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Governance of FAO's statistical and other data activities and their alignment with the cross-cutting FAO policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights

Proposal for an improved internal coordination and its alignment with corporate policies on Data Protection and Intellectual Property Rights

Executive Summary

- This matter is being referred further to the Report of the FAO Council of its 168th Session. In paragraph 20 (b) of the Report, the Council “*stressed the need for improved governance of FAO's statistical and other data activities, and their alignment with the cross-cutting FAO Policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights being developed further to the guidance of the 166th Session of the Council, and the 42nd Session of the Conference, and looked forward to their consideration by the Council at its next session through the Programme Committee (PC) and the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM), in line with their respective mandates.*”
- The matter is further referred to in paragraph 30 (e) of the above-mentioned Report. The Council “*stressed the need for alignment of all FAO work and activities involving data or statistics with the FAO framework on the protection of data and intellectual property rights that is being developed and requested the CCLM be regularly updated in this regard*”.
- The present document summarizes the Programme Committee (PC) document PC 132/5 “*Proposal for improved governance of FAO statistics activities*” and, in response to the aforementioned requests of the FAO Council, it aims to clarify the relationship between the document PC 132/5 and document CCLM 113/4 “*FAO Policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights: FAO Data Protection Principles and Rules*”. Furthermore, it also addresses a series of other queries expressed by Members regarding document PC 132/5.
- Key clarifications include the scope of the term “data” in document PC 132/5, which is limited to data for the elaboration of statistics and does not extend to any other kinds of data (for example human resources [HR] or personal data); as well as the internal nature of the proposed improved governance of statistics and data for statistical purposes. To further clarify the nature of the governance described in the document PC 132/5, the current document uses the term “internal coordination” instead of the term “governance”.

Suggested action by the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters, the Programme Committee and the Council

The Committees and the Council are invited to review this document to make observations and provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Mr Máximo Torero Cullen
Chief Economist
Tel. +39 06 570 50869
Email: Chief-Economist@fao.org

I. Background

1. In paragraph 20 (b) of its 168th Session Report, the Council “*stressed the need for improved governance of FAO’s statistical and other data activities, and their alignment with the cross-cutting FAO Policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights being developed further to the guidance of the 166th Session of the Council, and the 42nd Session of the Conference, and looked forward to their consideration by the Council at its next session through the Programme Committee (PC) and the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM), in line with their respective mandates*”.
2. The matter is further referred to in paragraph 30 (e) of the above-mentioned Council Report. The Council “*stressed the need for alignment of all FAO work and activities involving data or statistics with the FAO framework on the protection of data and intellectual property rights that is being developed and requested the CCLM be regularly updated in this regard*”.
3. As a further background, it is important to mention that, at its 128th Session, the Programme Committee (PC) “*welcomed the assurance of Management that the governance of FAO statistical activities would be improved to strengthen the oversight and enhance relevance, coherence and quality standards of all of its statistics, and looked forward to considering a proposal for this at its 130th Session*”.¹ Subsequently, at its 132nd Session, the PC “*took note of the Proposal for improved governance of FAO statistical activities, which aims at better managing the data for the elaboration of statistics in support of the work of the Organization, and encouraged FAO to further develop the document*”,² while recalling “*the importance of the Proposal (...) to be aligned with FAO’s Policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights, currently under development, in line with internationally agreed standards and protocols*”.³
4. The present document summarizes the document PC 132/5 and, in response to the aforementioned requests of the FAO Council, it aims to clarify the relationship between the document PC 132/5 and the document CCLM 113/4 “*FAO Policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights: FAO Data Protection Principles and Rules*”. Furthermore, it also addresses a series of other queries raised by Members regarding document PC 132/5.
5. Key clarifications include the scope of the term “data” in document PC 132/5, which is limited to data for the elaboration of statistics and does not extend to any other kinds of data (for example HR or personal data), as well as the internal nature of the proposed improved governance of statistics and data for statistical purposes. To further clarify the nature of the governance described in the document PC 132/5, the current document uses the term “internal coordination” instead of the term “governance”.

II. Improved internal coordination of FAO’s statistical and other data activities related to statistics

6. FAO presented the proposal for an improved internal coordination of FAO statistical activities to Members, first at an informal seminar for Permanent Representatives on 9 April 2021, and to the 132nd Session of the PC, 8-12 November 2021 (document PC 132/5). The proposal addresses the different issues and recommendations raised by the 2019 Evaluation of FAO’s Statistical Work, and chiefly, suggests an internal coordination structure that is based on the recommendations of the UN Secretary General’s Data Strategy and also takes into consideration the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) System-wide Roadmap for Innovating UN Data and Statistics and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

¹ CL 164/6 Rev. 1, paragraph 10 (d).

² CL 168/8, paragraph 11 (a).

³ CL 168/8, paragraph 11 (b).

7. As presented in the document PC 132/5, the proposal is articulated across four major priority action areas:

- i. Integrate and improve the internal coordination of FAO data and statistics.
- ii. Strengthen the statistical capacity of Decentralized Offices.
- iii. Optimize resource allocation and intensify resource mobilization.
- iv. Improve the quality of the information technology (IT) infrastructure supporting data and statistics work.

8. At its 132nd Session, the PC generally welcomed the proposal which highlights the urgency to strengthen and integrate the internal coordination and management of data and statistics centered on a Data Coordination Group and an Executive Data Champion. Furthermore, the Committee appreciated the comprehensive approach of the proposal to address the key recommendations of the Evaluation of FAO Statistical Work. However, the PC raised concerns regarding the scope of the term “data” as used in the document. At the same time, Members requested some clarifications regarding the priority areas defined in the proposal.

A. Scope of the term “data” in document PC 132/5

9. Certain kinds of data (those used for statistical purposes) and statistics are inextricably connected. Data are basic elements or single pieces of information, whereas statistics are numerical data that have been organized using conceptual frameworks through mathematical operations. In other words, data is the raw information that is the direct result of a study or survey, and can be used to create new information and knowledge. Statistics hence summarize the information content of data, allowing to measure specific aspects/characteristics of the real world. Statistics are, therefore, the results of data transformations, using statistical procedures aiming to answer “why” or “how” questions.

10. Document PC 132/5 deals exclusively with data for the elaboration of statistics, rather than with all kinds of data. In particular, personal data and HR data are not covered, and its focus is not data protection. Thus, it differs in scope from the “*Update on the FAO policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights*” to be reviewed by the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM) at its 115th Session, and is also distinct from the CCLM’s earlier consideration of data protection matters. That document, the result of a corporate effort led by the Legal Office and to which the Office of Chief Statistician has also contributed, addresses all kinds of data and focuses on establishing general principles of data protection and confidentiality, which also apply to statistical data dealt with in document PC 132/5 and the present document.

11. The relationship between data and statistics has become even closer with the proliferation of new or alternative data sources for the production of statistics alongside traditional censuses and surveys, such as big data, Earth observation data and administrative data. An integrated internal coordination mechanism of data and statistics can thus ensure data access, confidentiality and protection, as well as the adoption of harmonized quality assurance frameworks. An improved coordination of geospatial data, in particular, is expected to further boost effective and streamlined support to FAO initiatives. In addition, FAO will further encourage the use of alternative data sources and innovative methods to process unstructured data to fill existing data gaps and improve the quality of its statistics. To this end, it will scale up activities of its newly established Data Lab for Statistical Innovation.

12. These initiatives are fast-tracking FAO’s implementation of the UN Secretary-General’s Data Strategy, which emphasizes the need to nurture two key new capabilities: (i) *data analytics* (using data to better understand “what happened”, “why it happened”, “what may happen next”, “how to respond”); and (ii) *data management* (empower everyone to discover, access, integrate and share the data they need to meet the needs of the organization, people and planet). To this end, the Data Strategy specifically advises UN entities to designate an *Executive Data Champion* whose principal function will be to extract the maximum value from data assets, by joining up all innovative data

initiatives, enhancing data analytics capabilities and data literacy among users, and strengthening data architecture and governance.

13. Meanwhile, the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 recognizes statistics as a core function of the Organization, while also identifying “data” as one of four cross-cutting “accelerators” that can catalyze FAO’s delivery of all Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) under the *four betters*. A closer integration of data and statistics in FAO’s internal coordination can therefore effectively guide the implementation of the Strategic Framework 2022-31’s vision of statistics as a core function and data as an accelerator to programme delivery.

B. Improved internal coordination of Data and Statistics

14. Under the first priority action area, the proposal contained in document PC 132/5 recommends integrating and improving the governance of FAO data and statistics, as a way to further improving its coordination arrangements and as a means to capture the paradigm shift towards a much closer integration of data and statistics, signaled by the aforementioned internal and external strategic documents (see paragraph 3). The internal coordination mechanism proposed largely follows the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General’s Data Strategy, whilst reflecting the critical role of data as an accelerator toward the delivery of the Strategic Framework 2022-31’s *four betters*. Under this arrangement, the Chief Economist will act as an Executive Data Champion and chair a Data Coordination Group. This Data Coordination Group will oversee and be supported by a renewed overarching Interdepartmental Working Group on Data and Statistics that will convene in plenary to address cross-cutting issues, yet will also convene in thematically-focused working groups addressing statistics, big data and geospatial data.

15. The arrangements described in the above paragraph all pertain to FAO internal coordination structures as they are mandated to coordinate and manage the implementation of the data and statistics programme of work. Due to this reason, and to further clarify the nature of the governance described in the document PC 132/5, the current document replaces the term “governance” with the term “internal coordination”.

16. Although it is not part of the scope of the document PC 132/5, it is important to highlight that FAO has established external governance mechanisms in which countries can be involved in strategic decisions concerning statistical matters. FAO’s external statistics governance is currently structured at regional level around the following FAO regional bodies:

- a) The African Commission on Agricultural Statistics.
- b) The Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics.
- c) The Working Group on Agricultural and Livestock Statistics for Latin America and the Caribbean established by FAO, the Organization of American States / CIE, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (FAO-OEA/CIE-IICA).

These regional bodies organize biennial meetings that convene senior officials from National Statistical Offices and Ministries of Agriculture responsible for the production and dissemination of food and agriculture statistics, to: (i) assess the status of food and agriculture statistics in Members; (ii) define priorities for statistical capacity development in the region; and (iii) discuss with Members methodological developments and standards in food and agricultural statistics. The European and Near East Regions do not have equivalent formal regional fora for country involvement and participation in strategic discussions on agricultural statistics. At the global level, whenever necessary, topics of a statistical nature can be included in the agendas of FAO Governing Bodies, for example Technical Committees or the PC. Such bodies may, in turn, make relevant recommendations to the FAO Council or the FAO Conference.

C. Strengthening the statistical capacity of FAO Decentralized Offices

17. Under the second priority action area outlined in document PC 132/5, the proposal suggests strengthening the statistical capacity of FAO Decentralized Offices through numerous initiatives.

Firstly, the statistical capacity of Decentralized Offices will be strengthened through the provision and mobilization of additional resources. Accordingly, regional statisticians will be provided with dedicated resources drawn from the regular programme of the Regional Offices (not budget transfer from headquarters), while also mobilizing extra-budgetary resources at regional and national level (see part III of the proposal on “*Optimizing resource allocation and intensifying resource mobilization*”). Another initiative involves facilitating the mobility of statistical personnel between FAO headquarters (HQ) and Subregional/Regional Offices. Such mobility does not entail the transfer of yet more posts from HQ to Regional or Subregional Offices, as mobility will be implemented in both directions (to and from HQ) to create a more dynamic flow in the transfer of expertise. In addition, the Organization will leverage the Associate Professional Officers (APO) programme, the Young Professionals Programme (YPP) as well as South-South and Triangular Cooperation programmes to increase FAO’s ranks in Regional/Subregional Offices, drawing on statistical expertise readily available in the regions. Finally, the proposal seeks to increase the capacity of regional statisticians to support the implementation of country-level strategic and operational activities. As part of the implementation of this initiative, Decentralized Offices have recently been provided with a toolkit and guidance for mainstreaming statistics and SDG indicators in Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).

18. Besides strengthening the capacity of FAO Decentralized Offices themselves, regional coordination mechanisms and partnerships (including relevant CEB Task Forces and the prospective “regional Committees for the Coordination of Statistical Activities [CCSAs]”)⁴ will be leveraged to amplify FAO’s capacity to deliver statistical support to its Members. By partnering with these mechanisms, FAO can optimize its delivery at country level and enhance its impact.

D. Optimizing resource allocation and intensify resource mobilization

19. Under the third priority action area outlined in document PC 132/5, the proposal recommends optimizing resource allocation and intensifying resource mobilization. To this end, efforts to mobilize extra-budgetary resources for statistics will be scaled up, for instance by compartmentalizing large-scale statistical capacity development programmes, leveraging the Flexible Multi-partner Mechanism (FMM) facility and its sub-programmes, as well as leveraging emerging global mechanisms, such as the new Clearinghouse for Financing Development Data, launched at the latest World Data Forum held in October 2021, and the Complex Risk Analytics Fund.

20. Besides leveraging such global instruments, however, FAO will need to put greater emphasis on mobilizing extra-budgetary resources for statistics at country and regional level. To a large extent, this hinges on the ability of FAO Decentralized Offices to mobilize such resources. The likelihood of mobilizing resources for statistics at country and regional level also increases substantially when statistics are more integrated in the UNSDCF. Therefore, the work to support countries in mainstreaming statistics in UNSDCF and CCA should facilitate resource mobilization for supporting statistical activities. In this perspective, statistics should be seen as a key development outcome in and of themselves, providing for accountability and transparency, as well as a catalyst for other development outcomes by underpinning evidence-based policy and decision-making.

21. At the same time, as recommended by the “Evaluation of FAO’s statistical work”,⁵ in order to set the basis for optimizing current resource allocation, an Organization-wide assessment of statistical resources will be conducted to identify the skills-gaps that may exist in the domains of data science

⁴ The CCSA, or Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, comprises international and supranational organizations, whose mandate and activities include the provision of international official statistics and which have a permanent embedded statistical service in their organization and regular contacts with countries. Therefore, it includes both UN and non-UN international organizations; regional development banks; regional statistics training institutes, as well as other regional organizations.

⁵ [FAO, 2020](#).

and statistics, based on the recommendations of the UN System Capacity Mapping 2020 on Innovation, Data and Digital Capabilities.

E. Improving the quality of data and IT infrastructure

22. Under the fourth and final priority action area outlined in document PC 132/5, the proposal suggests improving the quality of data and IT infrastructure. The objective will be to put in place an innovative statistical data management system that ensures high-quality data and consistent application of international and corporate standards across the entire statistical value chain, which is vital if FAO statistics are to remain at the forefront of the information age. FAO is already planning to put in place and administer an innovative statistical data management system, based on two major integrated solutions covering, on one side, the phases of the design, collection, and production of the statistical value chain performed by the Statistical Working System (SWS); and on the other side, the dissemination phase and the integration of disparate FAO statistical databases into a central location and standards-based interoperable solution to maximize business value, handled by the Statistical Data Warehouse (SDW).

23. The overall objective of the project is to modernize the entire statistical production cycle of FAO statistical processes and to increase FAO's capacity to produce and disseminate relevant, reliable, accurate and timely data and statistics. The combination of these innovative interventions will substantially improve FAO data quality and data user satisfaction and accessibility, while reducing data management and administrative costs, as well as countries' response burden. It will also enable both FAO personnel and external users to easily combine cross-domain indicators and conduct policy analyses thereby supporting evidence-based decision-making of national governments and the international community.

24. It should be emphasized that FAO will use an off-the-shelf innovative open source platform, scalable upward and outward, called "*dotStatSuite*" and will not develop a SDW from scratch. Many international organizations (International Labour Organization [ILO], Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], etc.) and a number of countries have already adopted this IT platform to build their respective SDWs. Adopting an off-the-shelf solution significantly reduces development costs and risks, and is compliant with the Digitalization and Informatics Division (CSI) practices of customizing software tools already available in the market, rather than building them from scratch with external provider(s). Moreover, this Platform is based on international standards such as the General Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) standards, and its development is guided by the Statistical Information System Collaboration Community (SIS-CC), currently comprising 15 members including UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [ESCAP]), international/regional organizations (OECD, South Pacific Community), and several national statistical offices (e.g. Australia, Chile, Estonia, Italy, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, etc.).

25. To implement the SWS and SDW, a Capital Expenditure (CapEx) Project has already been launched, and will be fully rolled out in close collaboration with the Digitalization and Informatics Division (CSI) and the support of the Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG) on Data and Statistics. This collaboration will reinforce coordination between statistics and IT matters to define the overall IT architecture/applications in support of statistics work.

III. Alignment of statistical activities with the cross-cutting FAO policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights

26. The Programme Committee recalled the importance of the proposal delineated in the document PC 132/5 to be aligned with FAO's policies on Protection of Data and Intellectual Property Rights, currently under development, in line with internationally agreed standards and protocols.

27. Therefore, once the policy on Data Protection has been promulgated, relevant statistics policies and procedures will be reviewed by FAO's statistics internal coordination structure to ensure that they are fully aligned.

28. In this respect, however, FAO statistics is already rather advanced in the implementation of the main principles foreseen by the data protection and confidentiality policy under review, as exemplified by the following:

- a) FAO statistics and data for statistical purposes are governed by and already adhere to three overarching frameworks: (i) the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (though mostly geared toward National Statistical Agencies); (ii) the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities, which focus on international organizations and whose second edition (2014) was endorsed by the Director-General; and (iii) the International Statistical Institute (ISI) Declaration on Professional Ethics, which provides ethical guidance for all professional statisticians working both in the academia and in national and international organizations. In particular, Principle 6 of both the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities, as well as Principle 12 of the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics, focus on data protection and confidentiality;
- b) Key FAO databases, which publish only aggregated statistical information, adhere to the open data policy "Creative Commons 3.0 Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) license". With the development of the FAO Statistics Data Warehouse (PC 132/5, paragraph 27), this license will apply to all corporate statistical databases available on www.fao.org, whereas FAO is currently also initiating discussions to upgrade to Creative Commons 4.0 IGO (CC-BY-4.0) to adhere to the Digital Public Goods Standard for Open Data, that stems from the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation;
- c) In 2019, FAO established a corporate platform for the dissemination of food and agriculture microdata (the "Food and Agriculture Microdata [FAM] Catalogue") which applies the most advanced international standards and best practices in the treatment of personal data (personal data anonymization, use of statistical disclosure procedures, terms of use of microdata);
- d) FAO has developed corporate standards requesting the informed consent of the respondents for all surveys directly carried out by the Organization.

29. Although the two topics of statistics internal coordination and data protection are interlinked to some extent, the link is unidirectional in the sense that data protection issues influence the way statistical data are treated, yet the internal coordination structure for data and statistics does not affect data protection concerns and policies. Once the corporate policy on data protection is promulgated, a review to ensure full alignment of internal statistical policies and procedures, will be conducted by FAO's statistics internal coordination structure.

IV. Suggested action by the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters, the Programme Committee and the Council

30. The Committees and the Council are invited to review this document and make such observations thereon as considered appropriate. In particular:

The Council and the Committees are invited to:

- welcome the clarifications to the proposal for improved internal coordination of FAO statistical activities and other data activities related to statistics, particularly with regard to its alignment with FAO's corporate policies on data protection and intellectual property rights;
- reiterate the importance and critical role of the Organization's statistical work;

In addition, the Council and the Programme Committee are invited to:

- encourage Management to continue improving internal coordination of FAO statistical activities, in particular, to integrate the coordination mechanisms of FAO data and statistics, strengthen the statistical capacity of Decentralized Offices, optimize resource allocation and intensify resource mobilization, make FAO data and statistics more useful, usable and used, and improve the quality of the IT infrastructure supporting data and statistics work.