to data dissemination to its analysis and use for policy and decision making;
- ✓ *engage all the agencies* involved in collection and use of data relating to agriculture sector including the National Statistics Office, Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock, Environment and Water Resources, Commodity Boards, Exporter Associations and Councils, as appropriate in the country;
- ✓ *take a holistic view of the system* of data collection and dissemination; and
- ✓ *evaluate the existing and potential linkages between statistical activities* within the agriculture and between agriculture and other sectors.

4. Methodology of the assessment

Designation of the focal point and establishing a national team

Each target country will designate a “national focal point” to serve as the national counterpart for the assessment. Ideally, the focal point should be a senior officer located in the main agency/institution responsible for agriculture statistics. To the extent possible the focal point should be the same person who was responsible for the initial assessment and shall remain responsible for development of SSPARS. Appropriate linkage with existing Policy/Steering/Technical Committees in the National Statistics System should be ensured.

In cases the responsibility for agriculture statistics is shared between two agencies, it will be desirable to have an “alternate focal point” in the second agency. Nonetheless it will be important that the two focal points work in close collaboration to bring out the nationally owned perspective.

To obtain the contributions of the organizations dealing with specific sub-sectors or commodities “contact persons” in each stakeholder organization should be designated. These contact persons will serve as member of the “national team” responsible for carrying out the assessment and will participate in all its activities.

Visiting experts and/or the national consultants will facilitate the work of the national team to come up with a nationally owned report of the assessment.

The detailed model Terms of Reference of the focal point, contact point, the national team, experts and the consultants will be annexed to the Guidelines on In-depth Assessment (to be prepared).

Steps for the assessment

The initial tasks of the national focal point will be to draw a list of institutions engaged in collection of agricultural and rural statistics, the contact persons there in, and prepare a compilation of list of activities of these institutions and the key constraints as might have been identified in earlier reports.

Country profiles based on the initial assessment carried out through a self-reporting questionnaire will serve as the starting point of the in-depth assessment of the national statistics system. The report will provide indicators on institutional and legal framework, strategic vision and integration within the system, extent of availability of data, its timeliness, quality and reliability, and the contact information etc. These indicators by no means are expected to be perfect, but these do have enough discriminating capability and can be relied upon to identify the key weaknesses in the system. Nonetheless, it will be necessary that these indicators are validated in a meeting of stake holders at an early stage of the assessment. The responses in the completed Country Assessment Questionnaire (CAQ) should be referred to understand the main issues behind a specific weakness. In some cases it may occur that a specific capacity indicator is showing weakness due to incomplete response.

The national consultants, wherever the feasible, will collect and provide relevant documents (guiding check list to be developed) to the international expert for review. One example of such report is Panorama Reports prepared in the countries where CountrySTAT project of FAO has been implemented.

The international expert accompanied by the national focal point(s) will hold interviews with the ministers, policy makers and responsible officers in the country to clarify issues and validate their preliminary conclusions reached on the basis of review of documents. A record of the main points raised in each meeting should be maintained by the international expert for attaching to the Assessment Report.

The lead international expert will have two or three missions to the country to complete the in-depth assessment. While the first mission will be more fact finding and diagnostic type, the second/third mission will conclude with a stakeholder workshop to validate the findings in the draft report of the assessment.

Specific issues to be addressed during the course of assessment

1. Structure of food and agriculture system
2. Structure of the NSS and the place of agricultural statistics within it.
3. Existence and status of the national strategy/plan for improving of statistics (NSDS) and role and place of agriculture in it.
4. Role and place of statistics in agriculture sector development plan.

5. Validation of the core data set in consultation with users to come up with a nationally owned minimum set of core data on agriculture keeping in view national development priorities and the priorities in the agriculture sector
6. Current status of agriculture statistics, including regularity of major activities like agricultural census
7. Ongoing statistical activities in the agricultural sector and their SWOT analysis
8. Institutional capacity and training needs of different institutions (a set of standard indicators to be identified)
9. Budget scenario: separately for the National Statistics Office and the line ministries (a set of standard indicators or methodology to be developed)
10. Cost-effectiveness of use of the budget available for statistical activities and possibilities of optimizing efficiencies of resource use.
11. Etc. (check list to be completed after expert meeting for inclusion in the Guidelines)

5. Assessment report

The style of the report will be descriptive, logical and based on facts. The statements and conclusions of the experts doing the assessment need to be substantiated with facts or references. Opinion, statements and judgements of key stake holders need to be quoted with references and contact details. The report should be presented with due analysis of the country situation. The analysis need to be carried out keeping in view the scope and purpose of the assessment stated above, and should bring out some indications on possible options to remedy the situation within a given resource scenario.

The following headings could be used as a starting guide for drafting the report.

General development and statistical scenario

This section is important for understanding: (1) the general development scenario of the country including information on relative importance of agriculture and its sub-sectors in the socio-economic context of the country; (2) current development priorities and policies which have implications for agriculture statistics system; (3) Legal and institutional framework for collection of agriculture statistics vis-a-vis the NSS (4) institutions involved in collection of agricultural statistics; and (5) broad nature of issues and key areas for improvement.

Stakeholder analysis

This analysis should provide sufficient information to prioritize the activities under the GS. All stakeholders are not the passive data users. Some stakeholders may be willing to actively contribute manpower and/or financial resources to improve the situation. For example, commodity boards on coffee may be willing to share an updated list of coffee producers for updating the national master sampling frame on agricultural producers. Such opportunities need to be explored.

Capacity analysis of the responsible institutions

The capacity of any system is determined by the institutional framework, the organizational environment, infrastructure and number and quality of human resources deployed in the system.

The capacity analysis needs to be carried out using the information on the elements that determine the each dimension of the capacity. The Capacity Indicators prepared on the basis of CAQ may serve as the starting point of gathering information for this analysis. In doing the capacity analysis due consideration is to be given to the agreed logical framework of the Action Plan for the Global Strategy. The in-depth assessment will provide baseline information on the indicators identified for monitoring the progress of the Global Strategy. In addition to the indicators based on the CAQ, some additional indicators based on in-depth assessment may be defined. For instance, for analysing the capacity of human resources one needs to assess what percentage of persons have core skills to play a middle level role in the survey management, and what percentage of persons have advanced skills to design a survey, process the surveys etc. More such indicators need to be defined in the Guidelines.

Data needs analysis

The list of core data item identified under the Global Strategy has been prepared at the global level. There may be a need to further fine-tune this list of items in the light of the socio-agricultural environment of the country. While certain crops or livestock important at international level may not be important in a given country, there may be certain crop or livestock specific to the country which may be of critical importance for the country from economic of food security angle. The goal of the Global Strategy is to help countries to have good statistics at least on those crop and livestock which constitute bulk of the agriculture production of the country or are socially important. The analysis of the situation to assess the adequacy of the data should be carried out with full involvement of data users who could be asked to prioritize their unmet demands. The analysis would also indicate whether the data is being collected as per the national development priorities or there are some constraints in its availability.

Identification of main data gaps

This activity will be based on the outcome of data needs analysis. The conclusions will not only refer to the items on which data is not available, but also to the items on which data is produced but is “not fit to use” on counts relating to quality, reliability and timeliness.

Technical evaluations of the main data collection activities

The technical evaluations will be carried out for each major statistical activity for collecting data on agriculture sector, by referring to the list of core data items prepared at the country level. Technical evaluation will *inter alia* refer to the scope and coverage of the surveys, concepts and classifications, age of the sampling frames, mechanisms to update them, appropriateness of the types (list or area) of sampling frames, sampling designs in vogue and validity of expansion factors in the light of structural changes, data processing and dissemination issues. This could be presented using SWOT as tool.

Constraint Analysis should be carried out to:

- ✓ identify weakness in the system which hamper collection and dissemination of data.

- ✓ to bring out the most important or binding constraint(s) for the main or priority statistical activities. The constraints may be methodological, operational or resource and infrastructure related. For example, use of an old sampling design which has become inefficient due to changes in the structure of agriculture, lack of office space and mobility equipments or lack of resources to increase the sample size to generate reliable results at sub-national level or to purchase new IT or survey equipments.
- ✓ precisely assess the needs of training of human resources, technical assistance or a special research need to develop a country specific methodology.

SWOT analysis framework could be used to present the synthesis of the results of all the above analysis by each sub-sectors of agriculture, like crop, livestock, fishery for drawing meaningful conclusions and possible recommendations for consideration during the phase of development of the SSPARS. This would provide a summarized view to the policy makers and provide clear options for making choices.

6. Issues for discussion in the expert meeting

- I. How do we ensure that the report the assessment provides all the information needed for development of SSPARS, avoiding information gaps and duplication of efforts?
- II. What should be the contents (headings for a standard template) of the Country Proposal for seeking assistance under the Global Strategy?
- III. What should be the time frame for the Assessment? How many missions are needed?
- IV. What are the additional points/issues to be addressed in the Assessment?
- V. Should the country assessment also indicate some strategic vision in terms of choice of methodology or stop at providing a diagnosis of the situation?
- VI. How to measure/assess the resource use efficiency for statistical activities?

REFERENCES

- FAO/UN, 2011.** Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics
FAO, 2012. Action Plan for Implementation of the Global Strategy