

Draft Strategy Note - Basic Data and Statistics

I. Analysis of needs and FAO's comparative advantage

1. Policy decision-making, to promote food security, rural development and the sustainable use of natural resources, requires timely, relevant and reliable statistics. FAO plays a key role in the collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of information related to nutrition, food and agriculture, including forestry and fisheries, and is in many cases, the sole provider of such information. FAO's statistical databases are widely used both within the Organization as well as by member countries, national, regional and international bodies and the private sector. These databases are a unique and valuable resource which should be maintained and developed for the benefit of all. FAO, therefore, makes a critical contribution to this need for basic data and statistics on food and agriculture.

2. FAO is the UN technical agency responsible for food and agricultural statistics. FAO's comparative advantage is based on its long experience in food and agriculture statistics and its unique relationship with governments on the exchange of such data. Work is also undertaken with national and regional institutions to improve the quality and timeliness of their data through capacity building. FAO provides leadership for the improvement of food and agriculture statistics and, for some sectors, FAO Members have adopted Strategies¹ to accomplish such improvement. In addition, FAO's work in this area contributes to the improvement of statistics available for analysis of important cross-cutting themes, such as gender issues in the agricultural and rural sectors.

II. Overall vision and major objectives

3. **Vision:** FAO recognised as the world's authoritative source of statistical information on nutrition, food and agriculture, including forestry and fisheries

4. **Major objectives** are: (i) development work and policies in all areas of FAO's mandate are based on timely, relevant and reliable statistical information; (ii) member countries have the capacity to generate reliable statistical data at the national and sub-national levels on food and agriculture and the broader rural sector as a whole; and (iii) statistical systems, as they relate to food and agriculture, fit for the needs of the 21st Century.

5. FAO's work on basic data and statistics supports all three Global Goals of Members, in particular, Goal One where FAO is tasked with monitoring the number of undernourished people.

III. Expected main outcomes and beneficiaries

6. The main outcomes include:

- a. **Improved capacity at the national and regional levels to collect, analyse and disseminate food and agricultural statistics, including geo-spatial data, and increased national ownership** – CountrySTAT will provide the main vehicle for achieving this outcome. Within two years, 17 Sub-Saharan African countries will be benefiting from this initiative. In the medium-term, the initiative is expected to spread rapidly across all regions as CountrySTAT becomes the focus of FAO's statistical capacity building programme. With the emphasis on strengthening national capacities and national ownership, countries will be empowered through a better understanding of their agricultural sector and the issues related to food security and rural development. They will also benefit from a greater sense of national ownership of their data.
- b. **Improved data quality** - Quality issues are at the heart of improving the statistics compiled by FAO. While FAO adds value to the data through the compilation of indicators and analysis, the basic quality of the data provided by member countries remains a major issue. Quality is conceptualised in terms of

¹ The 2003 FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries (endorsed by the UNGA) and the 2007 FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Aquaculture

a number of factors including availability, reliability and timeliness and in each of these areas major gaps still exist for many countries and, in particular, the countries where the data is most needed to assess food insecurity and vulnerability. FAO will engage more closely with member countries to improve the quality of reported data.

- c. **Improved coordination of statistical activities** – Many of the issues relating to natural resource management including waters, soils, and aquatic resources cannot be resolved at the national level and require coordinated management at the regional and international levels. Harmonization of data, statistics, indicators, and analytical and management methodologies will improve transparency and communication among participating institutions, which is essential for decision-making, particularly when there are conflicting interests. Within FAO, a statistical plan will be prepared and updated on a regular basis and a statistical coordinating committee will be established to monitor its implementation. Through improved coordination of all statistical activities and better quality control within FAO, the statistics and derived variables as available in the databases will become more consistent and more comparable.

7. The major beneficiaries are decision-makers at all levels of both the public and private sectors. Improved statistics will lead to more informed decision-making for the benefit of all. In accordance with FAO's mandate, better estimation of the food insecure and vulnerable populations will lead to a better understanding of the issues and better targeted assistance.

IV. Implementation features

8. The IEE recommended that a total re-examination of the statistical needs for the 21st Century should be undertaken, heavily involving users and starting from information needs: by whom; for what. (IEE: 610). An external evaluation to address these issues is currently under implementation and the findings of this evaluation will play a major role in determining the future direction of statistics in FAO. The strengthening of geo-referenced natural resource databases and data on water is taken into account in the strategy note on Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management.

9. The primary shift in emphasis proposed is for national statistical agencies and other national providers of statistics to take greater responsibility for their data. In order to assure international consistency and comparability, FAO will continue to make estimates and forecasts and undertake statistical analysis in key areas. FAO's role will increasingly focus on methodological development, concepts and definitions and advice on the global agricultural statistics programme. Capacity building will also include the provision of guidelines and standardised statistical tools and the provision of high-quality technical assistance within an integrated framework (CountrySTAT, FIRMS, D4Science). The Organization will also be cognisant of emerging data needs and focus on adding value to country data through greater analysis.

10. In order to increase uptake of national responsibilities, further initiatives to disseminate statistics in ways which are more useful to the user community are required. These include enhanced dissemination of statistical and derived composite (multi-source) products incorporating resource and harvesting inventories, maps, analyses and interpretation. Partnerships with other agencies will be necessary to achieve this.

11. Coordination and consolidation of data, information, statistics and activities is a key issue to be addressed both within the Organization and also with our partners. Greater sharing of information and the use of existing information rather than the collection of new datasets will be actively pursued and duplication of activities will be progressively eliminated (EUROSTAT/UNSD/WTO/UNIDO). FAO will intensify its leadership and coordination role with full utilization of existing coordinating mechanisms (Conference, Technical Committees, inter-agency statistical coordinating mechanisms) and strengthening partnerships with other international bodies (UN bodies, WB, IMF, OECD, international, regional and national organizations).