



**Inter-Departmental Working Group on Statistics
17 July 2015**

Participants: Campanhola, Clayton (AGP); Dowlatchahi, Mina (OSP); Frenken, Karen (NRL); Gennari, Pietro (ESS); Hemrich, Guenter (OSP); Jaques, Yves (OPC); Katz, Stephen (ESS); Keizer, Johannes (OPC); Lebedys, Arvydas (FOE); MacDicken, Kenneth (FOM); Montero, Javier (ESS); Muller, Eva (FOE); Percic, Monika (ESP); Racionzer, Paul (EST); Ramaschiello, Valentina (ESS); Schmidhuber, Josef (ESS), Stewart, Jessica (ESS); Taconet, Marc (FIPS); Tarazona, Carlos (OED); Tekola, Berhe (AGA); Baumung, Roswitha (AGAG); Tsuji, Sachiko (FIPS); Unver, Olcay (NRL); Whimpenny, Paul (CIO); Wu, David (CIO)

Absent: AGS, ESA, ESN, NRC, TCI, TCE, RAF, RAP, REU, RLC, RNE

Agenda

1. Approval of the minutes for the meeting held on 15 January
2. Statistics in the Strategic Framework (2016-17)
3. FAO Evaluation of Knowledge Products
4. Information Sharing
 - Update on the Statistical Working System
5. AoB

1. Approval of the minutes for the meeting held on 15 January

There were no comments on the minutes of 29 April, which are therefore to be considered as approved.

With regard to the action points from the previous meeting, P. Gennari informed the IDWG that two new sub-groups had been established in response to the analysis of the Statistical Programme of Work (SPW) 2014-15.

He explained that the first group would undertake an in-depth analysis of FAO's data collection activities (with a particular focus on questionnaires), in order to streamline the process. He added that the goal would be to reduce the size of the questionnaires, as well as eventually establishing a more efficient system of data exchange within the Organization. He underlined that these initiatives will save resources and reduce the response burden on countries.

P. Gennari explained that the second sub-group would work to ensure better synergy between different datasets on the same subject, which do not currently 'talk to each other', especially from a user perspective, and a step-wise approach, starting from one data domain, had been adopted. The SPW 2014-15 found that price data is one area where there is scope for better coordination. The proposal, which is currently being developed, aims to create a single portal, where users can access all FAO price statistics and also find a user guide, which will detail the uses of the various datasets, and explain why and how they are different from one another.

He added that a high level work plan for 2015-16 had been drafted, and would soon be circulated to the IDWG. In addition to the two areas of work mentioned above, the work plan also contained details of priority areas on: the development and endorsement of the Quality Assurance Framework for FAO statistical processes, the implementation of Phase 1 and initiation of Phase 2 of the Statistical Working System project, the review, development and implementation of classifications and standards in statistics, the development of satellite accounts for agriculture, forestry and fishery of the System of Environment Economic Accounting (SEEA-AGRI), the proposal to Establish a Global Commission on Statistics as a FAO Governing Body, and the establishment of a Technical Network of Professional Statisticians.

With regard to the following action point in the Minutes, P. Gennari reminded the IDWG that staff involved in corporate statistical activities should include these tasks in their 2015 PEMS, once the system is available.

P. Gennari also provide a brief update on the progress of the implementation of the statistical quality assurance framework (SQAF). Since the meeting in January 2015, the guidelines, the self assessment checklist and the proposed quality indicators have been tested by ESS, FI and FO. Three processes have been selected for the first pilot phase of the SQAF: Producer Prices (ESS), Capture Fishery Production and Forestry Production and Trade. The pilot phase is now ongoing, and a wider roll out including 10 to 15 processes will begin before the end of the year.

2. Statistics in the Strategic Framework (2016-17)

P. Gennari emphasized the importance of this agenda item and explained that in the new biennium, some changes will be made to the approach to including statistics in the Strategic Framework. He ask M. Dowlatchahi to provide the context and to outline some of the key changes in this cycle.

M. Dowlatchahi explained that the principal changes in the approach for the new biennium had been derived from the lessons learned in the previous phase, as well as from feedback from the Chief Statistician and the IDWG on Statistics.

She noted that this round of planning would try to bring the approach to planning statistical activities in line with the corporate planning process, where possible. M. Dowlatchahi added that draft guidelines had been circulated to the IDWG prior to the meeting for both feedback and discussion. She underlined that the new planning process would focus on milestone setting, rather than planning detailed activities. In wider terms, she noted that SO teams are now working on the target setting phase of the process, and that a skills gap review was also underway, lead by the two DDGs. Milestones would also be set in the coming weeks and she explained that the process should be completed by August 25th.

She emphasized that whilst a coordinated approach to ensuring the inclusion of corporate statistical activities within the Strategic Framework was strongly supported, no resource moves between chapters were foreseen. Therefore, O6.02 would not be enlarged in terms of budget.

M. Dowlatchahi explained that the new approach in the 2016-17 biennium would reinforce the role of Chief Statistician as the coordinator of all statistical work in the Organization, supported in this function by the IDWG on Statistics. In practice this would mean that work plans for corporate statistical activities would be discussed, reviewed and agreed by the IDWG on Statistics, under the overall guidance of the Chief Statistician, and in close consultation with OSP and the SOCs. This new 'delivery mechanism' will also be responsible for ensuring the technical quality of statistical outputs. She emphasized the importance of liaising with SOCs to identify new data demands, particularly with regard to the ongoing SDG monitoring framework.

In terms of work planning for corporate statistical activities, IDWG members would be asked to follow a three step process. The first step, which should be completed by August 25th would be to critically review the Statistical Programme of Work 2014-15 and to identify two to three key milestones under the relevant statistical domains. In addition to milestone setting, members should also perform a review of the skills mix required to carry out these activities, and to provide feedback on this.

The second step of this process would be a critical review of submissions by the IDWG, under the guidance of the Chief Statistician, with a view to refining the milestones. The final step of the process would be to review the work plans with each SOC, and to ensure that the proposed milestones and the skills mix are in line with their requirements. M. Dowlatchahi explained that information on resource planning would be shared later in August. She reiterated that focus should be on setting milestones, rather than on detailed substantive aspects.

P. Gennari added that, whilst no additional resources were foreseen under O6.02, a review of the products and services would also be undertaken in order to ensure a truly corporate approach.

G. Hemrich emphasized the importance of clearly determining what is required from IDWG members in terms of inputs. P. Gennari explained that further detailed guidance would be sent to members.

M. Taconet asked for confirmation that in O6.02 resource allocation would only be given to ESS, even if other units contribute to the achievement of those milestones, as in the previous biennium. M. Dowlatchahi underlined that milestones should generally be of a corporate nature, and that no additional staff time should be planned under O6.02. She explained that O6.02 should be regarded as the home of statistical governance and coordination, and that the same logic for resource allocation would be followed as in the last cycle. She added that if additional non-staff funding became available, ESS could use it to fund milestones on statistical work regardless of where they 'sit' within the Strategic Framework. She also informed the IDWG that statistics had been identified as an area of focus in the new biennium and recommended that IDWG members also critically review their submissions against this.

B. Tekola updated the IDWG on a new area of work for AGA and AGP on assessing the competitive use of pesticides. P. Gennari added that several new activities would also need to be proposed in relation to the Sustainable Development process, and that he was aware of ongoing discussions on this within SO2. J. Schmidhuber added that the Technical Network of Professional Statisticians would be one valuable mechanism for discussion areas of collaboration.

S. Katz provided a brief update on the establishment of the Technical Network of Professional Statisticians and suggested that one of the first areas of focus could be on supporting the work planning process for 2016-2017.

Action: Chief Statistician to circulate further guidance on the planning of corporate statistical activities.

3. FAO Evaluation of Knowledge Products

C. Tarazona provided a brief overview of the main findings of the Evaluation of FAO Knowledge Products. He explained that there is a high level of use of FAO data, and that FAOSTAT is a major reference system for economic research, with over 44,000 citations. This is much higher than the citations for World Bank, the UN and FAO statistical data warehouse (SDW) combined. Furthermore, he added that FAOSTAT is an established brand name among a diversified range of FAO users. He noted that there was an increasing overlap in the uses made of FAO data, especially among the research and private sector communities. He added that users overwhelmingly trust FAO as a

provider of quality data and that such appreciation should serve as an incentive to fully implement quality assurance measures that safeguard this hard-earned trust.

In addition, users observed some overlaps in some analytical databases (prices). C. Tarazona emphasized that there is scope for greater synergies among FAO databases and other knowledge products and asked what the role of the Statistical Data Warehouse (SDW) should be. He underlined that greater involvement of, and feedback from, target users/partners could improve both the relevance and usability of platforms, and that a long-term vision for adding value to FAO knowledge products is needed. A process to prioritize demands and better target new databases (or additional features to existing ones) is also required.

P. Gennari reiterated the fact that it was necessary to ensure better data integration, and that a new approach to dealing with this issue needed to be discussed. He emphasized the importance of understanding user needs and added that it would be essential to fully define who FAO data users are, in order to cater for their varying needs.

Action: The need for greater synergies in data dissemination (the SDW, for example) to be discussed at the IDWG Technical Task Force.

4. Information Sharing

Update on the Statistical Working System (SWS)

S. Katz explained that the first phase of the SWS project focused on the construction of the system to support the production, trade and food balance sheets (FBS) processes for crops and livestock products. Phase II had been designed to develop a mechanism, which would extend the functionality of the system to support the statistical programme of work at corporate level. He explained that the initial emphasis of Phase II had been on the Fisheries department, which has proposed ten datasets, as well as the Forestry Department. Work on additional ESS datasets had also begun.

He noted that the project was funded by the Capital Expenditure Programme (CapEx), and that some delays in the project had occurred due to the late project approval and release of funds. In 2015, the project currently has USD\$ 650,000 unplanned. S. Katz informed the IDWG that a Project Board meeting was to be held that afternoon, and that a proposal to extend the project into 2016 was being considered. Further extending the timeline of the project would mean that the SWS could fully cater to corporate statistical requirements and that a number of additional statistical databases and processes would be able to adopt the new SWS.

P. Gennari added that the processes included for Forestry and Fisheries should be completed by the end of the 2015, and that if additional help was required to do this, funds were available. He added that the need to extend the governance of the project beyond ESS had been noted. He explained that J. Keizer is the Senior User, and that he required further support from other users from other divisions. Extending the project governance structure would entail identifying focal points in the divisions involved, who would be contacted for input and feedback on a regular basis.

S. Tsuji expressed Fisheries appreciation for the suggestion to include users from other divisions and added that whilst the system was excellent, it was still lacking some key functionalities.

Update on the Sustainable Development Goal process

P. Gennari informed the IDWG that he had attend the first IAEG-SDG meeting in New York in June. Unfortunately, the outcome of the meeting had been inconclusive and the focus had been more on

the process than the substance. Two new virtual platforms have now been established, which will facilitate input into discussions before the next meeting in October in the Philippines. He noted that a dedicated meeting on this with the IDWG may be required at the end of August. He added that he would circulate FAO's proposed indicators, which had been submitted to the UNSD.

Action: P. Gennari to circulate the FAO list of SDG indicators submitted to the UNSD.

Action: Dedicated meeting on the SDG process and indicator development to be held with the IDWG Task Force at the end of August.

5. AoB

M. Taconet asked for an update on the FAO-UNEP MoU following the discussions at the last Task Force meeting regarding the possibility of the Chief Statistician taking the lead on this. P. Gennari said he would follow up on this with J. Latham, as he had not heard anything further on this.

Action: P. Gennari to follow up with J. Latham on the potential new responsibilities for the Chief Statistician under the FAO-UNEP MoU.