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Information note

**Regional implementation plan for the global strategy to improve
agricultural and rural statistics**

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I. Introduction

1. Concern has been expressed at several international fora over the declining quantity and quality of agricultural statistics which are fundamental for policy-makers to take decisions on food security interventions and plan future food and agricultural development (e.g. ICAS, 2007; FAO's Independent External Evaluation, 2008; UN, 2009; OECD, 2009). There is also a growing demand for data for developing policies related to price volatility and the transformation of agriculture in the twenty-first century, climate change, biofuels, food insecurity and issues related to sustainable agriculture development, including the need for sex-disaggregated data.
2. Against this backdrop, in 2009 the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) requested FAO and other Friends of the Chair of UNSC to formulate a strategic plan. These partners proposed the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (hereafter referred to as the Global Strategy) as a response to the concerns and growing demands. The Global Strategy is a ground-breaking effort to improve agricultural statistics, driven by an in-depth assessment of the current situation. One of the major recommendations included in the Strategy is that agriculture be integrated into national statistical systems.
3. Following UNSC's endorsement in 2010, a global and regional approach was developed to formulate an implementation plan for the Global Strategy. FAO has been leading the preparation of the Global Action Plan, which has been undertaken in parallel with the development of the regional plan for Africa, the Global Strategy's pilot region.
4. In the Asia and the Pacific region, FAO has been joined by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and recently by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in preparing the ground to formulate a similar implementation plan for Asia and the Pacific. This paper presents the progress made in the development of the regional implementation plan for Asia and the Pacific.

II. The Global Strategy

The state of agricultural statistics in developing countries

5. Some of the weaknesses in national agricultural statistics are underlined by the data requirements posed by national strategic plans and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – especially on food security, biofuels, global warming and the environment – and the lack of reliable market information to properly monitor price volatility.
6. A 2009 study conducted by OECD's Partnership in Statistics 21st Century (PARIS21) found that only 10 percent of the International Development Association¹ (IDA) countries had included agriculture, more or less appropriately, in their national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDSs). Some of the factors explaining this fact are well-known:
 - The first generations of NSDSs revolved around national statistical offices (NSOs) and did not include statistical activities undertaken by line ministries such as agriculture;
 - There was a lack of coordination between NSOs and Ministries of Agriculture and deficient intrasector coordination;
 - Agricultural activities often are part of the informal economy and, therefore, usually not well-covered by statistical reporting systems;

¹ The International Development Association (IDA) is a development institution under the World Bank which focuses assistance on the world's 79 poorest countries.

- Ministries of Agriculture often have low statistical technical capacity, including a lack of adequate technical tools, statistical methodologies and survey frameworks to support data production efforts;
- Insufficient funding is allocated for agricultural statistics; and
- Statistical legislation does not cover the whole statistical system, or there is poor application of laws.

7. In this context, the UNSC requested FAO, the World Bank, Eurostat, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the International Statistical Institute and other Friends of the Chair of UNSC to formulate a strategic plan to improve agricultural statistics worldwide. Following a wide consultation process with national and international statistical organizations, agricultural ministries and other governmental organizations represented in FAO governing bodies, the Global Strategy was endorsed by UNSC in February 2010.

The Global Strategy to improve agricultural and rural statistics

8. The purpose of the Global Strategy is to provide a framework to enable national and international statistical systems to produce the basic information needed to guide decision-making in the twenty-first century. The Strategy also addresses emerging data needs, such as those caused by the recent spikes in food prices, and the growing concern over the impact of agriculture on the environment and climate change. The Global Strategy is based on three pillars:

- establishing a minimum set of core data that countries will disseminate on a regular basis to meet current and emerging demands, particularly related to food and nutrition security, sustainable agriculture development and climate change impacts, disaggregated by gender where appropriate;
- integrating agriculture into national statistical systems in order to meet policy-makers' and other data users' expectations so that statistical information is linked across the economic, social and environmental domains; and
- fostering the sustainability of agricultural statistical systems through governance and statistical capacity development.

9. The Global Strategy defines a comprehensive conceptual framework for the production and use of agriculture and rural statistics and information requirements of various data users. The conceptual framework, the assessment of national agricultural statistics systems and the choice of a core set of indicators, all point to the need to integrate agriculture into national statistical systems.

10. The Global Strategy identifies the main tools to be used to achieve this integration of agriculture into national statistical systems. The development of a "master sample frame" for agriculture will be the foundation for all data collections based on sample surveys or censuses. An integrated survey framework will be established to provide comparable data over time and across countries using an annual survey of selected core items and periodic data collections from a set of rotating panels covering economic and environmental issues. The integration across data domains will also be ensured by an integrated data management system for all official statistics related to agriculture.

11. The goal is to contribute to greater food security, reduced food price volatility and improved income and well-being for rural populations through evidence-based policies in line with MDG 1 that aims to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger". In addition, improved policies will contribute to the sustainable use of land and water resources and the adaptation of agricultural activities related to climate change to meet the challenges of MDG 7, which is to "ensure environmental sustainability".

Implementation plan and its components

12. Following the endorsement of the Global Strategy by UNSC in February 2010, the body urged FAO and the Friends of the Chair of UNSC to develop a global Implementation Plan (IP) aimed at

strengthening national agricultural statistical systems. It recommended that the global IP should include the following components:

- a comprehensive technical assistance programme;
- an articulated training programme; and
- a well-targeted research agenda.

13. In view of regional specificities, varying levels of statistical development and operational issues, the preparation of the IPs followed both a global and regional approach. FAO has been leading the preparation of the Global Action Plan which has been undertaken in parallel with the development of the regional plan for Africa,² the pilot region.

14. The Global Action Plan defines the steps to be taken and the overall responsibilities at the global, regional and national levels, with the understanding that each region will need different levels of support. It spells out requirements which are in harmony with those in the African plan. On the other hand, coordinating organizations in some other regions will depend on input from the global level to support the implementation for countries in their regions.

15. The Global Action Plan sets a global framework, norms and statistical standards which will avoid duplication, allow for common arrangements at the global level and facilitate the establishment of links and synergies with other global and regional initiatives.

16. The Global Action Plan was presented at the thirty-seventh session of the FAO Conference, held on 25 June – 2 July 2011, where it received strong support from FAO member countries and institutions. The recent meeting of Agricultural Ministers of the G20 in Paris, which took place on 22-23 June 2011, adopted an Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture³ which highlighted support for the Global Strategy and launched the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS). AMIS will complement the work of the Global Strategy, particularly by enhancing existing information systems, promoting greater shared understanding of food price developments, and further policy dialogue and coordination. The AMIS will be housed at the FAO and will involve other relevant international organisations, G20 members, other main grain and oilseeds producing, exporting and importing countries and the private sector.

17. The Global Action Plan recommends that regional IPs have a long-term perspective (i.e. from 10 to 15 years) via a phased approach, with the first phase covering the five-year period from 2011–2015.

III. The implementation plan for Asia and the Pacific

Steering group for agricultural statistics

18. At its second session in December 2010, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics unanimously endorsed FAO's proposal to develop an IP for Asia and the Pacific. The Committee established the Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics (SGAS) as a subgroup under ESCAP's Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics.

19. The SGAS will act as an executive committee, with FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) and the ESCAP Statistics Department serving as the joint Secretariat. The Secretariat is housed in the FAO regional office in Bangkok. It will provide guidance for the development of the Regional Implementation Plan, including identifying short-term and long-term priorities and establishing milestones. SGAS will also undertake monitoring of tasks and shall review progress of

² The Implementation Plan for Africa was designed by FAO, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Several regional and subregional organizations also participated, including the African Union/The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), AFRISTAT, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the South African Development Community (SADC).

³ Ministerial Declaration, Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture, Meeting of G20 Agriculture.

implementation periodically. The SGAS will report to member countries through FAO's Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS) and ESCAP's Committee on Statistics.

20. The SGAS is comprised of 15 member countries from Ministries of Agriculture and national statistics offices, and four development partners (the ADB, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)) and one training institution (the Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute, IASRI). The Chair of APCAS is also a member.

21. An important recent development has been the ADB decision to join FAO and ESCAP in developing and executing the regional IP. FAO has been designated as the focal point responsible for preparation of the technical assistance component of the regional IP, ESCAP will be the focal point responsible for preparation of the training component and ADB will be the focal point responsible for preparation of the research component.

Country assessment

22. One of the first tasks of SGAS and the FAO-ESCAP Secretariat is to commission a country assessment that will serve as the basis for the preparation of the three components of the regional IP.

23. The country assessment will allow the categorization of countries based on their capacity to produce the minimum set of core data. It will also identify training, technical assistance and research needs to enable each country to prepare a national action plan. A general assessment questionnaire will be used to obtain basic information from each country to determine which items in the minimum set of core data are being provided and by whom, data frequency and indications of quality. A more in-depth country assessment will be carried out after the country categorization in some priority countries, including a training needs assessment.

The way forward

24. The SGAS began discussions in September 2011 to guide the development of the Regional Implementation Plan, including short-term and long-term priorities and milestones. Some of the milestones (and tentative dates) include the following:

Milestones for the development of the regional implementation plan

Milestone	Date
Deadline for CAQs from countries	Mid-Dec 2011
Draft versions of training, research and technical assistance components	Mar 2012
Second meeting of the Steering Group	Apr 2012
Draft version of the Implementation plan/action plan	May/Jun 2012
Consultation with member states	Jun 2012
Consideration by legislative bodies	Sep–Dec 2012
Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS)	Oct 2012
ESCAP Committee on Statistics	Dec 2012

25. A regional IP is expected to be drafted by early 2012. The way forward will also include:

- establishment of the Global Governance Mechanism (the Steering Committee, the Coordination Office and the Technical Advisory Committee) to steer the implementation of the Global Strategy; and
- a Resource Mobilization Strategy to establish the global and regional trust funds. A resource partners' meeting was held at FAO headquarters on 28 October 2011 to mobilize resources.

26. The FAO-ESCAP Secretariat has received expressions of interest from donors such as the DFID and ADB to fund mobilization at the regional level in support of the regional implementation plan. The Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation has expressed interest in the country assessments in India and Bangladesh. FAO has prepared and submitted a concept note for the assessment in these countries.

IV. Conclusions

27. The regional IP of the Global Strategy is an historical opportunity to enable countries to develop sustainable statistical systems which will produce accurate and reliable agricultural and rural data – comparable over time and across countries – on production, demand, stocks, food and nutrition security, prices, climate change impacts, etc. (disaggregated by gender where appropriate) for use by decision-makers.

28. One of the Strategy's aims is to mainstream agricultural statistics in a country's NSDS. This would require dialogue and cooperation among data producers to avoid duplicating efforts when integrating agriculture into the NSDS.

29. Countries in the region should be closely associated with the formulation process of the regional IP to ensure that their needs and requirements are duly covered in the plan. Donors are encouraged to participate in the process and support the implementation plan. Funding will be required to implement the training, technical assistance and research components of the regional IP, given its importance for monitoring the MDGs and ensuring food and nutrition security.

30. Member countries are invited to take note of the preparations and development of the regional implementation plan and to provide necessary support for its successful implementation.