Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Information Seminar for Permanent Representatives

Challenges and Opportunities for reporting on SDG indicators

11 May 2020 (14:00 – 15:30)

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

At its 127th Session, the Programme Committee received a briefing from the Office of the Chief Statistician on the latest developments regarding the methodology of SDG indicator 2.4.1 *(Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture)* and the process for its development. As a follow-up, the Programme Committee requested that management organize in the first half of 2020 a Seminar for Members on FAO's statistics work, specifically focusing on the methodology of the 21 SDG indicators for which FAO is custodian. The report of the Programme Committee was then endorsed by the Council at its 163rd session on 2-6 December 2019, during which the Office of the Chief Statistician also provided an update on recent developments in the intergovernmental process for SDG monitoring and their implications for FAO's work.

The requested Seminar on Statistics, with a focus on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, comes at a pivotal moment when the international community has just entered the 10-year countdown to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, under the shadow of unfavourable system-wide reports suggesting that the world is off track to meeting the SDGs. The Seminar will take place on May 11th, and will benefit from the latest updates from the 51st session of the UN Statistical Commission, which was held in the first week of March. In this session, the UN Statistical Commission ratified the outcomes of the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework, which has been conducted by the Interagency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG) over the better part of 2019. Among other things, the IAEG-SDG approved minor methodological revisions to three SDG indicators under FAO custodianship (2.4.1 on sustainable agriculture; 2.5.2 on the risk status of livestock breeds; and 5.a.2 on the legal framework protecting women's land rights). This marks a turning point in FAO's work on SDG indicators, signaling the closure of an initial phase of development and testing of new methodologies and ushering in a new phase of focus on new methodological aspects such as data disaggregation, the integration of new data sources such as Earth Observation data, as well as the acceleration of capacity development initiatives.

The 51st session of the UN Statistical Commission is especially critical to FAO also for another related reason. FAO presented the first comprehensive report on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics, a decade since the last report of its kind was presented to the Commission by Eurostat. FAO's report thus presents a retrospective on the actions taken by FAO and its partners to improve the availability and quality of food and agricultural statistics, particularly in response to the largely unfavourable 2008 Independent evaluation of FAO's role and work in statistics, as well as describes future development plans in this area. A new, ongoing Evaluation of FAO Statistics that is being

finalized by the Office of Evaluation and that will be presented to the Programme Committee at its forthcoming session is expected to seal the stocktaking of FAO's progress over the past decade and provide further guidance on the way forward.

Objectives

The objective of the Seminar on Statistics is to provide Members with the first comprehensive briefing on FAO's work on the 21 SDG indicators under its custodianship, since the last Seminar of its kind that took place in March 2017. Although Members have since been briefed regularly on specific aspects of this work, for instance under the Council's "developments in fora" session, the Programme Committee's item on SDG indicator 2.4.1, or the Resource Partners' Roundtable in June 2019, such briefings have usually been relatively limited in scope. This Seminar therefore aims to bring together Permanent Representatives in order to:

- Receive an update on FAO's work on SDG indicators, the outcomes of the IAEG-SDG process, and the latest decisions of the UN Statistical Commission;
- Explain in more detail the main characteristics of each of the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, including their main methodological approach, relevance for the target, limitations, main challenges for country reporting and ways to overcome these;
- Discuss the main challenges on SDG reporting and FAO's strategy geared towards addressing transversal constraints in global SDG monitoring and supporting countries to produce and use SDG indicators for national policy-making. In particular, a specific focus will be dedicated to FAO's approach to monitoring the impact of the COVID pandemic on food insecurity;
- Discuss how political commitment can be increased to support SDG monitoring efforts.

Format

Given the ongoing social distancing requirements due to the COVID pandemic, the Seminar will be organized in a webinar format in the afternoon of 11 May 2020, and will consist of three parts:

I. In the first part, FAO will provide a brief overview of the latest global developments on SDG indicators and discuss the challenges faced by FAO in global SDG reporting.

II. The second part will introduce the individual factsheets that contain the main characteristics of each of the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, including methodology, data sources and challenges to country reporting.

III. In the final section, a five-person panel consisting of a representative of a developed country, one from a developing country, one from a partner institution, the Chief Statistician and the Director of the Statistics Division, will address five guiding questions concerning capacity development needs in countries, ongoing and future capacity development initiatives, opportunities for resource mobilization and political commitment.

If the Permanent Representatives agree, a more in-depth face-to-face Seminar will be organized in the following weeks (possibly in June, depending for how long the current crisis will extend over time) to provide an opportunity to Members to discuss the proposals contained in the FAO's new Strategy for the Modernization of Statistics and explain how this will address the main current challenges of FAO statistics and support the implementation of priority projects, such as the Hand-in-Hand initiative.

Information Seminar for Permanent Representatives

Challenges and Opportunities for reporting on SDG indicators

DRAFT AGENDA - 11 May 2020	
Opening	
14:00 – 14:05	Welcome and Introduction *Deputy Director-General*
Part I – Latest developments on the SDG indicators and the main challenges of global reporting	
14:05 – 14:25	*Pietro Gennari, Chief Statistician*
Part II – Factsheets on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship	
14:25 – 14:35	Introduction to the factsheets with an overview of the main indicators that present significant gaps in country reporting *Valerie Bizier, Senior Statistician, Office of the Chief Statistician*
Part III – Political engagement, capacity development and resource mobilization	
14:35 – 15:00	Interventions from five experts (a representative of a developed country, a representative of a developing country, an expert from a partner institution, the Chief Statistician and the Director of the Statistics Division) will address five guiding questions concerning political commitment, capacity development and resource mobilization. Guiding questions: - *Why are statistics so important for the achievement of the SDGs and why should resource partners and national governments invest in SDG data generation and use? (Developed country)* - *What are the key country needs in terms of statistical capacity development for SDG indicators and which initial steps have been taken to address them? (Developing country)* - *What are the main initiatives of capacity development that FAO has already launched or is about to launch that can respond to these needs on a global scale?(Chief Statistician)* - *How FAO can help countries monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress towards the SDG food insecurity target (Director of the Statistics Division)* - *How can we increase political commitment on SDG monitoring?(Partner institution)*
Discussion	
15:00 - 15:25	Questions and answers
15:25 – 15:30	Wrap-up and conclusions: Pietro Gennari

SDG indicators under FAO custodianship

SDG Indicators	Tier [1]
2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment	I
2.1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)	I
2.3.1 Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size	II
2.3.2 Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status	II
2.4.1 Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture	II
2.5.1.a Number of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in medium or long term conservation facilities	I
2.5.1.b Number of animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in medium or long term conservation facilities	
2.5.2 Proportion of local breeds classified as being at risk of extinction	II
2.a.1 The agriculture orientation index for government expenditures	I
2.c.1 Indicator of (food) price anomalies	II
5.a.1 (a) Percentage of people with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land (out of total agricultural population), by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	II
5.a.2 Percentage of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	II
6.4.1 Change in water use efficiency over time	I
6.4.2 Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources	I
12.3.1.a Global food loss index	II
14.4.1 Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels	I
14.6.1 Degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing	I
14.7.1 Sustainable fisheries as a percentage of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries	II
14.b.1 Degree of implementation of legal/regulatory/policy/institutional frameworks which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries	I
15.1.1 Forest area as a percentage of total land area	I
15.2.1 Progress towards sustainable forest management	I
15.4.2 Mountain Green Cover Index	I

[1] Tier I for which an established methodology exists and data are already widely available; Tier II for which a methodology has been established but for which data are not easily available; Tier III for which an internationally agreed methodology has not yet been developed and data are largely not available.

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Supplementary Handout for Online Webinar

Part I – Latest developments on the SDG indicators and the main challenges of global reporting

a) Global context

- In its latest session in March 2020, the UN Statistical Commission ratified the outcomes of the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework, which has been conducted by the Interagency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG) over the better part of 2019.
- In the context of the comprehensive review, the IAEG-SDG approved minor methodological revisions to three SDG indicators under FAO custodianship (2.4.1, 2.5.2 and 5.a.2).
- This marks a turning point in FAO's work on SDG indicators, signaling the closure of an initial phase of development and testing of new methodologies and leading to a new phase focusing on new methodological aspects such as data disaggregation, the integration of new data sources such as Earth Observation data, as well as the acceleration of capacity development initiatives.

b) The Challenge of global reporting

To achieve the SDGs, high quality data (relevant, timely, reliable and internationally comparable) are needed in order to identify development bottlenecks; inform policies and investment decisions; and monitor progress towards the SDGs. The world is currently not on track to meeting the SDGs, and one key factor is the lack of relevant data. Key issues to be addressed are: alignment between national and global indicator frameworks; data disaggregation and timeliness; data ownership; and progress assessment.

c) Alignment between national and global indicator frameworks

- Few countries use SDG indicators systematically in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Often, countries use different, incomparable indicators (as is almost always the case when reporting on hunger and food security). A similar situation is found in countries' National Reporting Platforms; moreover, very few clearly distinguish between national indicators and global SDG indicators.
- Many regional indicator frameworks are also not well aligned with the global SDG indicator framework. Such frameworks often exclude a large portion of global SDG indicators, discouraging countries from reporting them. Sometimes this may have been decided for good reasons at the time (indicators still under development, data not available), but regional frameworks need to be regularly reviewed and updated, taking into account new methodological developments.
- FAO has provided assistance to numerous countries as well as some regional organizations to foster greater alignment between national/regional and the global indicator framework, because there are a number of benefits to be gained:
  - ✓ Clear, consistent assessments of progress, which can lead to effective evidence-based policies;
  - ✓ Allows benchmarking with other countries, further guiding national policy decisions and leading to greater chances of attracting development assistance for achieving the SDGs;
  - ✓ Reduces national data requirements and therefore the reporting burden on countries;
  - ✓ Opens the possibility of benefitting from statistical technical assistance programmes of international agencies.

d) Data disaggregation

- Data disaggregation is the statistical community's main means to implement the principle of "leaving no one behind". It is a key priority work area of the IAEG-SDG and UN Statistical Commission, now that the Tier III reclassification process is complete.
- Available statistical data, in general, lack the level of detail necessary for identifying key inequalities in achieving the SDG targets across different population groups and territorial areas. The use of traditional survey tools and sampling methods impose limitations on the production of statistics at the level of disaggregation required.
- FAO is working to harness new/alternative data sources to enhance data disaggregation of SDG indicators, in particular using Earth Observation data and administrative data.
- FAO is also working to further develop or adapt existing innovative statistical methods, such as small-area estimation, to improve the availability of more disaggregated data from surveys.

e) Timeliness

- Most SDG Data are still produced with a large time-lag, thus being unable to provide actionable information for decision-makers.
- FAO is investing in nowcasting/forecasting and other techniques that could help provide more timely estimates of SDG indicators.
- FAO is also investing in innovative tools and methods and working with National Statistical Systems to mainstream these in order to reduce the data collection time (e.g. migrating from outdated paper-based data collection methods to new electronic methods).
- At the same time, FAO is implementing more efficient and automatized processing routines within FAO itself in order to reduce reliance on manual input, improve interoperability, and therefore reduce processing times.

f) Data ownership

- New or alternative data sources and innovative statistical methods can complement traditional data sources to reduce the time and resources needed for data production and fill key data gaps.
- To this end, FAO has created a Data Innovation Lab to act as a hub for developing the capacity of FAO statistics units on innovative solutions to produce new statistical information and fill data gaps in order to support flagship projects, such as the Hand-in-Hand initiative.
- Within this context, FAO is developing methods for the use of new/alternative data sources and innovative data science techniques to produce food, agricultural and rural statistics, using in particular big data, Earth Observation data and web-scraping tools.
- When using new/alternative data sources, FAO will comply with the IAEG-SDG's Guidelines for Global Reporting which foresee that whenever SDG data are not coming from national official sources, but are estimated by FAO, these estimates will be sent to countries for their validation before publication. In order to streamline this process and reduce countries' response burden, FAO is currently piloting a new simplified data validation mechanism.

g) Progress assessment

- With only 10 years left to go in the implementation period of the 2030 Agenda, it is becoming more pressing to gain a clearer picture of how far countries are progressing towards the SDG targets and which areas are most at risk of falling behind.
- The programme of work of the IAEG-SDG for 2020-21 identifies progress assessment and trend analysis as a key priority work area, and FAO has aligned its own work plan accordingly.
- FAO is part of the IAEG-SDG task force on the SDG Progress Chart, which aims to improve the consistency among international organizations of the methods used in measuring trends for SDG indicators.
- At the same time, FAO is working on enhanced trend analysis techniques for its own annual progress report and the monitoring of hunger and food security targets in its flagship SOFI report.

Part III – Political engagement, capacity development and resource mobilization - The FAO Strategy to address transversal constraints in country SDG reporting

SDG data gaps are pervasive as attested by FAO's recent Capacity Assessment, mainly due to: 1) Non-alignment of national/regional indicators with the global SDG indicators; 2) low investments by donors and national governments in SDG data production and use; 3) low capacity of national statistical systems and technical skills of official statisticians, especially in developing countries; 4) insufficient coordination among national data producers.

The results of FAO's 2019 Statistical Capacity Gap Assessment for SDG indicators

111 countries have responded to the FAO questionnaire to date. Key results indicate that:

- ✓ Agricultural surveys/Forestry/Fishery assessments are not conducted regularly. 63% of countries required assistance to strengthen institutional & technical capacity to design, collect, analyze and use the data on a regular basis
- ✓ Even when surveys are regularly conducted, they do not cover many SDG indicators: 73.4% of countries required assistance to upgrade existing data collection tools or strengthen technical capacities to produce and disaggregate relevant SDG indicators
- ✓ In some cases, data are available but not reported, analyzed or/and used: 60.6% of countries required assistance to improve their institutional coordination mechanisms on data reporting, while 62.4% of countries required assistance on the analysis/interpretation of the SDG indicators

Since 2016, a series of interventions and ongoing programmes of technical assistance on specific indicators have been implemented.

FAO Corporate resources were deployed in 2016-17 and 2018-19 to conduct methodological work and pilot testing; organize regional trainings, technical assistance missions, develop and translate e-learning courses, and expand communication and outreach activities.

These were complemented by FAO technical cooperation projects (TCPs) at regional and country-levels, sectoral extra-budgetary projects (including the Global forest resources assessments (FRA); Global Environmental Management Initiative-GEMI phase I & II; Voices of the hungry; AGRIS; and the First phase of the Global Strategy for Agricultural and Rural Statistics).

However, these programmes were generally limited in terms of their funding (especially for statistical capacity development), their time horizon (usually focused on covering the most urgent needs) and scope (targeting either a small selection of countries or a selection of indicators).

To reduce the fragmentation of efforts and further capitalize on synergies, FAO is moving towards a new model for Statistical Capacity development to be delivered though an integrated set of three new and complementary initiatives that target key aspects of the data production cycle and country-specific statistical development needs:

I. The Umbrella Programme on Measuring SDG data

This programme will support countries in adopting, producing, disseminating and using food- and agricultural-related SDG indicators. . It is designed in a modular approach, with tailored capacity development activities to be delivered through the five following outputs:

- Output 1: Data disaggregation techniques are established for all SDG indicators under FAO custodianship;
- Output 2: SDG data gaps and statistical capacities of target countries assessed and strategic plans developed that align national monitoring frameworks with the Global Indicator Framework;

Box: Developing country capacities in monitoring food security in an innovative way

Within the context of the FAO's work on SDG indicators, an exemplary initiative in terms of both methodological development and effective assistance to countries' capacity development is the "Voices of the Hungry" Project. Building on prior long-standing experience of a number of countries and Research Institutions, FAO developed the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), an experience-based measurement tool consisting of a set of questions about people's access to adequate food. The project demonstrated the robustness of the methodology, and the FIES-based metric was subsequently adopted by the IAEG-SDG as official global SDG indicator 2.1.2. Instrumental to achieve this result has been the introduction of the FIES module in the questionnaire of the Gallup World Poll which is implemented on an annual basis in over 140 countries and has been used by FAO to provide provisional data and global and regional aggregates. In parallel, FAO has provided support to dozens of countries to integrate the FIES in their national surveys and an increasing number of countries is already reporting their own national FIES data. As a result of these concerted efforts, in 2019 more than 100 countries validated FIES estimates produced by FAO or reported their own national estimates. This led the IAEG-SDG to reclassify the indicator from Tier II to Tier I at its latest session in October 2019.

In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak and other emergency crisis, FAO has already used a special FIES module to monitor changes in food access and food insecurity overtime as the situation evolves. Recently, colleagues in the FAO Regional Office for Europe conducted a mobile phone based rapid panel survey covering households in Wuhan and other regions of east China (rich areas) and western China (less developed regions). From December 2019 through early March 2020, the same respondents were contacted and administered the FIES questions at the different point in time. Analysis of the FIES data showed very consistent performances of the measurement scale that was able to detect a prevalence of severe food insecurity three times higher in the population sampled during this period.

FAO is already in consultations with resources partners to collect the special FIES module through the repeated, rapid assessments to capture the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households' ability to access food on a larger scale and in different points in time. Negotiations are also underway to organize a panel data collection process in collaboration with Gallup. With limited additional resources, FAO would be well positioned to produce reliable statistics on changes in food insecurity at national, regional and global level and therefore facilitate targeted responses to address any potential food security crisis.

- Output 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;
- Output 4: The 21 FAO-relevant SDG indicators are regularly monitored in partner countries by adapting existing national surveys and/or reengineering national data collection programmes;
- Output 5: SDG data are made openly accessible and SDG progress reports are produced and widely disseminated in partner countries.

II. The 50by2030 initiative

This will support, both technically and financially, the adoption of Agricultural Integrated Surveys that are fundamental for collecting data on a number of agriculture-related indicators, many of which suffer from severe data gaps. The initiative will scale up and build upon the experiences of FAO's AGRIS Programme and the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Study-Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA). Countries will have the possibility to implement either an agricultural survey programme – a frame based agricultural survey programme over a 10-year cycle – or an integrated agricultural and rural survey model combining a farm-based agricultural survey programme with a household-based rural socio-economic survey programme. The initiative thus aims to empower and support 50 low-income and lower middle-income countries to build strong national agricultural data systems that produce and use high quality and timely agricultural and rural survey data for informing policies, including data for indicators 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.4.1, 5.a.1, and 12.3.1.

III. The Second Action Plan of Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (2020-25)

This will ensure the use of innovative tools and methodologies developed during the first phase of the Global Strategy, and build the enabling conditions to improve agricultural and rural statistics as well as other FAO capacity development programmes at country level. The Second Action Plan of the Global Strategy has been conceived as a multi-year programme focused on five principles: i) Use of innovative tools developed during Phase 1; ii) Additional research to bridge remaining methodological gaps and respond to new demands from countries; iii) Better use of data, addressing gaps in terms of skills and knowledge for processing data and inform policy-makers, and sensitizing policy makers on how to read, interpret and use statistics; iv) Innovative capacity development strategies using experience gained from Phase 1 and integrating new approaches of capacity development; and v) Improved advocacy, communication and dissemination for building greater awareness of the activities and impact of the Global Strategy.

Resource Mobilization

Some initial resources have already been secured for the above three initiatives, although still well below their full funding envelope. FAO will continue its efforts in attracting the remaining funds necessary for their full implementation, but this requires concerted action by all relevant stakeholders. Without good data to support evidence-based policies and investments, SDG implementation is unlikely to be effective and achieve the desired targets. Investing in better data and investing in SDG implementation are not in competition; rather, they are synergetic and ensure that scarce resources are put to good use. However, to date, investment in statistics has been low and currently still attracts a mere 0.3% of ODA. With only 10 years remaining to the end of the 2030, we urgently need to scale up support to countries to ensure that high quality and disaggregated data for the SDGs are produced and used.