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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Update on FAO statistics work for SDG indicators and the UN Statistical Commission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This document provides an update on FAO's engagement with the Interagency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals indicators (IAEG-SDG), established by the UN Statistical Commission, with respect to the approval of alternative "proxy" indicator proposals, specifically for SDG indicator 2.3.1 (labour productivity of small-scale food producers) and 2.4.1 (proportion of area under productive and sustainable agriculture).
- Two IAEG-SDG meetings have taken place since the previous Programme Committee report on this matter (document PC 134/INF/7). At the first meeting (7-9 November 2022), the IAEG-SDG agreed to the use of proxies in principle, while alerting custodian agencies that ahead of the 2025 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework, it "would consider deleting any Tier II indicators with a low reporting rate and weak prospect for increasing data availability".
- At the second IAEG-SDG meeting (7 December 2022), the IAEG-SDG approved the two specific proxy indicators proposed by FAO, stipulating that the two proxies should temporarily replace the official indicators until a final determination is made on the status of the proxy indicator vis-à-vis the official indicators in the 2025 Comprehensive Review.
- In view of this decision, Management will adapt its relevant statistical capacity development activities accordingly, with the objective to satisfy countries' requests for technical assistance.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to take note of the information provided in this document.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- **welcomed the update provided on FAO statistics work for SDG indicators, in particular the two proxy indicator proposals approved by the IAEG-SDG on 7 December 2022;**
- **took note of the IAEG-SDG decision to only publish the two proxy indicators in the global SDG databases, until a final determination on the status of the proxies vis-à-vis the official indicators is made in the 2025 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework; and**
- **underscored the guidance of the 171st Session of the Council to keep Members informed to the extent possible on the development of the SDG proxy indicators, to continue the regular update through the relevant Governing Bodies and to convene an informal consultation with Members in this regard.**

I. Update on FAO statistics work for SDG indicators and the UN Statistical Commission

1. This document provides an update on FAO's engagement with the Interagency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals indicators (IAEG-SDG), established by the UN Statistical Commission, with respect to the approval of alternative "proxy" indicator proposals, specifically for SDG indicator 2.3.1 (labour productivity of small-scale food producers) and 2.4.1 (proportion of area under productive and sustainable agriculture).
2. As such, this document provides Programme Committee Members with an update of relevant IAEG-SDG deliberations and decisions with respect to previous document (PC 134/INF/7¹) on the same matter.
3. Two IAEG-SDG meetings have taken place since document PC 134/INF/7 was published, with progressively more impactful decisions with respect to FAO's two proxy indicator proposals. The first meeting was the 13th IAEG-SDG plenary session that took place in Bangkok, 7-9 November 2022, overlapping with the 134th Session of the Programme Committee. In this meeting, the IAEG-SDG agreed to the use of proxies in principle, specifying that "*Proxy indicators can be considered if the current indicator is proven to be very challenging for countries to implement and the proposed proxy indicator has a sound methodology and good data coverage*". At the same time, the IAEG-SDG also issued a stark alert regarding SDG indicators with a low reporting rate, affirming that ahead of the 2025 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework, it "*would consider deleting any Tier II indicators with a low reporting rate and weak prospect for increasing data availability*". The IAEG-SDG took no particular stance regarding the two specific FAO proxy proposals, deferring this decision to its next closed meeting on 7 December 2022.
4. On 7 December 2022, concurrently with the FAO Council discussion on this item, the IAEG-SDG held a meeting with FAO Management in order to deliberate and decide on the two proxy proposals that FAO had first presented in August 2022. FAO recapitulated the main aspects of each proposal, and the IAEG-SDG approved both proposals. The discussion also focused on how, in practice, to implement this solution, and in particular, which countries would be reporting which indicator and in which way.
5. More specifically, the IAEG-SDG decided to publish exclusively the values of proxy indicators in global SDG databases, even for countries that have data for the official indicators, as an interim solution for global SDG reporting until the next Comprehensive Review that will take place in 2025. The main reason for this decision is that, in this way, comparable data for a sufficient number of countries would be available, allowing for the computation of regional/global aggregates.
6. The IAEG-SDG also decided to reassess the relationship between the proxy and official indicator in the context of the 2025 Comprehensive Review on the basis of the respective data availability, and hence make a final determination on whether to definitively replace the official SDG indicator with its proxy, or continue treating the proxy as an interim solution, while aiming to produce the official SDG indicator for a larger number of countries.
7. The IAEG-SDG decision to not only approve the two proxy proposals submitted by FAO, but also to use the proxies as the exclusive indicators for global monitoring purposes until a final decision is taken in 2025, will influence FAO's approach in delivering statistical capacity development interventions, taking into account the possibility that the official indicators will be dropped in 2025. In the meantime, FAO will continue supporting countries in their efforts to report on SDGs 2.3.1 and 2.4.1, either with the official indicator or the proxy, subject to specific requests by Members and funding availability.
8. It should also be noted that capacity development interventions in support of the new proxy indicators can very easily dovetail with ongoing activities and do not require developing completely

¹ <https://www.fao.org/3/nk438en/nk438en.pdf>

new streams of work, reducing significantly the amount of resources required for providing technical assistance to countries.

9. Management acknowledges the relevant requests of the 171st Session of the Council², particularly paragraphs 29 d) and e), which respectively call for “*further refinement and development of the temporary proxy indicators proposed by FAO for SDG indicator 2.4.1, recognising that they must be approved by the UN Statistics Commission, and to keep Members informed to the extent possible*”, and for “*FAO to continue the regular reporting to Members through its relevant Governing Bodies, and to convene an informal consultation with Members on FAO statistics work for developing the SDG proxy indicators*”.

10. With respect to the aforementioned paragraph 29 d), the IAEG-SDG approved the 2.4.1 proxy. In this way, a discussion on further refining and developing the 2.4.1 proxy indicator would need to be postponed to the 2025 Comprehensive Review.

11. Regarding the aforementioned paragraph 29 e), Management appreciates the need for Members to be kept abreast of developments and has regularly provided briefing notes and organized information sessions to this end. Management will, therefore, continue providing regular reports, including by convening an informal consultation session with Members on FAO statistics work on the SDG proxy indicators in the first half of 2023.

² <https://www.fao.org/3/nl148en/nl148en.pdf>