

164th Session of the Council – written correspondence procedure
Item 13: *Developments in Fora of Importance for the Mandate of FAO*

Secretariat response to written questions from the Council

1. The Secretariat expresses its appreciation for the comments received for document CL 164/INF/4, *Developments in Fora of Importance for the Mandate of FAO*. It has taken due note of the comments and inputs.
2. In response to a question raised regarding the UN Secretary-General’s Data Strategy adopted by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the implications for FAO (CL 164/INF/4 WA1), please note that scaling up the generation of real-time statistics underpins the UN Secretary-General’s Data Strategy and, in particular, its new key “capabilities” of data analytics and data access. Real-time statistics can provide up-to-date and actionable information not only about what is happening, but also on the main reasons why it is happening and on what the response could be (data analytics). At the same time, they also ensure that everyone, and in every institution it operates, can discover, access, integrate and share the data they need (data access).
3. However, producing real-time statistical information requires the development and use of new statistical methods to:
 - a) gather and process alternative data sources, including administrative data and Earth observation data, to produce current fit-for-purpose statistics;
 - b) nowcast and/or forecast the estimates of key variables (e.g. crop production, crop yields, etc.) using all current information ready available.
4. In implementing this new approach, FAO will collaborate with Members in several ways:
 - a) Members will be involved in the development of these innovative statistical methods. Indeed, under the umbrella of the UN Statistical Commission, FAO is leading the work of the Committee of Experts on food security, agricultural and rural statistics (formerly known as the Inter-Agency Expert Group on food security, agricultural and rural statistics). This Committee, formed by experts from national statistical offices, ministries of agriculture and international organizations, has approved, in March 2020, an ambitious programme of work for the 2020-2023 period¹, which includes the development, testing and dissemination of statistical methods to produce real-time statistics at national level. Once finalized, these methods will be presented to the UN Statistical Commission and FAO governing bodies for endorsement, ensuring therefore a global consensus on the proposed methodologies.

¹ UN Statistical Commission (2020). Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics. E/CN.3/2020/13 <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-13-AgriculturalStats-E.pdf>

- b) FAO will provide support to national statistical systems on the adoption of these methods through transfer of know-how and capacity development activities. By assisting countries in the production of their own real-time statistical information, FAO will then be able to integrate these official estimates in its data production process.
- c) National statistical systems will always be the first point of contact to collect the information necessary to produce FAO real-time statistical information (e.g. to collect the necessary ground truth information to validate and calibrate the crop area and crop yield estimates generated from earth observation data).
- d) In case official up-to-date and ground information is not available and collaboration with national statistical systems is constrained for different reasons, FAO may use alternative/non-official data sources in the compilation of real-time data estimates. In such cases, FAO will implement data validation procedures to inform Members on the data and methodologies used in the compilation of real-time statistics, and seek their approval prior to their release.