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**Global initiatives: agricultural and rural statistics**

## Progress in implementing the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics

**Note by the Regional Office of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan  
to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, under the guidance  
of the Regional Steering Committee on Agricultural Statistics\*\***

### *Summary*

The present note reports on the progress made, as of December 2014, in implementing the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. It contains a description of technical assistance, training and research activities that have been undertaken by each of the implementing partners. An overview of the Global Strategy and the activities of its Global Office are also included in the report.

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\*\* The present document was submitted late owing to the need to include the issues raised during the latest discussions on the development agenda beyond 2015; in particular, the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Statistics and Data for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.

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## **I. Background**

### **A. Scope, expected outcome and governance structure of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics**

1. The Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics is the outcome of a three-year effort initiated by the Statistical Commission supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, and an extensive consultation process involving national statistical offices, agricultural ministries, and other government and private institutions. The expected outcome of the Global Strategy is to enable targeted developing countries (90 countries were targeted from 2012 to 2017, including 20 in the Asia-Pacific region) to build sustainable statistical systems that will produce accurate and reliable agricultural and rural data to inform and guide policy analysis and decision-making. The Global Strategy covers a broad range of areas of concern, including aspects of forestry, fisheries and land and water use, in order to address the emerging and closely related economic, social and environmental issues faced by policymakers. A global action plan for implementation was endorsed in February 2012 by the Statistical Commission.

2. The Global Strategy establishes a framework to rebuild statistical systems for agricultural and rural statistics, and to meet the emerging data requirements and the need to monitor cross-cutting issues. The framework is based on three pillars — a minimum set of core data produced by countries on a sustainable basis; integration of agricultural statistics into national statistical systems; and ensuring the sustainability of agricultural statistical systems through building statistical capacity and improving governance and coordination across the institutions producing agricultural statistics.

3. In order to achieve the outcome of the Global Strategy, four outputs have been identified:

(a) Effective governing bodies established and working at the global and regional levels;

(b) Coordinating bodies within the national statistical system, legal frameworks and strategic plans to be established in the target countries, in order to enable the integration of agricultural statistics into national statistical systems;

(c) New cost effective methods for data collection, analysis and dissemination to be developed and disseminated;

(d) Increased capacity of agricultural statistics staff in regional training centres and target countries.

4. The governance structure for the Global Strategy has three levels: global, regional and national. At the global level, the Global Steering Committee provides strategic guidance on and oversight of execution of the

global action plan. The Global Executive Board serves as an executive committee of the Global Steering Committee and is supported by the Global Office, which is based within the Statistics Division at FAO headquarters in Rome. The Global Office ensures overall technical coordination of the implementation of the Global Strategy at the global and regional levels. It also acts as the secretariat of the Global Steering Committee and the Global Executive Board.

## **B. Regional component of the Global Strategy**

5. The Global Strategy is being implemented through regional action plans. The Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan, which was developed in close consultation with countries and endorsed by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, at its third session, and the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics in 2012, was approved by the Global Steering Committee in February 2013. The Regional Action Plan maps 11 regional outputs to the global outputs and provides indicative implementation activities for three statistical capacity-building components — technical assistance, training and research. The Regional Action Plan also includes a component on advocacy to build support in the region for the improvement of agricultural statistics. All outputs are designed:

(a) To halt the decline in the content and quality of agricultural production statistics by restoring sustainable systems to produce them, and making use of new methods and technologies;

(b) To meet the emerging data requirements to not only support policy decisions regarding the links between agriculture, and poverty and the environment, but also to monitor how a decision in one area affects the others.

6. ESCAP, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are jointly implementing the Regional Action Plan, with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the FAO Regional Office and ADB acting as coordinators of the training, technical assistance and research components, respectively. A Regional Office based in FAO in Bangkok is responsible for coordinating the Regional Action Plan.

7. A Regional Steering Committee on Agricultural Statistics consisting of 15 members was established jointly by the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics and the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. This Regional Steering Committee is the ultimate decision-making body at the regional level. It provides guidance and oversight, within the framework defined by the Global Steering Committee and consistent with relevant funding agreements, for the implementation of regional and national activities defined in the Regional Action Plan. The current membership of the Regional Steering Committee includes representatives of eight countries (China, Fiji, India, Japan, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam), the Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute (representing statistical training institutes), the Asia-Pacific Association for Agricultural Research Institutions (representing agricultural research institutions), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (donor partner providing financial resources for the Regional Action Plan) and the three implementing partners.

## **II. Progress in implementation**

### **A. Regional Steering Committee**

8. The Regional Steering Committee is expected to meet at least once a year to review progress in implementation of the Regional Action Plan and endorse, for approval by the Global Executive Board, the annual workplans and budgetary allocations for the Regional Office and the technical assistance and training components. Its first meeting was held in April 2013 and its third meeting in November 2014. The annual workplans were endorsed at the 2013, 2014 and 2015 meetings; they were subsequently approved by the Global Executive Board.

9. The Regional Action Plan will assist at least 20 countries to develop and initiate implementation of a national strategic plan for agricultural and rural statistics. To date, implementation activities have targeted nine priority countries selected by the Regional Steering Committee at its first and second meetings, namely: Bangladesh; Bhutan; Fiji; Georgia; Indonesia; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Myanmar; Samoa; and Sri Lanka. At its third meeting, the Regional Steering Committee also selected: Afghanistan; Cambodia; Maldives; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; and Viet Nam. For the Pacific, the Regional Steering Committee recommended that the Regional Office work with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to select an appropriate group of small island countries and to propose an approach to assessment and assistance for these countries.

### **B. Regional Office**

#### **Coordination**

10. The Regional Office undertakes activities to ensure the coordination of the Global Strategy's implementation at the regional level. These include participation in relevant technical meetings within the scope of the Global Strategy, particularly meetings organized by ESCAP. Participation in these meetings enables the Regional Office to report on the progress of the Global Strategy, share the main achievements and explore other areas of collaboration. It also facilitates informal meetings with resource partners and back-to-back governing body meetings.

11. The training component of the Global Strategy in the region is implemented by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, while ADB is actively collaborating and implementing research activities. ADB does not receive funds from the Global Trust Fund set up to finance implementation of Regional Action Plan activities; it is providing assistance from its own budget. In order to improve communication and enhance open discussion and collaboration between regional partners and at the regional level, a task force on the Regional Action Plan established by the FAO Regional Office holds monthly meetings.

12. The FAO Regional Office is expected to facilitate coordination among partners at the national level in order to ensure the best result for each country and avoid duplication.

#### **Communication and advocacy**

13. The Regional Action Plan calls for promotion and increasing visibility of the Global Strategy at the regional level and advocacy to support resource mobilization efforts. Global and regional communication plans and

promotional materials have been developed for these purposes. The Regional Office organized a briefing and partnership consultation on the Global Strategy in November 2014 and further resource mobilization efforts will be conducted in 2015.

14. Advocacy activities will be focused on identified technical assistance needs, and the Regional Office will conduct missions to establish new contacts and consolidate relations with donors in the countries.

#### **Monitoring and evaluation**

15. The monitoring and evaluation framework developed by the Global Office will be used as the basis to assess progress in the implementation of the Global Strategy at the regional level. The Regional Office is working with consultants in identifying suitable indicators at regional level.

### **C. Technical assistance activities**

#### **Initial country assessment questionnaire**

16. Most countries in the Asia-Pacific region completed a pilot country assessment questionnaire in either 2011 or 2012. The information contained in the questionnaire has been used to develop a set of statistical capacity indicators. Country profiles have also been produced. The capacity indicators formed part of the criteria for determining which countries should be selected for detailed assessment.

#### **In-depth country assessment guidelines and reports**

17. An in-depth country assessment is the starting point for work in each of the selected countries; it provides a comprehensive assessment of current statistical capacity, including identification of areas of weakness. The results set the stage for all future work in the country. The Regional Office has developed a set of guidelines for that process, together with a template for the resulting report.

#### **Country proposal document**

18. Information gathered during the in-depth assessment process is used to produce a country proposal document. Country proposal documents are intended to act as a basis for short and medium-term activities. The documents provide a prioritized list of projects that are needed to improve agricultural and rural statistics. For each project, a description of the proposed objectives and outcomes are provided, as well as a broad description of the work needed and approximate costs.

19. Global Strategy funds will be used to implement some of the high-priority, short-term projects, and it is expected that a number of these projects will start in 2015, particularly in the countries that had started the in-depth country assessment process in 2013. Donor funding will be needed for the remaining projects.

#### **Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Rural Statistics**

20. The Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Rural Statistics is a long-term (10-year) strategy document for agricultural and rural statistics. It is intended to be compatible with, and to be integrated into, a country's national strategy for the development of statistics. In-country work should include preparation of a road map for the development of the Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

**In-country activities**

21. To date, in-depth country assessments have been endorsed, or are expected to be endorsed, by the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Samoa and Sri Lanka. Those countries have also submitted proposals for short-term capacity-building activities for funding consideration by the Regional Steering Committee.

22. Fiji is about to complete an in-depth country assessment. Work in Myanmar and Georgia will begin in 2015.

**D. Training activities**

23. Implementation of the training component of the Regional Action Plan started in August 2013. Training strategies and priorities include: conducting in-depth assessments of training needs; improving basic skills and knowledge of statistical staff engaged in agricultural and rural statistics data collection and analysis; assisting the priority countries in assessing applicability of research results and in initiating their adaptation; training on advocacy and communication skills; building training resources (training needs assessment tools, curricula and syllabuses, training materials and expert trainers) in order to strengthen the capacity of national and regional training institutions to utilize the resources and deliver training; strengthening training coordination and collaboration through networking activities, including through regional/subregional assessments and curriculum development, experts meetings and networking forums; providing regional courses on selected technical topics and on archiving, documentation and dissemination of statistical data; and strengthening capacity to use data for policy analysis for food security and sustainable agriculture.

24. Participants targeted for technical training include statisticians in statistical offices as well as ministries and institutions dealing with agricultural data collection and analysis. As regards the strengthening of institutions, targeted participants include senior managers of statistical training institutions and human resources development units.

25. Further details on the outputs of the training activities of the Regional Action Plan are available from the website of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

**Assessment of training needs**

26. Developing tools and processes for assessing training needs is part of the work programme of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific and its subgroup on agricultural and rural statistics training.<sup>2</sup> This work was started through a course on assessing the training needs of the statistical workforce in agricultural statistics; in-country and regional-level work will be initiated in 2015.

**Technical training courses**

27. Four regional workshops on "Building Training Resources for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics" — each with a separate focus — covered the following topics: a minimum set of core data for agricultural and

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<sup>1</sup> Available from [www.unsiap.or.jp/programmes/as.html](http://www.unsiap.or.jp/programmes/as.html) and [www.unsiap.or.jp/about/gc10/SIAP\\_GC10\\_7\\_RAP%20training%20component%20report.pdf](http://www.unsiap.or.jp/about/gc10/SIAP_GC10_7_RAP%20training%20component%20report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See E/ESCAP/CST(4)/12.

rural statistics that is outlined in the Global Strategy; data collection through sample surveys; data collection through administrative reporting systems; and integrated surveys for agricultural statistics. More than 80 officials participated in those workshops.

28. A regional training series on application of sampling methods in agricultural data collection was initiated in 2014. A similar series on basic statistical methods will be initiated in 2015.

29. To increase capacity in the use of statistics in policymaking, the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture has been cooperating on an ongoing series of policy analysis workshops on food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable agriculture. Some 90 policymakers and researchers participated in three such workshops.

#### **Communication and advocacy**

30. In 2015, training on improving the skills of statistical officials to effectively communicate statistical information to policymakers, the media and other stakeholders will support in-country activities on strategic plan formulation and resource mobilization.

#### **Coordination and networking**

31. Resources mobilized in respect of the training component of the Regional Action Plan supported the organization of the Network and its subgroup on agricultural and rural statistics. The Network is an important mechanism for strengthening national training institutions, collaboration on developing and sharing training materials and expertise, and developing standards, guidelines and tools for capacity-building through training.

### **E. Activities of the Asian Development Bank in support of the Global Strategy**

32. To support the Global Strategy, ADB has designed and funded a project (Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics for Food Security) that contributed to the drafting of the Regional Action Plan and assisted four countries (Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives and Viet Nam) to develop their respective country action plans. That project has also provided technical and funding support to Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Viet Nam for undertaking methodological research to improve their respective agricultural data collection systems. ADB has also successfully obtained financial support from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction to help four countries (the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) to adopt remote-sensing technology to estimate rice cultivation areas and production. This second project is called Innovative Data Collection Methods for Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

33. To identify the key methodological research areas to focus on, ADB assisted the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam in developing their respective action plans through intensive consultations with stakeholders. In so doing, those countries were able to identify which research areas to focus on and prioritize the activities that need to be undertaken to achieve their desired outcomes. The Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam were able to obtain government approval and support for their respective action plans.

34. Bhutan is carrying out a comprehensive review of its current system, which employs mostly administrative reports, and is exploring other potential data sources, like the Bhutan Living Standards Survey to complete their minimum set of core data items. In collaboration with the Partnership in Statistics Development in the 21st Century, which ADB asked to assist, Bhutan will document the metadata of the current agricultural data collection system. The technical paper on the comparative analysis of data sources has been completed and circulated for comments.

35. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, on the other hand, undertook a comparative analysis of its existing data sources to improve its administrative reporting system by incorporating a supplemental approach that could be used to derive measures of reliability. The Philippines explored the use of Google Earth optical satellite imagery and the Agricultural Land Information System software to supplement their land-use statistics. Viet Nam is redesigning its livestock survey to improve the quality and coverage of livestock production estimates. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam are exploring the use of optical and radar satellite imagery to supplement their respective data collection systems for rice.

36. In undertaking the above-mentioned methodological research with the active participation of staff in the respective national statistical systems, ADB conducted specific training programmes to improve the skills of those involved in research and production of agricultural statistics in Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

37. The first training programme on the use of remote sensing in agricultural statistics and the application of the International Asian Harvest Monitoring System for Rice — software developed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency that translates radar satellite data into rice area maps and also provides rice area estimates at the provincial level — was organized in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

38. As regards the contribution of ADB to the advocacy campaign of the Regional Action Plan, various high-level meetings and launch and dissemination workshops were held that focused on the research results and planned methodological research in Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

39. In 2015, ADB plans to continue collaborating with the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam in adopting remote-sensing methods to supplement estimates concerning their respective rice areas and production. Three in-country training programmes and a high-level mid-term project assessment will also be organized.

40. More details about the accomplishments and plans of ADB on improving agricultural and rural statistics are to be found on the website of the Community for Agricultural and Rural Statistics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Available from <http://cars.adb.org>.



**F. Synergies between the regular programme of activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Global Strategy**

41. The FAO regular programme of activities, particularly the normative work of developing standards, capacity-building and technical assistance, includes many activities relating to the improvement of ESCAP members and associate members' agricultural statistics. Most of the objectives of the Global Strategy are covered by the ongoing regular programme of FAO. FAO recognizes the importance of building synergies and complementarities between the ongoing FAO work programme and the activities of the Global Strategy. At the operational level, these synergies are established by: (a) assigning the work of the Global Strategy to FAO staff on mission to countries implementing FAO-funded projects; and (b) using FAO regular programme funds to organize activities geared towards fulfilment of the goals of the Global Strategy, in conjunction with other implementing partners in the region. One such event is the Expert Meeting on Crop Monitoring for Improved Food Security organized by the FAO-ADB partnership, which is built on the principles of comparative advantage, pooling of resources and sharing of experience and knowledge. FAO welcomes further proposals for partnerships on events that contribute to the improvement of agricultural and rural statistics, as well as the fulfilment of the strategic objectives of FAO.

**III. Conclusion**

42. Significant progress has been made in a number of countries in assessing capacity and identifying the need for technical assistance and training, so as to make improvements to agricultural and rural statistics. Those needs are now being addressed as new countries start the in-depth country assessment process.

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