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Committee on Statistics

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Review of progress by the groups responsible for the regional initiatives of the Committee with respect to the collective vision and framework for action: agricultural and rural statistics

Progress in implementing the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics**

Summary

This document contains a report on the progress in implementing the first phase of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. It covers technical assistance, training and research activities as of 20 August 2018.

Since the last meeting of the Committee on Statistics in December 2016, the Global Strategy programme in the Asia and Pacific region emphasized the delivery of an accelerated technical assistance work plan focused on the introduction of appropriate cost-effective methodologies developed within the framework of the Global Strategy (GS).

The Committee on Statistics is invited to express its views on implementation of the first phase of the Regional Action Plan of the Global Strategy in the Asia and Pacific region; to provide guidance for the successful completion of the first phase in 2018; and to express priorities and strategies for the proposed second phase.

I. Background

A. Scope, expected outcome and governance structure of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics

1. The Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (the Global Strategy) is the outcome of an international effort initiated by the United Nations Statistical Commission with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, and an extensive consultation process involving national statistics offices, agricultural ministries and other government and private institutions. The expected outcome of the Global Strategy is to enable target developing

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countries (90 target countries at the global level, including 20 in the Asia-Pacific region) to build sustainable statistical systems that will produce accurate and reliable agricultural and rural data to inform and guide policy analysis and decision-making. The Global Strategy covers a broad scope, including aspects of forestry, fisheries, and land and water use, in order to address emerging and interrelated economic, social and environmental issues faced by policymakers. The Statistical Commission endorsed the Global Action Plan for implementation in February 2012.

2. The Global Strategy establishes a framework to rebuild statistical systems for agricultural and rural statistics and to meet emerging data requirements and the need to monitor cross cutting issues. Three pillars form the base of the framework: a minimum set of core data produced by countries on a sustainable basis; integration of agricultural statistics into national statistical systems; and ensuring the sustainability of agricultural statistics systems by building statistical capacity and improving governance and coordination across the institutions producing agricultural statistics.

3. In order to achieve the outcome of the Global Strategy, four global outputs were identified:

(a) Effective governing bodies set up and functioning at global and regional levels;

(b) Coordinating bodies within the national statistical systems, legal frameworks and strategic plans established in the target countries, to enable the integration of agriculture into national statistical systems;

(c) New cost-effective methods for data collection, analysis and dissemination developed and disseminated;

(d) Increased capacity of agricultural statistics staff in regional training centres and target countries.

4. The governance structure for the Global Strategy has three levels: global, regional and national. At the global level, the Global Steering Committee provides strategic guidance on and oversight of the execution of the Global Action Plan. The Global Executive Board serves as an executive committee of the Global Steering Committee, supported by the Global Office based in the Statistics Division of the FAO headquarters in Rome. The Global Office ensures overall technical coordination of the implementation of the Global Strategy at the global and regional levels and acts as the secretariat of the Global Steering Committee and the Global Executive Board.

B. Regional component of the Global Strategy

5. The Global Strategy is implemented through regional action plans. The Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, developed in close consultation with countries and endorsed by the Committee on Statistics of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its third session and the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics in 2012, was approved by the Global Steering Committee in February 2013. The Regional Action Plan maps 11 regional outputs to the global outputs and provides indicative implementation activities for three statistical capacity-building components, namely technical assistance, training and research. The Regional Action Plan also includes a component on advocacy to build support in the region for the improvement of agricultural statistics. All outputs are designed to:

(a) Halt the decline in the content and quality of agricultural statistics by developing sustainable systems to produce them and making use of new methods and technologies;

(b) Meet the emerging data requirements not only to support policy decisions regarding the linkage of agriculture to poverty and the environment, but also to monitor how a decision in one area affects the others.

6. ESCAP, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and ADB are jointly implementing the Regional Action Plan, with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the FAO Regional Office and ADB coordinating the training, technical assistance and research components respectively. The Regional Office in Asia and the Pacific, based in the FAO office in Bangkok, is responsible for coordinating the Regional Action Plan.

7. The Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific was established jointly by the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics and the Committee on Statistics. This Regional Steering Committee is the ultimate decision-making body at the regional level. It provides guidance and oversight, within the framework defined by the Global Steering Committee and consistent with relevant funding agreements, for the implementation of the regional and country activities defined in the Regional Action Plan.

8. The current membership of the Regional Steering Committee includes representatives of eight countries (Bhutan, China, Fiji, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam); the National Statistical Systems Training Academy of India (representing statistical training institutes); the Asia-Pacific Association for Agricultural Research Institutions (representing agricultural research institutions); the Secretariat of the Pacific Community; the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); the United States Department of Agriculture; the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (donor partner providing financial resources for the Regional Action Plan); and the three implementing partners. The Regional Steering Committee also decided in December 2015 to include Japan and India as resource partners.

II. Progress in implementation

A. Regional Steering Committee

9. The Regional Steering Committee meets at least once a year to review progress in implementation of the Regional Action Plan and to endorse, for approval by the Global Executive Board, the annual work plans and budgetary allocations for the Regional Office and the technical assistance and training components. To date, the Regional Steering Committee has met eight times. It first met in April 2013 and most recently in June 2018. Annual work plans and budgets are endorsed by the Regional Steering Committee and subsequently approved by the Global Executive Board. There is currently no plan for additional face-to-face meetings of the Regional Steering Committee in 2018, the final year of the Global Strategy.

10. The Regional Action Plan plans to assist at least 20 countries to develop and begin implementation of a national strategic plan for agricultural and rural statistics. To date, implementation activities have targeted 19 priority countries selected by the Regional Steering Committee: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, the Lao People's

Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tonga and Viet Nam. In 2017, the Regional Steering Committee prioritised work in these 19 implementing countries and the development of the Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Fisheries statistics for Pacific Island Countries, which was endorsed in March 2018.

B. Regional Office

1. Coordination

11. The Regional Office undertakes activities to ensure the coordination of the Global Strategy's implementation at the regional level. These include participation in relevant technical meetings within the scope of the Global Strategy, particularly meetings organized by ESCAP. Participation in these meetings enables the Regional Office to report on the progress of the Global Strategy, share the main achievements and explore other areas of collaboration. It also facilitates informal meetings with resource partners and back-to-back governing body meetings.

12. The Regional Office also developed ties with sub-regional bodies within the region, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), SAARC and the Pacific Community (SPC). Representatives of these organizations were invited to become members of the Regional Steering Committee and are kept fully informed and consulted on any developments regarding the work of the Global Strategy in the region.

13. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) implements the regional training component of the Global Strategy, while ADB implements research activities. ADB does not receive funds from the Global Trust Fund set up to finance the implementation of Regional Action Plan activities, and collaborates instead using its own resources. In order to improve communication and enhance open discussion and collaboration between regional partners and at the regional level, each implementing agency invites the other partners to their workshops, seminars and conferences and they collaborate to organize events of common focal interest and share technical resources where needed.

14. The FAO Regional Office facilitates coordination among partners at the country level in order to ensure the best result for each country and to maximize the quality of training and avoid duplication.

2. Communication and advocacy

15. The Regional Action Plan calls for promotion and increasing visibility of the Global Strategy at the regional level and advocacy to support resource mobilization efforts. Global and regional communication plans and communication products are developed for these purposes, including the release of a Global Strategy brochure highlighting the progress and achievements of the region. The Regional Office has further organizes briefings and partnership consultations on the Global Strategy to increase awareness among stakeholders of the Global Strategy work.

16. The Regional Office also currently produces a number of communications products, including: (a) the bimonthly release of the "Global Strategy Asia Pacific Update" newsletter; (b) the maintenance of a Global Strategy Asia-Pacific website; and (c) production of a series of videos highlighting the results

of implementation of the Global Strategy in the region. For more information, please visit www.fao.org/asiapacific/perspectives/agricultural-statistics/global-strategy/en/.

17. Advocacy activities focus on identified technical assistance and training needs and the Regional Office conducts missions to establish new contacts and consolidate relations with donors in the countries.

3. Monitoring and evaluation

18. The monitoring and evaluation framework developed by the Global Office is used as the basis to assess progress in the implementation of the Global Strategy at the regional level. The framework provides for the monitoring of progress of regional implementation in line with four global outputs.

C. Technical assistance activities

1. Initial country assessment questionnaire

19. Most countries in the Asia-Pacific region completed a pilot country assessment questionnaire from 2011 to 2012. The information contained in the questionnaire was used to derive a set of capacity indicators for those countries on a range of aspects of statistical capacity. Country profiles were also produced. The capacity indicators were one of the criteria for selecting countries for detailed assessment. In 2018, a final round of the country assessment questionnaire will be disseminated to countries.

2. In-depth country assessment

20. An in-depth country assessment is the starting point for work in each of the selected countries, providing a comprehensive evaluation of current statistical capacity, including areas of weakness. The results set the stage for all future work in the country. To date, 16 in-depth country were completed in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

3. Country proposal document

21. A country proposal document, which uses information gathered during the in-depth assessment process, acts as a basis for short- and medium-term activities, providing a prioritized list of activities that needed to improve agricultural and rural statistics. For each activity, a description of the proposed objectives and outcomes is provided, as well as a broad description of the work needed and approximate costs.

22. Upon approval by the Regional Steering Committee, Global Strategy funding is used to implement some of the high-priority, short-term activities in each of the priority countries. In many cases, other funding sources also help implement activities, including country funding.

4. Strategic plan for agricultural and rural statistics

23. The Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics is a long-term (five- to ten-year) strategy document for agricultural and rural statistics. Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics are intended to be

compatible with, and integrated into, a country's national strategy for the development of statistics. Development of a strategic plan is a key objective of the Global Strategy and the final output of the detailed in-country work. In Asia-Pacific countries, major challenges faced by agricultural statistics systems include inadequate coordination mechanisms among data-producing agencies, outdated systems and methodologies for data collection, multiple sources of data on the same variables and lack of capacity to train statistics personnel, particularly field staff involved in data collection. The strategic plan documents include recommended strategies to deal with such issues and new methodologies available from the research component of the Global Strategy. To date, strategic plans were drafted in fifteen countries. A sub-regional *Pacific Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Fisheries Statistics* (P-SPAFS) for the Pacific Island countries was also finalized in 2017 and launched in March 2018.

5. Technical assistance activities on the use of cost-effective methodologies developed under the Global Strategy

24. The delivery of technical assistance on cost-effective methods developed by the research programme of the Global Strategy has also progressed in ten countries in the region, covering: measuring cost of production statistics, compiling food balance sheets, measuring post-harvest losses, development of agricultural modules within population censuses, improving crops and livestock statistics, building Master Sampling Frames for agricultural sample surveys, improving the quality of administrative data, and finally the use of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) tools for effective data collection.

25. The delivery of technical assistance on these methodologies was provided through the dissemination of both regional workshops in collaboration with partners in the region, and through direct in-country technical assistance work.

D. Training activities

26. Implementation of the training component of the Regional Action Plan started in August 2013. Training strategies and priorities included: conducting in-depth training needs assessments; improving the basic skills and knowledge of statistical staff engaged in agricultural and rural statistics data collection and analysis; assisting the priority countries in assessing the applicability of research component results and in initiating their adaptation; training on advocacy and communication skills; building training resources (training needs assessment tools, curricula and syllabuses, training materials and training of expert trainers) towards strengthening the capacity of national and regional training institutions to utilize the tools and deliver training; strengthening training coordination and collaboration through networking activities, including through regional/sub regional assessments and curriculum development, experts meetings and networking forums; providing regional courses on selected technical topics and on archiving, documentation and dissemination of statistical data; addressing data and statistics for sustainable development; addressing the costs of agricultural production; and strengthening capacity to use data for policy analysis for food security and sustainable agriculture.

27. Participants targeted for technical training are statisticians in statistical offices as well as ministries and institutions dealing with agricultural data collection and analysis. For institutional strengthening, targeted participants

are senior managers of statistical training institutions and human resources development units.

28. For further details on the outputs of Regional Action Plan training activities, please refer to www.unsiap.or.jp/programmes/as.html and www.unsiap.or.jp/about/gc10/SIAP_GC10_7_RAP%20training%20component%20report.pdf.

1. Training needs assessments

29. Developing tools and processes for assessing training needs is part of the work programme of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific and its Subgroup on Training for Agricultural and Rural Statistics.¹ This work began through a course on assessing the training needs of the statistical workforce in agricultural statistics, and in-country and regional-level work was initiated in 2015. Further training included training of trainers.

2. Technical training courses

30. Six regional workshops on “Building training resources for improving agricultural and rural statistics” – each with a separate focus – have covered the following topics: Training of trainer workshops for official statistics, the development of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing Applications, Cost of Production Statistics, and the compilation of Food Balance sheets.

31. Overall, 29 countries and 124 statisticians have benefitted from these trainings and workshops. Participating countries in these six regional and sub-regional courses were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam. Regional Action Plan implementing partners jointly designed and conducted these training courses and workshops.

32. The workshops were conducted in collaboration with various Regional Action Plan partners, such as FAO, the Pacific Community, the World Bank and training institutes in the Republic of Korea.

33. As part of the effort to build training resources, training assessment tools were developed and tested in Lao PDR and Mongolia. A region-wide assessment of training needs is ongoing. Furthermore, the development of online training materials and the delivery of moderated online training courses was initiated. Online training is not only cost-effective, but also allows for greater reach and more flexibility in participation.

3. Communication and advocacy

34. In 2015, two regional training courses on improving the skills of statistical officials to effectively communicate statistics to policymakers, the media and other stakeholders were undertaken to support in-country activities on strategic plan formulation and resource mobilization. A similar regional training workshop was conducted in 2016, which included statisticians and policymakers. A total of 66 officials from the region, representing statistical

¹ See E/ESCAP/CST(4)/12.

offices, training institutes and ministries of agriculture, have taken part since 2015. A regional training workshop on communication and advocacy for agricultural and rural statistics was undertaken targeting agricultural statistics experts

4. Coordination and networking

35. The training component supported the organization of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific and its Subgroup on Training for Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The Network is an important mechanism for strengthening national training institutions, collaborating on the development and sharing of training materials and expertise, and developing standards, guidelines and tools for capacity-building through training.

36. Through the Network, a specific programme of work was created. The key activities of the Subgroup on Training for Agricultural and Rural Statistics include developing a database for training resources, a system of certifying statistical trainers and a framework for assessing core skills of statisticians.

E. Activities of the Asian Development Bank in support of the Global Strategy

37. To support the Global Strategy, ADB has designed and funded a project (entitled “Improving agricultural and rural statistics for food security”) that contributed to the drafting of the Regional Action Plan and assisted four countries (Bhutan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives and Viet Nam) to develop their respective country action plans. This project has also provided technical and funding support to Bhutan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Viet Nam to undertake methodological research to improve their respective agricultural data collection systems.

38. As part of the activities under the above initiative, six methodological papers were completed and published as a compendium, available in ADB’s website at www.adb.org/publications/results-methodological-studies-agricultural-and-rural-statistics.

39. ADB has also successfully obtained financial support from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction to help four countries (the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) to adopt remote sensing technology to estimate rice area and production under a second project called “Innovative data collection methods for agricultural and rural statistics”. Under the project, software that transforms both optical and radar satellite data into rice area map will be developed, which can be used by statisticians to estimate rice area and production. Several training programmes were also conducted under the technical assistance for counterpart staff in the four pilot countries. An online e-learning course on the topic was developed and enrolled 84 participants. The course continues to run on a self-learning basis and can be accessed at: www.adbx.online/courses/course-v1:ADBx+RS202+2018_01/about.

40. The ADB is further supporting a third project on “Implementing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Tools to Improve Data Collection and Management of National Surveys in Support of the Sustainable Development Goals” in 2018. The project will look into the use of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) in improving the data collection methods of National Statistical Systems in 4 countries – Lao PDR, Sri Lanka,

Republic of Marshall Islands and Viet Nam. A randomized experimental technique will be utilized to inform countries on the benefits of transitioning from paper to computerized surveys. The expected project outcome is to institutionalize the usage of ICT tools in national-level surveys providing quality and timely statistics useful to track the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

41. As regards the contribution of ADB to the advocacy campaign of the Regional Action Plan, various high-level meetings and inception and dissemination workshops were conducted on research results and planned methodological research

42. For more details about ADB accomplishments and plans on improving agricultural and rural statistics, please visit the website of the Community for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (<http://cars.adb.org>).

F. Synergies between the regular programme of activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Global Strategy

43. The FAO regular programme of activities, particularly the normative work of development of standards, capacity-building and technical assistance, includes many activities relating to the improvement of agricultural statistics in ESCAP member countries. The Global Strategy and the regular programme of FAO share most of the same objectives in improving agriculture and rural statistics. FAO recognizes the importance of building synergies and complementarities between the ongoing FAO work programme and the activities of the Global Strategy for the maximum benefit of countries. At the operational level, these synergies are established by: (a) assigning the work on the Global Strategy to FAO staff on mission to countries implementing FAO-funded projects; and (b) using FAO regular programme funds to organize activities aimed at achieving the goals of the Global Strategy, jointly with other implementing partners in the region. FAO welcomes further proposals for partnership on such events that contribute effectively to the improvement of agricultural and rural statistics, as well as the fulfilment of the strategic objectives of FAO.

III. Conclusion

44. The first phase (2013-2017) of the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan of the Global Strategy will have been running for six years in December 2018. Work under the Global Strategy has raised the profile of agricultural statistics in countries as well as the expectations of stakeholders in statistical systems. Significant progress has been made in a number of countries in assessing capacity and identifying areas of need for technical assistance and training to make improvements to agricultural and rural statistics. Strategic plans for agricultural and rural statistics are also now ready in many countries. The country strategic plans present an integrated framework for improving agricultural statistics systems, focusing on elements that contribute to implementing the collective vision, outputs and activities, such as integrating multiple data sources, strengthening institutional coordination and modernizing agricultural statistics business processes.

45. Work under the Global Strategy continue to provide technical assistance and training support to the selected countries in the priority areas identified in their plans. Support from development partners will need to supplement government resources to enable sustainable improvement of the

statistical systems in the region. Besides the implementing partners – ESCAP and ADB – FAO is also working towards building partnerships with other regional organizations such as the Pacific Community, ASEAN and SAARC in furthering the objectives of the Global Strategy.

IV. Action requested

46. The Committee on Statistics is invited to express its views on implementation of the first phase of the Regional Action Plan of the Global Strategy in the Asia and Pacific region; to provide guidance for the successful completion of the first phase in 2018; and to express priorities and strategies for the proposed second phase.
