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Global initiatives of Statistical capacity development for food and agriculture SDG indicators

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SUMMARY

FAO has made significant progress in the development of SDG indicator methodologies since the last session of this Commission, managing to upgrade all remaining “Tier III” indicators by April 2019. The approval of the methodologies of these indicators has, on the one hand, opened the possibility for countries to report on these indicators, and on the other hand, significantly expanded the need for capacity development of National Statistical Systems. To tackle this need, FAO continued to mobilize corporate resources and therewith provided capacity development support to countries in various modalities; and it has stepped up its extra-budgetary resource mobilization efforts, with a view to accelerating progress in ensuring that the majority of countries are able to report on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship by 2030. In the period 2018-2019, FAO invested an additional USD 1.5 million in corporate funds on capacity development activities for SDG indicators, particularly in organizing regional and national training workshops and in further expanding its e-learning course arsenal. In addition, FAO has also stepped up its extra-budgetary resource mobilization efforts related to SDG indicators. On the one hand, the “50 by 2030” initiative (estimated at USD 500 million) will support 50 low and low-middle income countries in collecting the farm-level based SDG indicators. On the other hand, FAO has recently unveiled a USD 21 million multi-donor Umbrella Programme on Measuring the SDGs, aiming to catalyze support to countries in the collection, production, dissemination, and use of all 21 indicators under its custodianship. This Programme has already received its first donation of USD 1 million, with which a series of activities have already been planned by the FAO’s Office of the Chief Statistician. FAO is also closely following two global initiatives supporting SDG reporting, the “Data4Now” initiative and the work led by the Bern Network on the Global Data Financing Facility for statistics.

I. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ON INDICATOR METHODOLOGIES

Since November 2017, FAO has successfully managed to reclassify all nine remaining indicators under the “Tier III” category, which were hitherto still deemed to be under methodological development. Therefore, all 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship now have internationally agreed methodologies. The methodologies of those nine indicators were approved at different instances by the Interagency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG), a working group of the UN Statistical Commission responsible for the implementation of the SDG global indicator framework. The nine indicators are: 2.3.1/2.3.2 (productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers), 2.4.1 (sustainable agriculture), 5.a.2 (equal rights in access to land under the law), 6.4.1 (water use efficiency), 12.3.1 (food losses), 14.6.1 and 14.b.1 (international instruments to combat IUU fishing and promote small-scale fisheries) and 14.7.1 (sustainable fisheries as a percentage of GDP). Henceforth, FAO’s methodological work related to SDG indicators will increasingly place greater emphasis on data disaggregation techniques, data estimation and imputation techniques, as well as more comprehensively measuring trends and progress towards targets.

II. FAO SUPPORT TO GLOBAL REPORTING

The approval of the methodologies of these indicators has, on the one hand, opened the possibility for countries to report on these indicators, and on the other hand, significantly expanded the need for capacity development of National Statistical Systems, which are invariably already overburdened and yet now need to collect, analyze and disseminate a host of new data. In 2019, FAO was, therefore, able to officially report data on a record 16 out of 21 SDG indicators, enriching the scope of the 2019 global SDG Progress Report published in July. This was particularly welcome in a critical year for the global follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as this is the year in which the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) held its first quadrennial review at Heads of State and Government Level.

The ability to report new data on the reclassified indicators also allowed FAO to publish its first digital report on SDG progress relevant to the food and agriculture-related SDG targets. This report, offering a greater analytical depth compared to the global SDG Progress Report, covers 18 SDG indicators (17 under FAO custodianship and one for which FAO is a partner agency) and is hosted on FAO SDG indicators portal. The digital report paints a grim picture of progress in the food and agriculture domain. The most recent evidence available suggests that the world is not on track to meet the majority of SDG targets related to sustainable agriculture and food security. This conclusion is accentuated by the continued rise in hunger in the world for a third year running, as reported by the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, and the continued degradation of the natural resource base.

III. ONGOING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The approval of new methodologies for SDG indicators has also highlighted countries’ capacity gaps in SDG reporting. Data gaps for many indicators are still vast in terms of country coverage, time series data, and disaggregation dimensions, limiting their ability to guide policy and investment decisions effectively. For instance, critical SDG indicators on sustainable agriculture, women’s access to land and food loss and waste have no or almost no data. Other indicators such as those on the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers or the sustainability and efficiency of water use have largely outdated data, with few data points scattered across many years. Other

indicators, such as those on food security and green mountain cover, are still largely estimated by FAO as opposed to being produced by countries themselves.

To tackle these gaps, FAO has followed a two-pronged strategy: it has continued to mobilize corporate resources and therewith provided capacity development support to countries in various modalities; and it has stepped up its extra-budgetary resource mobilization efforts, with a view to accelerating progress in ensuring that the majority of countries are able to report on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship by 2030.

In the period 2018-2019, FAO invested USD 1.5 million in corporate funds on capacity development activities for SDG indicators, particularly in organizing regional and national training workshops; and in expanding and further translating its e-learning course arsenal. There are currently 11 e-learning courses covering 13 indicators accessible through the FAO E-learning center, with a further three courses covering four indicators expected to be launched by the end of 2019. Moreover, the majority of currently available courses will be translated into French and Spanish before the end of the year. Russian and Arabic translations are planned in 2020.

Figure 1. Status of SDG indicator e-learning courses (published vs. under development-UD)

e-learning course	English	French	Spanish
2.1.1	✓	UD	UD
2.1.2	✓	✓	✓
2.3.1/2.3.2	UD		
2.4.1	UD		
2.5.1/2.5.2	✓	UD	UD
2.a.1	✓	UD	UD
2.c.1	✓	✓	✓
5.a.1	✓	UD	UD
5.a.2	✓	UD	UD
6.4.1	✓		
6.4.2	✓	UD	UD
12.3.1	UD		
14.4.1	UD		
14.b.1	✓	✓	✓
15.1.1/15.2.1	✓	UD	UD

For their part, the regional and national training workshops engaged national statistical officers and officers from other data producer entities, providing them with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the methodology, data collection tools and reporting procedures. A significant proportion of these workshops was dedicated to African countries. In particular, African countries received the bulk of sub-regional and country technical assistance missions on food security reporting (2.1.1/2.1.2), and benefitted from dedicated regional training workshops on the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers (2.3.1/2.3.2) and agricultural sustainability (2.4.1); government expenditures in agriculture (2.a.1); land ownership and secured rights (5.a.1); water stress and water use efficiency (6.4.1/6.4.2); food losses (12.3.1); forest area and sustainable forest management (15.1.1/15.2.1); and mountain green cover (15.4.2). African countries also benefitted from a Sub-regional Capacity Building Workshop on Monitoring the FAO-relevant SDG Indicators in Eastern Africa, which took place from 10 June to 14 June 2019; as well as a Regional workshop on Mainstreaming Sustainable Food and Agriculture (SFA) in the implementation of the SDGs within Malabo Declaration, which took place on 28-30 May 2019 and explored the linkages between SDG

monitoring, policy integration and investment planning. Figure 2 below summarizes the main FAO capacity development activities for SDG indicators focusing on African countries in 2018-2019 (this does not include global training workshops where some countries from the region may have participated). Finally, two FAO projects supported by Japan on “Strengthening Agricultural Statistics and Food Security Information in CARD Countries through South-South Cooperation” and “Supporting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2.1 Monitoring by Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition Information in Africa” provided further support on food and agriculture statistics.

Figure 2: Summary of FAO capacity development activities for SDG indicators focusing on African countries in 2018-2019

SDG indicator	Capacity development activity	Period
2.1.1/2.1.2	National training workshops in 12 countries	2018 - 2019
	Subregional workshop, South Africa	February 2019
2.3.1/2.3.2	Joint Regional training workshop, Cairo	October 2019
2.4.1	Mainstreaming Sustainable Food and Agriculture (SFA) workshop (10 countries), Addis Ababa	May 2019
	Joint Regional training workshop, Cairo	October 2019
2.a.1	Regional training workshop, Cairo	April 2019
5.a.1	National Training workshop, Côte d’Ivoire	November 2018
	Joint Regional training workshop, Cairo	October 2019
12.3.1.a	National Training workshop, Côte d’Ivoire	June 2018
6.4.1/6.4.2	Regional training workshop (9 countries), Botswana	April 2019
	National training workshop, Côte D’Ivoire	November 2018
	Sub-regional training workshop (9 countries), Addis Ababa	October 2019
15.1.1/15.2.1	Four sub-regional FRA Remote Sensing Survey workshops in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Gabon	September 2018, July and August 2019
2.1.1/2.1.2/ 2.3.1/2.3.2/ 2.a.1/2.4.1/ 2.5.1.a/2.5.1.b/2.5.2 12.3.1	Subregional training workshop (9 countries), Addis Ababa	June 2019
All 21 indicators	National training workshop, Algeria	December 2018

IV. GLOBAL INITIATIVES OF STATISTICAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SDG INDICATORS AND REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

Despite these in-person training activities and expanded toolbox of online courses, capacity gaps in countries are not closing fast enough for most countries to be able to effectively report on progress towards the food and agriculture-related SDG indicators. This conclusion is corroborated by the results of a global SDG Gap Assessment conducted by FAO in 2019 that underscores the pressing demand for capacity development support and reveals that many countries are not in a position to collect many SDG indicators in neither short nor medium term (RAF-AFCAS-19-E-41). For these reasons, FAO has also stepped up its extra-budgetary resource mobilization efforts related to SDG indicators. On the one hand, the “50 by 2030” initiative (estimated at USD 500 million) will support 50 low and low-middle income countries in collecting the farm-level based SDG indicators (2.3.1/2.3.2/2.4.1/5.a.1 and partially 12.3.1) (see RAF-AFCAS-19-71). On the other hand, FAO has recently unveiled a USD 21 million multi-donor Umbrella Programme on Measuring the SDGs, aiming to catalyze support to countries in the collection, production, dissemination, and use of all 21 indicators under its custodianship. FAO is also closely following two global initiatives supporting SDG reporting, the “Data4Now” initiative aiming to fill gaps in SDG data availability and improve timeliness and quality, and the Global Data Financing Facility, aiming to provide funding support statistical infrastructure and cross cutting data sources.

a) Umbrella Programme on Measuring the SDGs

The overall objective of the Umbrella Programme on Measuring the SDGs is to enable partner countries to produce and use more comprehensive data on SDG indicators, allowing them to design effective evidence-based national strategies to ensure that relevant SDG targets are met. The direct beneficiaries will be the national institutions responsible for collecting, computing and disseminating the SDG data and indicators, as well as policymakers, whose decisions will be better informed as a result. Decision-makers will benefit not only from higher-quality and more granular data but also from improved analytical progress reports, which will help to identify the key determinants of SDG achievement. In this way, by addressing all the steps of the data cycle and by establishing a strong link to the policy work of FAO, the programme will ultimately help countries reach the SDG targets.

The Umbrella Programme is global in scope and fully aligned with the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, which provides the framework for planning and implementing statistical capacity-building pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is designed in a modular approach, with tailored capacity development activities to be delivered through five modules, as illustrated in Figure 3. The five modules will deliver the following five outputs:

Figure 3: The Umbrella Programme Modular Approach

MODULE 1: Data disaggregation techniques are established for all SDG indicators under FAO custodianship

MODULE 2: SDG data gaps and statistical capacities of partner countries assessed and strategic plans developed that align national monitoring frameworks with the Global Indicator Framework

MODULE 3: Innovative and cost-effective methods, such as the use of earth observation data, are adopted in partner countries for producing relevant SDG indicators in a sustainable way

MODULE 4: The 21 FAO-relevant SDG indicators are regularly monitored in partner countries

MODULE 5: SDG data made is openly accessible and SDG progress reports are produced and widely disseminated in partner countries.

i. Data disaggregation techniques are established for all SDG indicators under FAO custodianship

The development of specific data disaggregation techniques and guidelines for the FAO-relevant SDG indicators will involve, in particular, the identification of a minimum set of dimensions for the disaggregation of each SDG indicator, the development of standard methods for data disaggregation by geographical location and population groups (e.g. small area estimation techniques), the field testing of these methods and their validation by expert groups and the development of guidelines for the collection and dissemination of disaggregated data (e.g. standard tables and software routines). In line with the recommendations of the IAEG-SDG, the identification of a minimum set of dimensions for the disaggregation of each SDG indicator will take into account the policy relevance of each dimension right at the design level such as to maximize the benefits of disaggregated data for the target groups and minimize the cost and error of post-estimate disaggregation.

ii. SDG data gaps and statistical capacities of partner countries are assessed, and strategic plans that align national monitoring frameworks to the Global Indicator Framework are developed

The alignment of national indicators to the global indicator framework is in the best interest of countries and the international community, both from a political and statistical perspective. In order to advocate for the use of the global indicator framework and to support countries in its adoption, however, National Statistical Agencies need assistance in identifying the key data gaps and the best data sources which can be used and potentially upgraded for generating the SDG indicators. Moreover, countries need support in establishing an effective institutional coordination mechanism for monitoring the SDGs and reporting them to international agencies. Under this module of the

Umbrella Programme, FAO experts will undertake direct technical assistance missions to some 20 countries during the first two years of the programme and gradually diminish support over the remaining years, for a total coverage of 60 countries.

iii. Innovative and cost-effective methods using earth observation data are adopted in partner countries for producing relevant SDG indicators in a sustainable way

Earth Observation data can significantly contribute both directly and indirectly to improve the availability and quality of agricultural statistics. However, confusion often arises as National Statistical Agencies are confronted with many different technologies and applications generating different data. Moreover, they rarely have the capacity to customize and apply the available tools to the country context without dedicated support. Geospatial imagery still needs to be supplemented with survey data to calibrate the interpretation software (“ground-truthing”) and obtain accurate measures of land cover and use. A series of activities under this module of the Umbrella Programme will support up to 12 selected developing countries (three per year) in the use of earth observation data for strengthening their agricultural statistical systems and for generating estimates of FAO-relevant SDG indicators.

iv. The 21 FAO-relevant SDG indicators are regularly monitored in partner countries

The effective implementation of the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship requires the use of specific methods and data sources. In order to ensure that countries are able to produce and report all the related indicators, tailored assistance will be provided, taking into account the particularities of each theme. Therefore, for each of the themes, a variety of capacity development modalities will be deployed to promote the implementation of the SDG indicators by countries and enable them to monitor progress towards the relevant targets. These will consist primarily of dedicated regional training workshops for selected countries followed by targeted technical assistance missions to some of the countries participating in the regional trainings carried out by FAO experts.

v. SDG data are made openly accessible, and SDG progress reports are produced and widely communicated in partner countries

Under this module of the Umbrella Programme, several initiatives will be deployed to improve the use of SDG indicators in decision-making, including support for building communication and analytical capacities in National Statistical Agencies and improving users’ access to agricultural data. Technical assistance will be provided to National Statistical Agencies to develop an open data policy and at the same time master the technical tools, legal instruments, and operational procedures to make microdata accessible while preserving respondents’ confidentiality. FAO will also offer targeted structured training and hands-on technical assistance to National Statistical Offices and/or relevant line Ministries in countries to improve their capacities in developing analytical progress reports, either as independent products or as relevant sections of national SDG progress reports or Voluntary National Reports.

Launched at a high-level Resource Partner Roundtable in June 2019, which saw the participation of a number of African countries, the Umbrella Programme has already received its first donation of USD 1 million. FAO’s Office of the Chief Statistician has already planned a series of activities with these funds, with an increased emphasis on capacity development activities at the country level during which FAO experts and national counterparts can work directly on national data and eventually ensure that the appropriate data is being reported according to the established methodology, standards and classifications. African countries comprise a significant share of target countries under this sub-

programme of the Umbrella Programme, which have been selected primarily based on the results of the aforementioned SDG Gap Assessment and specific country requests addressed to FAO.

Additional country requests for assistance under this programme should be formally addressed to FAO through the respective FAO country or regional office or directly to the Office of the Chief Statistician (Chief-Statistician@fao.org).

b) The 50 by 2030 Initiative

The 50x2030 Initiative to Close the Agricultural Data Gap aims to empower and support fifty low and lower-middle income countries (L/LMICs) to build strong national data systems that produce and use high-quality and timely agricultural data through survey programs (see RAF-AFCAS-19-E-71 for a full account). The scarcity of high-quality, timely agricultural data is a key constraint for L/LMICs to effectively plan, finance, and implement agricultural development strategies as they strive to realize their full potential. Many L/LMICs have taken the first steps –identifying the utility of data and beginning to prioritize as such through the development of Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS) – but many of those same countries have asked for help in strengthening key capacities and knowledge to form a comprehensive, sustainable system for data production and use.

Supporting the overall aim for countries to build high-quality data systems and building off the experiences of previous programs (FAO AGRISurvey and World Bank LSMS-ISA), the 50x2030 Initiative will support countries to build and implement either an *Agricultural Survey Program* or an *Integrated Agricultural and Rural Survey Program* – depending on the country’s needs, wishes, capacity, and potential for technical and financial take-over by the respective governments. The direction chosen by countries will build on countries’ existing data systems and survey programs and be supported through an assessment to gauge countries’ capacities and data needs. The Initiative is global in scope with participating L/LMIC countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, and South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Country requests for assistance under this programme should be formally addressed to FAO through the respective FAO country or regional office.

c) Data4Now

Filling gaps in SDG data availability, including the coverage and timeliness of different sources, is an enormous challenge. To help this effort, this joint initiative by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, UN Statistics Division, World Bank, and SDSN TReNDS, aims to:

- ✓ Improve accessibility of methods, making innovative methods for data production and analysis accessible to data producers and data users to support progress towards the SDGs.
- ✓ Build technical coalitions and capacity, developing technical collaborations to build skills and knowledge and increase the standardization and uptake of new methods at scale.
- ✓ Catalyze national data innovation partnerships, scaling up new data partnerships in selected countries to increase the availability and use of timely data for decision-making on the SDGs.

An initial proof-of-concept phase will aim to demonstrate capacity in partner countries to regularly produce timely data (updated annually or with higher frequency, depending on the measure) from sustainable sources (including the private sector and civil society), for at least three SDG measures. The first workshop of the initiative will take place in Rwanda, 13-14 November 2019. FAO will

provide support remotely for this activity. Countries are invited to participate in the project as country partners, collaborating with others to identify real-time measures in their country and to pilot new approaches for generating this data.

Following this first phase, in September 2020 the initiative will be scaled up so that, by 2023 and the halfway point to the SDGs, robust methods and sources of timely data are in widespread use, and it is possible to assess progress and devise programs and policies based on timely data to ensure that SDGs are achieved by the deadline of 2030. FAO plans to provide support to countries through this initiative.

d) Global Data Financing Facility

The “Bern Network on Financing Data for Development”, of which FAO is a member, is advancing relevant preparations for the launch of a Global Data Financing Facility at the third UN World Data Forum (WDF), 18-21 October 2020, in Bern, Switzerland. The facility aims to comprise a fully demand-driven funding channel based on country priorities, focused on statistical infrastructure and cross cutting data sources, and complementing sectoral funding mechanisms supporting the production of specific SDG indicators. The Facility, which is global in scope with an initial focus on low-income countries, has three key aims:

- ✓ Encourage partner country awareness of and commitment to development data, and especially the basic building blocks described above, leveraging additional domestic budget resources as well as external financing.
- ✓ Incentivize improved in-country investment proposals and additional participation by both existing donors and new actors.
- ✓ Support and convene research and development and experimentation, in new development data technologies and delivery mechanisms.

The Facility will be organized in separate windows. **Window 1** would provide national statistical authorities with a credible multi-year (for example five-year) match-funding response for some of their most urgent data capacity gaps, building on national budget commitments. **Window 2** would provide seeding and blend-financing for transformative, leapfrogging data architecture and service delivery applications so that countries are not left behind by waves of progress while they struggle with existing challenges.

The participation of FAO in the Bern Network aims at ensuring that the Facility will also benefit food and agriculture statistics. More information can be found here:

https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/BernDraftReport_SoftCopy_FINAL.pdf

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AFCAS members are invited to express their views and recommendations to FAO on the following:

- FAO’s efforts in countries in the region for improving their capacity to produce, disseminate and use the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship and to monitor the implementation of SDGs more generally;
- The relevance of the Umbrella programme on Measuring the SDGs to address the SDG monitoring capacity development needs of the countries in the region.