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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Update on data for statistics and statistics functions: Risks, challenges and opportunities for data for statistics for food security and nutrition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This document aims to update Members on the current challenges FAO faces in collecting, analyzing and disseminating sufficient, high quality food security and nutrition (FSN) data the corresponding risks involved, as well as to propose – and seek Members’ guidance on – realistic coping strategies.
- The demand for more and high-quality FSN data has recently increased in a significant manner, due to a combination of factors. These include new data demands for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals; the growing recognition that unhealthy dietary patterns are a leading cause of food insecurity, malnutrition and the rise of non-communicable diseases; the observed patterns of increased food insecurity and the intensification of humanitarian crises.
- FSN indicators are inherently data-intensive, often many requiring inputs from a wide array of sources and variables to ensure accuracy and relevance. To this end, FAO’s longer-term strategy for improving the quality of FSN indicators relies on an extensive statistical capacity development programme aimed at strengthening the statistical capacities of Members to collect, analyse and disseminate relevant data.
- Past reports to the Programme Committee on the topic of statistics have already outlined a multi-layered resource mobilization *and* resource allocation optimization strategy to try to overcome the structural imbalances between demand for data and resource constraints Those solutions have already been implemented and have ensured that FAO has maintained, to the extent possible, the current level of quantity and quality of FSN data.
- In the current context, however, the structural imbalances between resource availability and demand for data exceed FAO’s capacity to address these with additional, conventional resource mobilization or optimization approaches. All these represents several risks that include FAO not being able to produce new data and the statistics on FSN demanded by Members and FAO not being able to invest in innovative and efficient methods of data collection and quality control.
- This document therefore outlines some potential coping strategies, including reducing FAO’s reliance on *ad hoc* funds for FSN data setting up a dedicated Food Security and Nutrition Data fund; and de-emphasizing or even discontinuing certain components of FAO’s statistical work.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to take note of this report and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- **welcomed the update on the risks and challenges for data for statistics for food security and nutrition (FSN);**
- **expressed concern about the reported structural imbalances between the growing demand for high-quality FSN data and the diminishing resources allocated to this area of work;**
- **appreciated the fact that Management has already implemented the resources mobilization and optimization actions outlined in Document PC 132/5 but recognized that these are not enough to fully address current resource constraints; and**
- **took note of the coping strategies outlined in section III.**

I. Introduction

1. At its 139th Session (11-15 November 2024), the Programme Committee received, under Agenda Item 16 “Agricultural Data and Statistics”, an update on the Data Coordination Group and the oversight, relevance, coherence, and quality of FAO’s statistics. As a result, the Committee, in its Report, *inter alia*, “encouraged Management to continue improving the internal quality control of FAO’s...” and “looked forward to receiving regular updates as a standard agenda item on this important work...” (Document [CL 176/9](#)). At its subsequent Session, Document [PC 140/8](#) provided an update on data for statistics and statistics functions, focusing on the streamlining of statistical functions, response rates and the procedures for filling data gaps and the work to adapt methodologies to different biomes or country contexts.

2. The present document aims to update Members on the current challenges FAO faces in collecting, analyzing and disseminating sufficient, high quality food security and nutrition (FSN) data. In particular, and considering that this is a core function of the organization (enshrined in Article 1 of its Constitution), this document aims to appraise Members on the challenges pertaining to FSN data, the corresponding risks involved, as well as to propose – and seek Members’ guidance on – feasible coping strategies.

II. Key current challenges regarding food security and nutrition data

A. The growing demand for FSN data and statistics

3. Timely, relevant and granular data are widely acknowledged to be an essential enabler for evidence-based policymaking, with a view to achieving food security and adequate nutrition for all, consistent with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2. FAO, since its foundation, has produced food security and nutrition data to enable the global monitoring of development goals and to trigger actions across the humanitarian-development spectrum.

4. In recent years, the demand for more and high-quality food security and nutrition data has increased in a significant manner, due to a combination of factors. First, the inclusion of a broad, universal goal for ending chronic hunger, ensuring food security and improving nutrition in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has meant that new indicators and methods have had to be developed and deployed in order to monitor progress. As an example, FAO’s Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) was developed to monitor not only different levels of severity of food insecurity but also to monitor food insecurity in middle- and high-income countries. In addition, FAO launched in 2020 the indicators of cost and affordability of healthy diets (CoAHD), which have now become a regular feature of *State of the World Food Security and Nutrition* (SOFI) reports. These indicators have broadened the understanding of food security beyond the indicators of the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) and the prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity based on the FIES.

5. Second, the demand for FSN data and indicators has increased in light of the growing recognition that unhealthy dietary patterns are a leading contributor to food insecurity and malnutrition as well as poor health outcomes and the global rise of non-communicable diseases. Therefore, the promotion of healthy diets that are nutritionally adequate, safe, affordable and culturally acceptable, and that rely on sustainable agrifood systems, has become a recognized core objective for the international community reflected in several UN initiatives such as the UN Food Systems Summit, the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025) and the Rome Declaration on Nutrition. In this regard, in 2024 FAO released a new FAOSTAT data domain on food and diet, aiming to provide detailed information on food and nutrient availability, consumption, intake and diversity. This domain has quickly become the 8th most visited on FAOSTAT. A key feature of the domain is its inclusion of the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W), one of two components (along with MDD for Children aged 6-23 months, or “MDD-C”) of a new SDG indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD) approved at the latest Statistical Commission in March 2025 (with FAO assuming custodianship of MDD-W and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) of MDD-C). The adoption of the MDD as an SDG indicator for monitoring progress toward

SDG target 2.2 on ending malnutrition reflects a broad consensus on its value in addressing a critical gap in the global SDG indicator framework, which previously lacked a direct measure of healthy diets. With the introduction of FAOSTAT's new data domain and the formal recognition of MDD, it is anticipated that the availability of more robust and actionable data on food and diets will strengthen efforts to develop evidence-based strategies for enhancing nutrition and health outcomes through dietary interventions. Nonetheless data on MDD is extremely scarce and will constrain FAO's ability, as a custodian agency, to report on progress on dietary diversity and, more broadly, on the quality of healthy diets.

6. Third, the availability of accurate and timely food security and nutrition data is currently even more important due to disconcerting figures that have been observed and reported in the most important global publications on the matter. The latest SOFI Report pointed to signs of a reduction of chronic hunger in the world in recent years, with 8.2 percent of the world population suffering from hunger in 2024, down from 8.5 percent in 2023 and 8.7 percent in 2022. However, global estimates for 2024 are still well above 2015 levels (7.7 percent of the population), when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched. Similarly, the latest Global Report on Food Crisis, which presents assessment of acute food security and acute malnutrition¹ in food crisis situations, reported that around 295 million people faced high levels of acute food insecurity (the Integrated Food Security Classification/Cadre Harmonisé [IPC/CH] 3+) in the 53 food-crisis countries and territories that were included in the analysis in 2024. Of these, more than 35 million were in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and almost 2 million in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe). Analyses of acute food insecurity are based on tools such as the IPC/CH, the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS) and the Data in Emergencies Monitoring System (DIEM)². In line with the intensification of humanitarian crises and the growing demand for evidence-based decision-making, the need for timely and reliable food security data across the humanitarian-development spectrum has increased over time.

7. It must be highlighted that FSN indicators are inherently data intensive. Many require the timely availability of inputs from a wide array of sources and variables to ensure accuracy and relevance. Their calculation often depends on comprehensive datasets such as supply and utilization accounts, food balance sheets, dietary energy requirements, food prices, food composition tables, household income and expenditure surveys, demographic data and – where available – individual food intake surveys. In contrast, other FSN indicators rely on primary data collected regularly through well-designed, representative surveys targeting specific populations. This dual reliance on both secondary and primary data makes the monitoring of acute and chronic food insecurity, as well as malnutrition, highly resource-intensive, requiring sustained investments in data systems, capacity and coordination.

8. Another important element to consider is the quality of the data that is used to produce FSN indicators. FAO's longer-term strategy for improving the quality of FSN indicators relies on an extensive statistical capacity development programme aimed at strengthening the statistical capacities of member countries to collect, and analyse relevant data that later, when reported to FAO by Members, will be disseminated in FAO statistical portals. Such statistical capacity development support is also highly resource intensive. Ongoing FAO projects of this kind, directly contributing to support countries on FSN data, include:

¹ Acute food insecurity refers to food deprivation of a severity that threatens lives or livelihoods, regardless of the underlying cause, context, or duration. Chronic food insecurity, on the other hand, refers to persistent inability to access sufficient food, often driven by structural factors such as poverty, poor infrastructure, or limited access to essential services. While acute and chronic food insecurity differ in their drivers, impacts, and response strategies, they often coexist and interact. This is particularly true in contexts of protracted crises and emergencies, where long-standing structural vulnerabilities compound the effects of acute shocks, creating a complex and overlapping food insecurity landscape.

² FAO is a founding partner and core technical contributor to the IPC/CH classification system, as well as the host of GIEWS and DIEM, therefore playing a central role in informing food crisis situation happening at global, regional and national levels.

- a) the “*Produce reliable information on food security and nutrition to guide policies and interventions to end hunger and malnutrition*” project, which is the latest ongoing initiative reflecting the strong commitment of the European Commission in supporting capacity-building on food security and nutrition statistics. The project aims at filling data gaps, enhancing technical skills for data analysis to derive meaningful indicators and strengthening the understanding and use of reliable statistics among governments and authorities;
- b) the “50 x 2030” Initiative, which aims to empower and support 50 low- and lower-middle-income countries by 2030 in establishing robust national agricultural data systems that will generate high quality and timely agricultural survey data, including for producing regular and robust data on food production, which, in turn, is necessary to assess food supply;
- c) the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, who’s current second implementation phase aims to support countries improve their agricultural statistical systems by enhancing investment in new methodologies, initiating the provision of technical assistance and training a new generation of agricultural statisticians. These improvements are expected to dovetail and mutually reinforce the objectives of the aforementioned “50 x 2030” Initiative; and
- d) the support offered to countries on monitoring the SDGs – in this regard, FAO provides targeted training and technical assistance interventions on relevant food security and nutrition statistics, supporting countries with the compilation and disaggregation of the FIES indicator (SDG indicator 2.1.2) and the new MDD indicator (SDG indicator 2.2.4.b). Contingent on the availability of resources, the support to countries can covers the entire data value chain – from data collection, analysis, all the way to data use, including, for example, the integration of food insecurity and nutrition evidence into national policy frameworks and reporting processes, such as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

9. Finally, the increasing demand for FSN data is also reflected in the growing institutionalization of FSN as a standalone statistical domain in the international sphere. Prior to 2024, FSN data and statistics were not recognized or organized as a dedicated statistical domain by the global statistical community. Crucially, this meant that there was no overarching institutionalized effort for better coordinating actions and initiatives and addressing common challenges, such as the adoption of standardized, harmonized and internationally agreed concepts, methods and a minimum set of indicators and data on food security and nutrition. Such efforts were hitherto mostly fragmented at different levels, and, in particular, with food security statistics being tackled separately from nutrition³.

10. The need for a stronger, overarching coordination of FSN data and statistics began to be increasingly recognized but not necessarily matched with the needed resources. This become even more evident after 2019. In that year, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) included a reflection on data collection and analysis in its multi-year programme of work for the period 2020–2023 in response to rising levels of hunger and malnutrition. As a result of an inclusive, multi-year process, and guided by the insights of the CFS’s High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition background document entitled [Data Collection and Analysis Tools for Food Security and Nutrition: Towards Enhancing Effective, Inclusive, Evidence-Informed Decision-making](#), the CFS Policy recommendations on strengthening collection and use of FSN data and related analysis tools ([Document CFS 2023/51/5](#)) were endorsed in October 2023. This document provides an action-oriented, intergovernmental agreed, voluntary and non-binding global policy framework in support of country-led efforts towards improving FSN data-related policies and actions.

11. In line with these policy recommendations, FAO, UNICEF and the World Health Organization supported the establishment of a new statistical domain on FSN statistics under the

³ Until recently, international coordination on food security data and statistics was spearheaded by a dedicated Task Team of the Committee of Experts on Agricultural and Rural Statistics (UN-CEAG) (of which FAO is providing the Secretariat to support the activities), which, however, did not include nutrition in its mandate. By contrast, international coordination in the field of nutrition statistics was provided mainly by dedicated UNICEF and WHO working groups.

Statistical Commission, which was endorsed in 2024 by the Commission in its [decision 55/110](#). This new data domain has the dual aim of catalyzing higher and more focused attention on FSN within the statistical community and of better coordinating efforts and addressing the challenges relating to the lack of standardized, harmonized and internationally agreed concepts, methods, minimum set of indicators and data on FSN. While the policy recommendations are a pivotal instrument for coordination and harmonization of FSN data and methods, they also highlight the need to establish and implement a new and revamped data agenda, which constitutes an immediate challenge for the Organization.

B. Dwindling resources dedicated to FSN data

12. While the demand for timely, valid and reliable FSN data is rising, FAO faces unprecedented challenges due to the declining level of voluntary contributed resources invested in this domain. Part of the issue lies with the fact that, as was highlighted in Document [PC 132/5](#), paragraph 20. In other words, while many of the core activities implemented by FAO units pertaining to collecting, analysing and disseminating FSN data are funded through the FAO Regular Programme funding, a significant portion relies on voluntary contributions. This is particularly true for technical support to national governments which is almost entirely supported by voluntary contributions.

13. Indeed, several workstreams of the FAO Statistics Division (ESS) pertaining to FSN data are facing increased resource constraints. For example, the Division's work to scale up the country-level production of data and indicators on both chronic and acute food insecurity is currently supported by the aforementioned EU-funded project "*Produce reliable information on food security and nutrition to guide policies and interventions to end hunger and malnutrition*," which is scheduled to conclude in February 2026, with uncertainty about its effective continuation. Similarly, as has already been communicated to the Programme Committee by Management in previous occasions (see Document [PC 140/8](#)), demand for statistical capacity development support largely outstrips available resources. Moreover, as the total funding available for SDG indicators has not grown, the adoption of the new MDD indicator has meant that the share of resources allocated to each SDG indicator under FAO custodianship has had to be further reduced. For its part, the "50 x 2030" Initiative has also had to revise its ambition to expand the number of countries benefitting from the programme, following the withdrawal of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds (USD 9 million over 3 years). This project, currently FAO's spearhead for enhancing the quality of agricultural data at country level, has resources until December 2026 but uncertainty on how to bridge its funding gap until 2030 – its target date for full implementation.

14. The FAO Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) also relies substantially on extra-budgetary funds for data collection and analysis activities, with the United States contributing approximately 75 percent of total external funding for this purpose up to January 2025. Additional contributions came from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, FAO internal funds (at the global level) and the European Union (at the country level). This funding enabled regular, actionable monitoring of agricultural livelihoods and acute food insecurity in 30 food crisis countries, as well as large-scale assessments in key hotspots such as Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. However, since early 2025, external funding has dropped dramatically. Currently, only the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is providing support at the global level, which is expected to continue until March 2027 – but this represents only a fraction of the funding previously available until 2024. In the same vein, the aforementioned IPC/CH faces a major funding gap in 2025–2026, according to the Global Humanitarian Overview 2025 Monthly Updates.

15. Apart from the direct impact on extra-budgetary resources, there has also been an adverse impact on primary data collection itself. The stop of resources to the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) programme will have a significant impact. The DHS collected a wide range of food security and nutrition-related data, such as related to nutrition practices and interventions; anthropometric measurements, data on breastfeeding practices, dietary diversity, micronutrient supplementation and feeding practices for infants and young children. Indeed, a substantial portion of existing data on the new SDG indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity has been collected by the DHS survey. With the

DHS survey programme now officially terminated, an important source of FSN data is no longer available, further constraining the supply of primary FSN data.

III. Risks and solutions to the current challenges regarding FSN data

Risks stemming from the structural imbalance between growing demand and dwindling resources

16. The demand for FSN data is growing, while the supply of corresponding resources and even key data sources is dwindling, presents a clear risk for FAO, which Programme Committee Members should be appraised of. The overall risks are that: 1) FAO is not able to produce new statistics and their underlying data on food security and nutrition that are demanded by Members to monitor the SDGs, healthy diets and the transformation of agrifood systems; 2) FAO is not able to invest in innovative and efficient methods of data collection (geospatial data and alternative data sources; 3) FAO may face important challenges to even sustain its current level of data production and specially to keep strengthening its data quality control systems; and 4) that FAO is not able to sustain the scaling up of the capacity development support that Members need in order to produce FSN data.

17. For example, without adequate resources, FAO may not be able to continue the same level of direct data collection through private survey providers, as a provisional gap-filling solution to produce the SDG indicator 2.1.2 (Prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity based on FIES) at global level, let alone expand such data collection to fulfil the immediate needs of the new indicator 2.2.4 (MDD). The country coverage and periodicity of data may be reduced, compromising FAO's ability to provide thorough global and regional assessments. Similarly, without sufficient funding, the analysis of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition, as developed and established by the IPC/CH of which FAO is founding partner and core technical contributor, may not be able to continue at the same level of detail and geographical coverage of humanitarian crisis.

18. Countries across different regions have various gaps in terms of statistical production capacity, survey systems and other data sources available, data literacy and analysis skills, hindering their ability to regularly produce high quality FSN data. Such constraints become particularly limiting in the case of certain FSN data that rely on costly FSN-relevant surveys and complex assessments. This is why FAO pursues a dual strategy of providing statistical capacity development support as a long term strategy while deploying a number of other gap-filling measures in the short- to medium term, as outlined in Document [PC 140/8](#). Ultimately, if the quantity and quality of FSN data decline, the ability of countries and the international community to make evidence-based decisions for promoting food security and nutrition outcomes will also diminish, further hampering the achievement of SDG 2. It is therefore essential that FAO sustain, and even increase, its statistical capacity development support to countries, otherwise, the quantity and quality of data collected from countries is susceptible to decline.

Coping strategies for addressing the risks and challenges on FSN data and statistics

19. Document [PC 132/5](#) had already appraised the Programme Committee of FAO's perennial challenges in securing sufficient funding for statistical work and had outlined a multi-layered resource mobilization and resource allocation optimization strategy to try to overcome these⁴. Those solutions have already been implemented and have ensured that FAO has maintained, to the extent possible, the current level of quantity and quality of FSN data. In the current context, however, the structural imbalances between supply and demand, as outlined in the previous section, exceed FAO's ability to address these with additional, conventional resource mobilization or optimization approaches. Major efficiency savings have already been sought and implemented (for example, the merger of the Statistical Division and Office of the Chief Statistician, as detailed in the preceding report of this

⁴ This strategy included leveraging the FMM (now renamed as FVC) instrument to mobilize extra-budgetary funds; compartmentalizing larger capacity development programmes into smaller modules that can more easily match donor preferences; conducting an assessment of resources dedicated to statistical activities with a view to identifying further efficiencies; engaging Decentralized Offices in mobilizing extra-budgetary resources for statistics at country and regional level; and exploring emerging opportunities for resource mobilization at the global level.

series, Document [PC 140/8](#)). Hence this section of the document will outline some potential *coping strategies*, rather than resource mobilization solutions.

20. One possible coping strategy is to reduce FAO's reliance on *ad hoc* funds for FSN data. In this respect, bare essentials would be the financing of FIES and MDD-W data collection, and the annual capacity development support allotment for SDG indicators. These two components have hitherto relied on a mix of extra-budgetary and ad hoc Regular Programme funding, undermining their predictability and therefore compromising their sustainability and efficiency from a planning point of view.

21. Another possible coping strategy would be to adopt one of the key recommendations of the aforementioned CFS' *High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition* and set up a dedicated Food Security and Nutrition Data fund. The purpose of such a dedicated fund would be to bring donors and countries together to support FAO needs to collect FSN data and implement FSN analytical assessments. Considering the CFS's call to governments to "increase and sustain responsible investment and adequate resources for the production of timely, quality, disaggregated...reliable and consistent FSN data", such a fund would provide a stable source of funding for sustaining, improving and innovating on data collection for FSN, addressing the uncertainties in the current financing model.

22. There is no one single blueprint for the structure and scope of such a dedicated fund, but there are useful examples that could be adopted and adapted for the purpose. One such example is FAO's Special Fund for Emergency and Resilience Activities (SFERA), a flexible funding mechanism that enables FAO to rapidly respond to humanitarian crises. An FSN data fund with similar flexibility, whereby resource partners can provide either unearmarked contributions or direct their funds towards a specific component of the FSN data, could prove a vital instrument in supporting FAO's work on FSN data. Elements of a trust fund model – in which a subgroup of FAO Members can act as trustees – may also be considered. Yet another possibility is the FAO Evaluation Trust Fund model, which foresees a mandatory contribution from projects to cover the costs of FAO's Office of Evaluation – this approach could be adapted by stipulating a mandatory contribution from projects and programmes that use FSN data for their assessments or for monitoring progress.

23. FAO will continue and intensify its efficiency gains without sacrificing quality of the statistical process and data. The development of the new Statistical Working System (SWS) and Statistical Data Warehouse (SDW) (see Document [PC 132/5](#), section IV for details), scheduled to be fully operational by the end of 2027, is expected to absorb and supersede a number of existing disparate FAO databases, resulting in further efficiency savings. This system will also help to prioritize and de-emphasize, after a careful assessment, certain components of its FSN-related statistical work.