



Expert Meeting 2

**Developing Sector Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics and  
Integration into the National Strategies for Development of Statistics**

04 DECEMBER 2012, 14:00 – 17:30

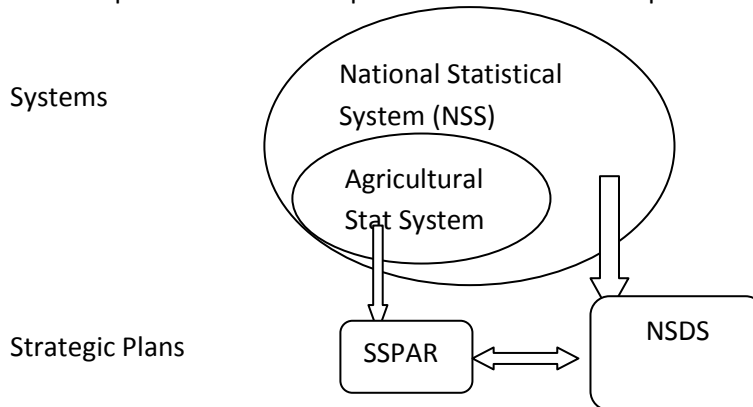
RED ROOM, WFP HEADQUARTERS

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON KEY ISSUES IN DEVELOPING SSPARS AND INTEGRATION INTO THE NSDS**

**1. BACKGROUND: CURRENT STATUS**

Sector Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SSPARS) are seen as the starting point for the development of agricultural statistics, as they set out the institutional, organizational and methodological requirements to improve the quality of the data. SSPARS should form part of the National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) which covers the entire national statistical system. The NSDS provides a vision for the development of the National Statistical System (NSS) in 5-10 years and provides a framework for coordination within the NSS and between development partners. It should assess user needs, alignment with data produced and inputs needed for production (institutional, human and financial), and as part of implementation, prioritize activities and provide a costed action plan which can be used for advocacy both nationally and internationally.

The following scheme depicts the relationship between the main components of the system:



Sector strategic plans for statistics are now seen as the building blocks for development of the NSDS. However, their development and inclusion into the NSDS has been low.

Paris21 has reported that:

*"Of a total of 78 IDA countries in 2008, 43 countries (55%) have a strategy for the development of statistics where agriculture is or is supposed to be included. Among these 43 IDA countries, it can be said that only 4 to 10 countries (therefore only around 10% of all IDA countries in the world) have included agriculture more or less appropriately in the NSDS process." (Duhamel, C. and Fonteneau, F., 2008)*

In those cases where agriculture was included in the NSDS, the agricultural domains were primarily production and prices with other domains (trade, marketing, resources, consumption) or sub-sectors (forestry, fisheries) not well covered. The main reasons for this are well known: the first generation of NSDSs were NSO-centric; lack of coordination between NSOs and Ministries of Agriculture and deficient intra-sector coordination; agricultural activities are often part of the informal economy and therefore,

usually not well covered by statistics reporting systems; low technical capacity within Ministries of Agriculture, including lack of adequate technical tools, statistical methodology and survey framework to support data production efforts; insufficient funding allocated for agricultural statistics; and countries' statistical legislation not always covering the whole statistical system or the application of laws is neglected.

## **2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SSPARS AND THE GLOBAL STRATEGY**

Under the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, the integration of agriculture into the national statistical systems is a key component, with SSPARS as the first step towards this. Integration of agriculture is in fact, the second pillar of the Global Strategy. As such the development of SSPARS and their integration into the NSDS is one of the major activities for implementation of the Global Strategy. Integration of agriculture into the NSS will allow a better understanding of the impact of agriculture across various sectors; and coordination of the collection and analysis of agricultural data, therefore avoiding duplication of effort and expense, and consistent statistics among producers.

The global reference framework provided by the Global Strategy is a starting point for the SSPARS. Firstly, it sets out a minimum set of core data which is the starting point for the improvement of agricultural and rural statistics. The core data items are those which are most important to global agricultural production and therefore for reporting to the international statistical system. These items should be examined when establishing the framework and strategic goals for the SSPARS. The core data items and agricultural products for collection, decided upon by countries, will in turn inform the strategies for statistical data collections and analysis; and development of human and material resources.

Secondly, the focus of the Global Strategy on a broader conception of agriculture which includes the social and environmental dimensions, as well as the economic, will also inform the core data items. Given this more inclusive conceptualization of agriculture, the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system is key to the Global Strategy. SSPARS should therefore consider the aspects of a statistical system which need to be in place to enable integration, including mechanisms for coordination, common systems for dissemination etc.

In turn, SSPARS and the NSDS are the foundation for implementation of the Global Strategy. At the country level, the overall implementation will be under the auspices of the NSDS and the accompanying SSPARS. The SSPARS provides a plan for country statistical development, supported by technical assistance, training and research of the Global Strategy. Some countries already have SSPARS in place, which will only need to be revised to meet the requirements of the Global Strategy. Those without SSPARS can receive technical assistance for developing their sector strategic plans as modules of the NSDS.

The first step for each country is to begin the country assessment and prepare a country proposal that outlines what is needed to develop or update its SSPARS and the technical assistance and training it will need to do so. The country assessments will provide the necessary information to prioritize capacity development activities in countries and for countries to select critical areas for intervention. On the basis of the country assessment, countries will prepare proposals for technical assistance, training and research based on their statistical development needs, which may include developing or updating the SSPARS component of the NSDS to facilitate integration of agricultural statistics into the national statistical system.

## **3. ACTIVITIES TO DATE**

To date FAO and Paris21 have prepared a draft Guide to Integrating Agriculture Statistics into National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). However, since then an updated version of the Paris21 guidelines for developing NSDSs is being prepared, which reflects a focus on new statistical initiatives impacting on the national statistical system, changes to the development agenda and new financial instruments for funding statistics. In addition, the new guidelines place more focus on implementation of the NSDS. The draft sector plan guidelines therefore need to be adjusted in line with these changes.

A pilot project to test the development of SSPARS has already been carried out by FAO and Paris21 to assist three countries in developing the agricultural statistics component of their NSDS. The overall objective of the project was to better mainstream and integrate the agricultural statistical system into the NDSS. Outputs included: a specific agricultural sector strategy for the development of statistics and costed action plans, funded adequately; advocacy documents on promoting the importance of agricultural statistics; and facilitating the co-ordination of technical and financial partners on specific issues linked to financing of agricultural statistics, in liaison (in some cases) with existing groups of donors for the overall NSDS.

The pilot countries were Lao PDR (NSDS just approved), Mozambique (NSDS under implementation) and Peru (into the second five year period of implementation). The pilots therefore covered countries which were at different stages of development of the NSDS to test whether different approaches were required and the risks under each situation. Other projects are ongoing in Tanzania and Malawi where development of the sector plans are just beginning.

#### **4. OVERVIEW OF SECTOR PLAN (SSPARS) DEVELOPMENT**

The current steps for NSDS and SSPARS design and implementation are outlined below. As quoted from Paris21 Secretariat (2004) the key components of the overall NSDS process are:

##### ***Phase I: Launching the process (Design Road Map)***

*This is a critical phase and the key outcome is to have a decision and a plan to develop an NSDS. This is often made formally, for example, through a decision of cabinet, or the minister with responsibility for statistics and followed by development of a road map that will set out what needs to be done, by whom, when and how it will be financed.*

##### ***Phase II: Assessment of the Current Status of the National Statistical System***

*Building on existing processes, a range of assessments using tools such as a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis will be needed, including the following:*

- *Collecting and analysing existing documentation*
- *Identifying user satisfaction, current and future needs for statistics, and existing data gaps*
- *Assessing each key statistical output against agreed quality criteria*
- *Assessing methodologies and the quality of statistics*
- *Taking stock of existing capacity (for example, infrastructural, technical, and resources) to meet the identified data needs and fill data gaps*
- *Reviewing the legal and institutional framework, linkages, and coordination arrangements*
- *Assessing organisational factors*

##### ***Phase III: Developing the vision and identifying strategic goals***

*This phase build on the assessment, includes:*

- *Agreeing a mission and vision statements*
- *Agreeing on desired results*
- *Setting priorities and strategies, employing if necessary scenarios to deliver the vision and results*

##### ***Phase IV: Preparing the implementation plan***

*The core of the implementation plan is the specification of detailed, costed, pragmatic and time-bound action plans, including a financial plan addressing specific needs in terms of external assistance.*

##### ***Phase V: Implementation, monitoring and evaluation, reporting***

*The design phase of the NSDS is only the first step. To be effective statistical systems must remain flexible and respond to new demands for data and a changing environment. Any medium-term plan, therefore, will inevitably require modification in light of experience. The strategic management process, therefore, needs to build in mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress, report regularly on the progress, to review the strategy and to make modifications when required.*

## 5. INCORPORATION INTO NSDS

It is evident that there is a need for a close relationship between the formulation of the SSPARS and the NSDS, as the whole national statistical system is involved. However, the nature of this relationship is highly dependent on the situation of the NSDS. Three situations may occur:

- In the rare case where there is not yet an NSDS, the formulation of the SSPARS is still possible. Using the same methodological approach as the NSDS will guarantee that the SSPARS can be mainstreamed into the future NSDS.
- When an NSDS is being prepared, it is important that the agricultural sector ensures that the SSPARS is developed as a building block of the NSDS. For example, in Uganda and Malawi agricultural sector plans were developed and integrated as components of the overall NSDS.
- When an NSDS already exists but does not appropriately cover the agricultural sector, it is important to ensure that it is mainstreamed properly. It will benefit particularly from the monitoring and evaluation processes planned for the NSDS cycles. In order to ensure a good synchronization of the schedules for development and implementation, intermediate action plans may be developed specifically for the agricultural sector, as was the case in Mozambique.

Whatever the solution adopted it is important that the agricultural sector gains autonomy in terms of strategic planning in statistics. This can facilitate integration into the overall NSDS process provided that the SSPARS are developed according to the standard NSDS methodology; the process is owned by the national authorities; and the strategic goals respond to both national demand and international requirements (including the broad framework set by the Global Strategy).

## 6. KEY CHALLENGES

The main challenges for development of SSPARS and their integration into NSDSs occurs in decentralized statistical systems where data on the agricultural sector is prepared by line ministries which operate independently of the national statistical office. Where data on agriculture is collected through the national statistical office there are usually fewer issues. The development of the NSDS and the SSPARS may well have many issues in common, but the focus here is on those which are specific to agricultural sector plans.

Mainstreaming agricultural sector statistics into the NSDS requires willingness to collaborate. This is not always automatic and challenges which can be encountered, as identified by AFDB (2007), are lack of channels of communication between sector ministries and the NSO; no incentives to work with the NSO due to fear of loss of independence by sectors and fear of increased burden by the NSO; fear that mainstreaming sectors will weaken scarce resources. Sectors may not understand the potentials for funding through the NSDS and may not have the human resources to implement the strategies. These challenges play out in the process of plan development and implementation as discussed below.

### A. Inclusive plan development with the NSO and integration into the NSDS

The challenges for inclusive plan development are threefold. Firstly, although, it is recognized that the formulation of SSPARS should be nationally lead and owned, in many instances plans are developed primarily by consultants with only marginal input by national government. Work during the pilot projects highlighted the importance of a participatory process with the strategy designed by a national team with sufficient time and resources.

Secondly, plans are also often developed by the agricultural sector in isolation from the rest of the national statistical system. This impacts on what is considered to be the scope of agriculture in the SSPARS - as often the concept of agriculture remains limited to the economic dimension, with the broader concept of agriculture recommended by the Global Strategy not considered. The scope of the SSPARS is also affected by the institution responsible for leading the SSPARS process, and where there are several institutions responsible for agriculture and related sectors, ensuring integration of areas such as livestock, fisheries and forestry is also a challenge.



Thirdly, while a broad consultation of stakeholders is recommended, in many cases the focus is often on producers of statistics with little stocktaking of user needs or user satisfaction with the products available. The development of the SSPARS is a complex process, often bound by regulations and administrative practice, which set out the need for consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. In many countries it is also important to identify the ways in which national and international partners supply technical and financial assistance. It is therefore difficult to agree on an implementable strategy without full engagement of all stakeholders.

The FAO and Paris21 *Draft Guidelines on Integrating Agriculture into the NSDS* recommends that separate discussion within the agricultural sector takes place during each of the following phases:

- The drafting of the road map followed by design of the NSDS
- The Assessing phase in order to agree on the main lessons to be learned and the general direction for consolidation with the NSS
- The Identification of Strategic Goals phase to integrate views into a single vision and set strategic objectives, including the sector's priority statistics, a programme for all surveys and censuses, common resources such as sampling frames and references, any reorganisation that has to be made, the clarification of functions and as far as possible defining the financial resources to be earmarked for agriculture and other sectors.

### **Lessons Learned**

#### *Scope of Agriculture*

In many countries agriculture statistics is produced by both the NSO and the Ministry of Agriculture. In these cases deciding which body is responsible or how responsibility is to be shared in developing the SSPARS is a first step. It is also important to consider how and to what extent to integrate related areas such as livestock, fisheries and forestry which may not fall under the Ministry of Agriculture. This is also important for future integration of the sector plan into the NSDS and ensuring future statistical coordination. The broader conception of agriculture, as under the Global Strategy, is often not considered by Ministries of Agriculture. The key decision makers often remain interested primarily in the economic domain, as this is often the main focus of the agricultural policies. The broader conception which informs policies such as poverty monitoring and the environment, is often of more interest outside Ministries of Agriculture.

#### *Participatory Development*

Various options for participation are possible, depending on whether there are existing coordination groups or not. Where existing coordination groups, such as the National Statistical Council, already exist these should be involved. For example, under the National Statistical Council, the sectoral sub-committee on agriculture could take on the work of developing the plan. Use of existing groups also facilitates discussion during plan formation on the coordination mechanisms needed for implementation of the plan.

In countries where participation has worked well, a national technical working group/review committee was formed to lead the process, with a sub-group - the drafting sub-committee - designated to draft the plan. The technical review committee and drafting committee should cover the whole process of plan development, from analyzing the demand for statistics in agricultural sub-sectors, the data available, proposing strategic goals and priorities, developing strategies and the action plan. The composition of the technical working group/review committee has been found to work best when it is inclusive with a broad range of governmental and non-governmental representatives, which also ensures early awareness of the plan among stakeholders.

Although the process should be lead by the agricultural sector, NSO involvement is also important in order to capitalize on suitable on-going surveys which could be suitable for capturing agricultural information and to enable future integration into the NSDS. For instance, in Peru the Continuous Surveys of Households was identified as a mechanism by which information on the rural areas could be captured.

In Malawi, for example, the technical review committee, called *Agricultural Statistics Forum (ASF)*, is jointly chaired by Directors of both the NSO and Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. The AFS brings together all relevant technical experts from the various agricultural sector ministries, experts from the NSO with particular interest in agricultural statistics (such as national accounts), as well as experts from national non governmental organizations which produce agricultural statistics such as FEWSNET, and interested users such as the MET Service, national academic institutions, such as the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and international organisations. Resource partners are also represented through the national donor coordination committee.

#### *Process of plan development*

During plan preparation it is often difficult to have a truly participatory process, not necessarily for financial reasons. It may be difficult for national staff to devote time to drafting of the SSPARS, particularly if there are competing demands. In some cases, staff are unable to be released for work on the SSPARS, with the result that participation is not as extensive as planned. This is all too often the situation in many countries.

Where national staff is not sufficiently involved and the work is left primarily to consultants, this can lead to a plan which does not take sufficient account of national needs - from both users and producers. The technical working group or national counterpart should work closely with consultants at all stages of drafting in order to provide a clear picture of the final objectives. In some cases, there is sufficient interaction between consultants and national counterparts at the beginning of the process but this tails off during the process. It has been found that periodic consultation at the stakeholders meeting during the drafting process is not usually sufficient input.

It has been found that increased participation is often facilitated by organizing periodic working group retreats on specific aspects of the plan, as was the case in Mozambique and is planned for Tanzania. Although this increases the cost of preparing the plan, it is often essential in order to enable national staff to participate.

#### *Stakeholder consultation and Assessment*

During sector plan development a wide range of stakeholders should be consulted during the assessment phase of plan development and regularly at key phases of plan development. All too often stakeholder consultation is left to the end of the process when the plan is finalized. Another issue is that often the focus is on the producers of statistics - rather than users - which does not provide a comprehensive picture of national priorities. It is crucial to consult with users of statistics, for example, using tools such as a user satisfaction assessment, which includes a matrix of demand mapped to the statistics available. This also has the advantage of providing a gap analysis of statistical products to needs.

Deciding who are the stakeholders is a key part of the process. In general, the assessment should include current and potential users both from government and key non-governmental users, for instance agricultural market boards often require high quality data and can have substantial influence on the economy. Consultation with existing groups working on the NSDS ensures coherence between the sector plan and NSDS and assists in its eventual integration into the NSDS.

Although consultation covers a wide range of users, it is also important to include as a second stage the prioritization of user needs. The list of user needs would be beyond the scope of implementation, and as such it is important to focus on nationally agreed priority needs in the first instance.

In some countries it has been found that although carried out, the assessment or diagnosis phase can deliver incomplete or contradictory information from different users. The importance of building trust from respondents over time, should not be underestimated, and in some cases, where carried out by an external consultant, several visits would be needed to obtain a complete picture and the depth of information required. Obtaining greater depth of understanding also assists in assessing the quality of information received from stakeholders. In some cases, triangulating responses from different stakeholders can help to verify the information received.

## **B. Obtaining ownership by national government and high level decision makers**

Obtaining ownership by national government and high level decision makers is essential if the plan is to be implemented successfully. The final aim is to have the plan endorsed at the highest political level such as a Council of Ministers/Cabinet. If this is not possible endorsement by the Minister of Agriculture with agreement for its incorporation into the NSDS by the Director of the National Statistics Office is a second option.

A strong endorsement provides support for implementation and resourcing of the sector plan. All too often SSPARSs are developed which remain unimplemented due to lack of buy in from key decision makers. In many instances decision makers are involved only through the presentation of the completed SSPARS at a stakeholders validation meeting at the end of the process. While this is a necessary condition, it is usually not sufficient to achieve validation and endorsement of the plan by high level decision makers.

The importance and need for continued advocacy should not be underestimated. Not only is this crucial for resources but there is inevitably political turnover which leads to a need for continuous advocacy and re-endorsement of the sector plan.

### ***Lessons Learned***

Strong commitment for the SSPARS from government is essential for implementation of the sector plans. In fact for the whole NSDS process, commitment at the highest possible level is a guarantee that not only the NSDS but also the sector plans will be owned by the country. If the overall NSDS is endorsed at Council of Ministers level or the Cabinet, endorsement is de facto for the sectors. If it is not possible, endorsement at the level of the Minister of Agriculture is an option but is highly dependent on the status of NSDS (in place or not) and the approach taken (top-down, bottom-up, governance committee or not). In either case the commitment and engagement of the head of the Statistical Office in the NSO or the Ministry is crucial as this will be the person to advocate for endorsement and support from the Council/Cabinet or Minister of Agriculture.

Validation and endorsement of the SSPARS by government is also aided if not left to the end of the plan development process. For instance in some cases, the Minister of Agriculture was sensitized from the inception of the process - before preparation of the roadmap - and endorsed the formulation of the plan as part of its inception. It is recommended to have a series of stakeholder and technical workshops throughout the process of designing the SSPARS:

- A national event with all stakeholders and participants from regions, NGOs, international partners for explaining the process, introducing the constituency
- Workshop for validating the assessment of the statistical situation
- Workshop for validating the mission, vision and strategic goals (prioritization work important!)
- Final workshop for validating the SSPARS, including its action plan

It is also recommended to involve high level decision makers, for example through a governance committee consisting of the director of the national statistical office and the ministers of agriculture, and other ministries involving agriculture. The governance committee is regularly informed of progress and reviews the plan at key stages before final validation.

## **C. Advocacy and resource mobilization (within government and resource partners)**

The implementation of the SSPARS and its integration into the NSDS is part of a continual transformation of the national statistical system's structure, resources and products in order to improve the results of public policy. However, all too often SSPARS are not adopted and remain unimplemented. Implementation is hindered by poor budgeting-financing of activities and lack of advocacy. In too many cases SSPARS remain at the level of broad strategic goals with inadequate action plans or contain a long shopping list reflecting an ideal agricultural statistics system without taking into account what is possible given the time frame and available resources. To be implementable the action plan of the SSPARS should have precise, prioritized and costed activities which are clearly linked to user needs, reflecting both the national demand and international commitments, identified in the needs assessment and gaps analysis.

A second issue is the under-estimation of the need for advocacy, both within government and from resource partners, which is a strategic component for plan implementation. Advocacy is often left till the end of the process, after the plan is finalized, which misses crucial opportunities during the design phase when conflicts between competing priorities can be debated and support mobilized.

### **Lessons Learned**

The need for advocacy as a component of the SSPARS design process has been recognized by Paris21. Although agricultural statistics are often the most in need of development, it is important that statistics is envisaged as a whole national entity, rather than sector by sector, which supports national development policies. Indeed, it is the fact that agricultural statistics often lies outside the national statistical system which can be a weakness in terms of the lack of resources for agricultural statistics and limited capacity and human resources for statistical data collection, analysis and dissemination.

A lack of vision for support to the overall statistical system could impact on long term decisions for the financing of the overall statistical system from the national budget. Any existing mechanisms for coordination between government and resource partners should be reviewed in this light. A dispersion of resource partner coordination by sector could be detrimental to the overall support to the statistical development of countries.

The dialogue and consultation among resource partners, budget holders in government, agricultural and national statistical system should be part of the design and implementation of the sectoral master plan, starting from its inception. The process of SSPARS design should therefore include the preparation of specific advocacy materials for the national statistical system and within that for agricultural statistics.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Developing or improving sectoral strategies on agricultural statistics at national level will benefit from the fact that NSDS process has reached a certain maturity in developing countries, particularly on the African continent where almost 95% of the countries have been embarking on the NSDS process over the last 10 years. Until now, in many cases the agricultural sector has not been appropriately mainstreamed into the overall NSDS process. However, the conditions of a better integration have now been reached: lessons have been learned, methodologies have been improved and the opportunities given by the Global Strategy in offering the necessary conditions for effective integration are present.

Solutions for overcoming the different key challenges presented above are quite well known but require national authorities to establish the necessary conditions for building an agricultural statistical system which is able to provide the data for designing and monitoring national policies and meeting international requirements. These efforts will require constant advocacy, a good coordination of the agricultural sector with the national statistical system and will have to be accompanied by technical and financial partners, engaged through appropriate dialogue concerning the financing of the strategies. One of the objectives of the Global Strategy will be to facilitate this process and contribute, through appropriate strategic planning, to deliver quality statistics in support of policy outcomes, including poverty reduction, increased food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development and the environment.

## **8. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

- i. Who should be responsible for the development of the SSPARS? Related to this, how to ensure that the broader scope of agriculture and related sectors when not under the Ministry of Agriculture (such as livestock, fisheries and forestry) are considered?
- ii. Deciding key users - how to prioritize the user needs?
- iii. Best practices for increasing national involvement when capacity to release staff is limited?
- iv. What level of government endorsement is sufficient to aid implementation? What is feasible? Best practices to engage key decision makers?
- v. Agreement on advocacy for the entire national statistical system? How will this work in practice?



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