



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics**Sixth session**

Bangkok, 16–19 October 2018

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Review of progress by the groups responsible for the regional initiatives of the Committee with respect to the collective vision and framework for action**Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: progress in implementing the existing regional initiatives of the Committee on Statistics****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document contains an outline of progress made with regard to the existing regional capacity development initiatives under the purview of the Committee on Statistics towards the implementation of the document entitled “Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community”. For each regional initiative, implementation achievements are highlighted and decisions proposed for the Committee to consider and guide the respective steering or expert groups in advancing their progress towards shared ambitions and a framework for action.

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Statistics, at its second session, expressed its full support for the two overarching strategic goals of enhancing capacity by 2020 and creating a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices.¹ The goals were intended to respond to the needs of the statistical community at the time, and emphasis was placed on stronger collaboration at the regional and global levels.

2. In 2016, the Committee, at its fifth session, endorsed an equally ambitious collective vision and framework for action by the Asia Pacific statistical community.² The community committed to expanding and

* ESCAP/CST/2018/L.1/Rev.1.

¹ See E/ESCAP/CST(2)/2.

² “Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community” (E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1).

reinforcing regional partnerships and to continuing to build on the efforts of the existing statistical capacity development initiatives in Asia and the Pacific.

3. The existing statistical capacity development initiatives are overseen by member States and international organizations through seven steering and expert groups under the purview of the Committee:

(a) Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific;

(b) Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics;

(c) Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific;

(d) Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific;

(e) Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics;

(f) Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific;³

(g) Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific.⁴

4. The present report introduces the work undertaken by the first five steering and expert groups ((a)–(e)) since the fifth session of the Committee and highlights progress made towards the implementation of the collective vision and framework for action. The document also contains specific decisions for the Committee’s consideration.

5. Work undertaken by the last two groups ((f) and (g)) is presented separately, under agenda item 4.

II. Work of the steering and expert groups

A. Economic statistics

6. The Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific is the longest-running initiative of the Committee, endorsed at its second session, in 2010.⁵ The second phase of the three-phase implementation plan was completed at the end of 2017, leaving a third phase (2018–2020) before its planned end in 2020.

7. The Regional Programme’s core set of economic statistics reflects its scope and ambition, and functions as reference for progress monitoring.⁶ The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in 2011, endorsed the recommendation of the Committee to use the core set as a regional framework to focus regional efforts, coordinate training and mobilize donor support for capacity-building.⁷ This is further elaborated in the implementation

³ See ESCAP/CST/2018/3.

⁴ See ESCAP/CST/2018/4.

⁵ See E/ESCAP/67/12, decision 2/6.

⁶ www.unescap.org/resources/core-set-economic-statistics.

⁷ Commission resolution 67/10.

plan for the Regional Programme, in which support is focused around four areas: advocacy, coordination, statistical infrastructure and skills.⁸

8. The Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific guides the implementation of the Regional Programme and implements core regional activities through task forces. These activities include the Asia-Pacific Economic Statistics Week, an annual forum to produce and share practical research on the improvement of economic statistics, which was held in 2016, 2017 and 2018.⁹ Another task force has guided the monitoring of the Regional Programme by designing and advising on the application of a capacity screening tool.

9. Bearing in mind that the primary responsibility for the implementation of the Regional Programme lies with member States, the secretariat focuses its contributions on servicing the Steering Group, supporting collaboration among development partners and mobilizing funds for the provision of technical assistance to address expressed country priorities and needs.

Advancing economic statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

10. Since the fifth session of the Committee, the secretariat has provided technical assistance to Bhutan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, and Viet Nam on a variety of priority topics of the Regional Programme, with financial support from the Department for International Development of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Studies on the improvement of the quality of economic statistics in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Tajikistan were also completed with the financial support of the Russian Federation.¹⁰

11. Through the Regional Programme, a standard curriculum is being developed to enable national statistical offices to provide training on economic statistics to the staff of their national statistical systems. In this regard, the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific established, in December 2017, a subgroup on economic statistics.¹¹ The subgroup will provide input and advice on the curriculum and training materials and their roll-out by national statistical offices.

12. At its most recent meeting, in May 2018, the Steering Group reviewed progress in the implementation of the Regional Programme based on reports by countries, development partners and the secretariat.¹² The Steering Group also took note of preliminary results of a capacity screening exercise undertaken in 2017 to assess the availability of the core set of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific and examine whether the necessary infrastructure existed to produce it.¹³

⁸ E/ESCAP/CST(3)/CRP.1 (available at www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/CST3-CRPIE.pdf).

⁹ See <http://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-economic-statistics/asia-pacific-economic-statistics-week-apes>.

¹⁰ See <http://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-economic-statistics/assessments-and-reviews-related-economic-statistics>.

¹¹ See document ESCAP/CST/2018/4 for an overview of the activities of the Network.

¹² See document ESCAP/CST/2018/INF/3 for the reports of the sixth and seventh meetings of the Steering Group.

¹³ See ESCAP/CST/2018/INF/4 for highlighted results from the capacity screening.

13. The Steering Group observed that much progress had been made, with countries having produced, on average, 72 per cent of the core set. While this was impressive in quantitative terms, large discrepancies were noted between high-income and low-income countries. Quality dimensions such as relevance, accuracy and comprehensiveness were highlighted as continuous concerns, with demands increasing and shifting as a result of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the Regional Programme had strengthened economic statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals – for example, through the improvement of national accounts – it could be more directly and visibly linked to the 2030 Agenda and the collective vision and framework for action.

Going forward

14. In discussing priorities for the third phase of implementation of the Regional Programme, the Steering Group considered a revision of the core set, bearing in mind the following aspects: (a) the varying availability in most countries of most core set items; (b) the continuous need for quality improvement; (c) demand stemming from the 2030 Agenda; and (d) alignment with the collective vision and framework for action. The Steering Group also noted that while the current end date for the Regional Programme was 2020, the collective vision and framework for action covered results towards 2030, in line with the 2030 Agenda.

15. The Committee is invited:

(a) To request the Steering Group to review the core set of economic statistics with respect to its relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals; its alignment with the collective vision and framework for action; its appropriateness with respect to the regional level of ambition and scope for improving economic statistics, bearing in mind the findings of the capacity screening exercise in 2017; and its usefulness as the reference for monitoring the Regional Programme;

(b) To request the Steering Group, based on the results of that review, to adjust the core set to ensure:

(i) That its alignment with the collective vision and framework for action and the Sustainable Development Goals is enhanced;

(ii) That priority issues for the third phase of implementation of the Regional Programme, such as quality improvements, are reflected;

(c) To request the Steering Group to put forward the revised core set of economic statistics for endorsement by the Committee at its seventh session, in 2020;

(d) To express its view on a possible extension of the Regional Programme to 2030 to align its results, approaches and implementation period with that of the collective vision and framework for action and the 2030 Agenda;

(e) To provide any other related guidance to the Steering Group on its achievements and work.

B. Population and social statistics

16. The regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific,¹⁴ and its implementation plan,¹⁵ were endorsed by the Committee at its fourth and fifth sessions in March 2014 and December 2016 respectively, including terms of reference of a regional steering group tasked with overseeing the implementation plan.

17. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics has aligned the vision of the regional strategy with the collective vision and framework for action, by reformulating the vision of the regional strategy to a scenario whereby, by 2030, the countries of Asia and the Pacific have the capacity to produce, disseminate and use the core set of population and social statistics.

18. Furthermore, the Regional Steering Group has structured the results framework of the regional strategy so that it is in alignment with action areas for transforming national statistical systems to meet the demands of the 2030 Agenda. Activities under the endorsed implementation plan are structured according to three goals, which are aligned with the first three action areas of the collective vision and framework for action.

19. The first goal addresses user-producer engagement to ensure effective demand for and investment in the development of official statistics (action area A of the collective vision and framework for action); the second goal is aimed at enhancing data integration for more disaggregated population and social statistics and more integrated analysis (action area C); and the third goal is aimed at instilling trust in statistics by enhancing the quality of evidence and the ability of users in evidence-based decision-making (action area B).

20. The three goals are as follows:

(a) Goal 1: An enabling policy environment to maintain demand for population and social statistics. A supportive and well-coordinated policy environment is in place to ensure effective demand for the production and dissemination of the core set of population and social statistics to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) Goal 2: Strengthened production of the core set of population and social statistics. Quality, comparable and timely statistics of the core set are available to address national data gaps and meet policy and monitoring requirements for national and international development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Goal 3: Enhanced accessibility and use of the core set of population and social statistics. The core set of population and social statistics is accessible to all key users (including Governments, civil society, academia and the business sector) and is used to promote evidence-based advocacy and analysis of policies and programmes.

¹⁴ E/ESCAP/CST(4)/CRP.1 (available at www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/CST4_CRP1_Regional-strategy-to-improve-population-statistics.pdf).

¹⁵ E/ESCAP/CST(5)/3 and E/ESCAP/CST(5)/3/Corr.1.

Advancing population and social statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

21. In order to carry out activities under goal 1 of the implementation plan, the Regional Steering Group recognized the importance of providing member States in Asia and the Pacific with a generic tool entitled “Every policy is connected” (EPIC).

22. The tool enables national statistical offices to engage policymakers and enhance understanding and prioritization of statistical information needs, including disaggregated statistics, in the context of the 2030 Agenda by facilitating a cooperative and principle-based assessment of policy and data through the fostering of dialogue between policymakers, data producers and other relevant stakeholders, with the following objectives:

(a) To understand gaps in policy and data in regard to target groups, as suggested by commonly agreed principles;

(b) To integrate the social, economic, environmental and institutional principles into every policy and associated monitoring framework, where relevant;

(c) To create a common platform for effective user-producer dialogue in an equal environment where both policy and data are being benchmarked against a set of principles agreed upon by national stakeholders;

(d) To increase ownership of indicators and statistics among policymakers and enhance political and financial support for the development of national statistical systems.

Details of the tool and the expected outcome of its application are contained in conference room paper ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.1.

23. The tool was developed through a series of national, regional and subregional workshops across the region and through live testing on several sectors and application across 14 sector plans, using a whole-of-government approach, in Samoa. Templates and a user manual are available to facilitate implementation of the tool at the regional and national levels. Feedback to date has been very positive.

Advancing gender statistics in the region

24. The ESCAP Gender Policy Data Integration Initiative on strengthening data and statistics for evidence-based policies and programmes to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment in the region was formulated along the lines of the approach adopted by the Regional Steering Group. The initiative is focused mainly on women’s economic empowerment to advance goals 1 and 3 of the implementation plan, which in turn contribute to the collective vision and framework for action as described above.

25. The initiative is designed to do the following:

(a) To raise awareness among the statistical and user communities on the current status and progress of selected women’s economic empowerment issues that are relevant in the national context;

(b) To enhance the capacity of national statistical systems in engaging with policy counterparts to identify information needs for selected women’s economic empowerment issues;

(c) To strengthen the statistical capacity of national statistical systems in:

- (i) The use of existing international statistical standards pertaining to selected women's economic empowerment issues (such as unpaid work, asset ownership, entrepreneurship, the informal sector and informal employment, and violence in the workplace);
- (ii) The application and use of innovative approaches to enhance the production of related disaggregated data;
- (iii) The analysis and use of existing gender-sensitive data for progress monitoring and policy advocacy.

26. The initiative is built around activities to promote the engagement of national statistical offices with policy counterparts, in particular (a) to apply the policy-data integration tool (EPIC) to women's economic empowerment policies to identify data needs and related indicators, and (b) to develop an analytical report or data-driven product with progress assessment and situational analysis on selected issues pertaining to women's economic empowerment in the national context.

27. At the regional inception workshop for the initiative, potential interest was expressed by representatives of Armenia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand in undertaking selected project activities. The tool has been introduced in the Philippines and is scheduled to be introduced in Armenia in early November.

Going forward

28. The Committee is invited:

- (a) To acknowledge the alignment of the Regional Steering Group's vision and activities with the collective vision and framework for action;
- (b) To acknowledge progress by the Regional Steering Group in addressing user-producer engagement to ensure effective demand for and investment in the development of official statistics (action area A of the collective vision and framework for action);
- (c) To endorse the policy-data integration tool (EPIC) as a generic tool to enhance user-producer engagement to establish effective demand for data at the national level in the context of the 2030 Agenda;
- (d) To recommend the application of the tool in domains beyond population and social statistics and gender statistics.

C. Civil registration and vital statistics

29. Universal and responsive national civil registration and vital statistics systems provide timely, complete and continuous vital statistics, which is critical to ensuring that no one is left behind and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets relating to health, education, justice and gender equality, including explicit targets on birth registration (Goal 16.9) and statistical capacity (Goals 17.18 and 17.19).

30. With countries taking the lead and with the partnerships providing support, the Asia-Pacific civil registration and vital statistics community supported the strengthening of national systems, including the production and dissemination of reliable and timely vital statistics. These efforts focused on building coordination by bringing together various stakeholders to enhance

user engagement through better understanding of the data processes and quality issues, and the significant potential benefits for improved service delivery. The coordination and collaboration highlighted the urgent need to modernize statistical business processes to capture the full benefits of integrated civil registration and vital statistics systems. The technical support from partners and sharing of best practices among countries supported the capacity-building for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems and sustaining the improvements.

Advancing civil registration and vital statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

31. The concerted efforts in the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the broader strengthening of national civil registration and vital statistics systems demonstrated the effectiveness of regional coordination for national action. A total of 38 Asia-Pacific countries have submitted national targets and baseline reports as part of the requirements of the Regional Action Framework; at least 30 countries have set up national coordination mechanisms; and at least 15 countries have developed national strategies, with 14 more countries currently in the process of developing strategies. Five countries have published their national vital statistics report based on registration records for the first time, and several more countries are finalizing their reports and receiving support.

Advancing civil registration and vital statistics through partnerships

32. At its seventy-fourth session, in May 2018, the Commission decided to convene a second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in 2020, recognizing the progress made in the implementation the Regional Action Framework but also the challenges faced, and emphasizing the urgent need to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems for sustainable and inclusive development in the region.

33. Political commitment at the highest level played an essential role in ensuring that the relevant government stakeholders effectively took on their roles and responsibilities, and that civil registration and vital statistics systems were adequately resourced and designed to be inclusive and responsive. This work is being implemented under the guidance of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and in collaboration with the regional partnership on civil registration and vital statistics. The Regional Steering Group, consisting of countries and partners, guides the overall implementation of the Regional Action Framework. The broader partnership comprises development agencies including the Asian Development Bank, the Data for Health initiative of Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Pacific Community, Plan International, the Statistics Division of the Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and World Vision. Both the Regional Steering Group and the partnership meet regularly to coordinate support and address emerging and priority issues including linkages between civil registration and vital statistics systems and the 2030 Agenda.

34. The regional collaboration also works with global and other regional initiatives. Inter- and intraregional collaboration is key to understanding and efficiently addressing the needs and demands of the countries through joint activities and shared knowledge products.

Going forward

35. The Regional Steering Group discussed the potential modalities for the midterm review of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024). It is specified in the Regional Action Framework that members and associate members should submit baseline, midterm and final reports to the secretariat during the Decade to track progress and compile information about activities to improve civil registration and vital statistics that could be constructively shared across the region and with other regions. Immediately following submission of the midterm reports, the secretariat and development partners, in collaboration with the Regional Steering Group, would synthesize those country reports into a regional report on progress towards achieving the targets set by members and associate members.

36. The Regional Steering Group agreed that it would be beneficial for the purposes of accelerating progress on improvements if a ministerial conference was held in 2020, and emphasized that the necessary links between identity management systems and civil registration and vital statistics provided substantial advantages and could be highlighted during such a conference.

37. The Committee is invited:

(a) To support the convening of the second Ministerial Conference, in 2020, by galvanizing the support of the Asia-Pacific statistical community;

(b) To ensure that goal 3 of the Regional Action Framework, which focuses on the production and dissemination of accurate, complete and timely vital statistics, is reached by institutionalizing the routine production of vital statistics reports through commitment from relevant government agencies to dedicate staff time and other resources to the production of the reports, and through regular consolidation and reconciliation of data by means of a technical group on data integration and quality assurance (as part of the multisectoral national coordination mechanism);

(c) To encourage all relevant agencies to share micro-level data instead of aggregated data on vital events with national statistical offices with due diligence;

(d) To encourage continued modernization of civil registration and vital statistics systems, including digitization and integration with existing administrative and survey data, while recognizing the importance of system planning for information and communications technology (ICT).

D. Disaster-related statistics

38. The Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was established by the Commission in resolution 70/2, with extensions and adjustments to its mandate made by the Commission in its resolutions 72/11 and 73/7. The Expert Group received guidance on its work from the Committee at its fourth and fifth sessions. In May 2018, the Committee reported the results of its work to the Commission.

Advancing disaster-related statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

39. The goal of reducing the risk of impact from disasters features prominently in the 2030 Agenda, and targets and indicators on the topic are included in Goals 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts).

40. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted in 2015, contains the following expected outcome over the 15-year period: the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries. It refers to four priorities for action: (a) understanding disaster risk; (b) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (c) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and (d) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. A set of 38 (including compound) indicators was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly for monitoring the Sendai Framework targets. The targets are:

- (a) Reduce global disaster mortality;
- (b) Reduce the number of affected people globally;
- (c) Reduce direct disaster economic loss;
- (d) Reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities;
- (e) Increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies;
- (f) Enhance international cooperation;
- (g) Increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information.

41. One of the key functions of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific is to bring together knowledge, expertise and leadership from national statistical offices, disaster management agencies and other relevant users of data for disaster risk reduction. The Disaster-related Statistics Framework,¹⁶ the main result of its work, was at the outset designed collaboratively by statistics users and producers, making it an example of the implementation of the principle of user engagement of the collective vision and framework for action. The Framework includes organized descriptions of the uses of the standard products of statistical offices, such as censuses and surveys, for evidence-based disaster risk reduction policy.

42. The Framework is also a tool for developing an integrated platform for statistics at the national level. Much of the data utilized in producing statistics or indicators for disaster risk reduction monitoring via the Sendai Framework indicators and in disaster risk reduction policymaking are derived from disparate data sources across Government. Understanding disaster risk involves integration of statistics on the social, environmental and economic conditions of defined geographic areas. Implementation of the Framework will (a) enable the improvement of the production of statistics from existing databases, and (b) bridge the representation of the realm of disasters and risk reduction on the one hand with the current standard practices of socioeconomic statistics on the other. The bridge between the two domains of statistical information is essential for producing indicators. This bridge requires strong partnerships between disaster management agencies, national statistical offices and other holders of relevant data.

¹⁶ ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.2.

Advancing disaster-related statistics through partnership

43. Progressive development and relevance of the outputs of the Expert Group depend heavily on relationships and mutual understanding between national statistical offices and national disaster management agencies. In some cases, the work at the regional level has helped to establish the initial contacts and develop mechanisms for closer collaboration between the two, towards improved accessibility to relevant data and improved quality assurance.

44. At the international level, partnerships are also crucial to maintain the coherence and complementarity of the development of statistical guidance with the demands for disaster risk reduction policy, including monitoring progress via the Sendai Framework Monitor and the Sustainable Development Goals. International support for the implementation of the Framework at the national level must be closely coordinated between international agencies as there are many stakeholders and many opportunities for complementary activities. The need for standard guidance has been recognized at the global level by the Statistical Commission, which in 2018 decided to include in the agenda of its following session a separate item on disaster-related statistics, building on existing work by ESCAP, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and these organizations were tasked with preparing a joint report for its 2019 session. The three organizations established the Global Partnership on Disaster-related Statistics in 2017 to align efforts towards common objectives.

Going forward

45. In May 2018, the Expert Group reported the results of its work to the Commission in the form of a summary,¹⁷ as well as the Framework. In considering the results of the work of the Expert Group and the technical nature of the main output of the work, the Commission requested the Committee on Statistics, at its sixth session, and the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, at its sixth session (in 2019), to review the results of the work of the Expert Group and to submit those reviews to the Commission at its seventy-sixth session.¹⁸

46. Further, referring to decision 49/113 of the Statistical Commission,¹⁹ the Commission requested the secretariat to support the preparation of a joint report by the Secretary-General, ESCAP, ECE and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, taking into consideration the work of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

47. Bearing in mind the achievements of the Expert Group and the decisions of the Commission and the Statistical Commission, the Committee is invited:

(a) To review the Framework, as contained in document ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.2, with a view to endorsing its statistical contents;

(b) To endorse the recommendations of the Expert Group concerning its future priorities and working mechanism, as contained in paragraphs 11 to 13 of document ESCAP/74/24;

¹⁷ ESCAP/74/24.

¹⁸ Commission resolution 74/6.

¹⁹ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2018, Supplement No. 4 (E/2018/24), chap. I, sect. B, decision 49/113, subpara. (k).

(c) To task the Expert Group with conveying the results of the review by the Committee to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its sixth session, in 2019;

(d) To request the Expert Group to provide guidance to the secretariat on the preparation of the report to the Statistical Commission at its fiftieth session.

E. Agricultural statistics

Advancing agricultural statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

48. Since the fifth session of the Committee on Statistics, in December 2016, the emphasis of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics in the Asia-Pacific region has been in the delivery of an accelerated technical assistance workplan focused on the appropriate introduction of the new cost-effective methodologies developed within the framework of the Global Strategy. These methodologies include measuring cost of production statistics, compiling food balance sheets, measuring post-harvest losses, developing 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 using computer-assisted personal interview tools for effective data collection.

49. The delivery of technical assistance for these methodologies has been provided both through regional workshops in collaboration with partners in the region, and through direct in-country technical assistance work.

50. The technical assistance programme is currently being coordinated by the Regional Office in Asia and the Pacific of the Global Strategy, based in the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Bangkok. It covers 19 implementing countries in the region: 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.

51. The additional focus area of the Regional Office of the Global Strategy has been the preparation of strategic plans for agricultural and rural statistics in Global Strategy implementing countries. These strategic plans serve as Government-owned documents outlining a strategy for the development of agricultural and rural statistics in line with other national strategy documents such as the national strategy for the development of statistics and agricultural sector plans. The strategic plans also draw upon earlier outputs of the Global Strategy in the region, including the compilation of the in-depth country assessment reports on the capacity of agricultural statistical systems in implementing countries, and the country project proposal papers developed to highlight short-term needs in the development of agricultural statistics. As of mid-2018, strategic plans have been drafted in at least 15 of the Global Strategy implementing countries.

Advancing agricultural statistics through partnerships

52. The Regional Office of the Global Strategy, in collaboration with the Pacific Community, further supported the preparation of a Pacific strategic plan for agricultural and fisheries statistics.²⁰ The plan represents a joint outcome of long-term efforts made by FAO, the Pacific Community and the heads of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, statistics and planning in the Pacific island countries. The plan will guide the development of agricultural and fisheries statistics in the Pacific small island developing States and address unprecedented data demand for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

53. The work of the Regional Office of the Global Strategy is further complemented by the work of Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific in the delivery of training on the various cost-effective methodologies developed within the framework of the Global Strategy. Training courses in the region have in the past two years covered such areas as sampling methods for producing core data items for agricultural and rural statistics, agricultural cost of production, food balance sheet methodologies, and the use of computer-assisted personal interviewing.

54. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific has also been active in the region in coordinating the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific to help facilitate the sharing of trainers and knowledge in the areas of agricultural and rural statistics.

55. Lastly, the Global Strategy in the Asia-Pacific region is complemented by the work of the Asian Development Bank in support of the research component. Activities have included a number of initiatives including the promotion of innovative data-collection methods for agricultural and rural statistics with the use of remote-sensing techniques for crop yield and area estimation, the use of ICT tools to improve data collection and management of national surveys in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, and upcoming activities on the digitization of cadastral maps and the Internet of things for agriculture.

Going forward

56. The Committee is invited:

- (a) To express its views on the implementation of the first phase of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics;
- (b) To provide guidance for the successful completion of the first phase in 2018;
- (c) To indicate priorities and strategies for the proposed second phase.

²⁰ FAO and Pacific Community, *Pacific Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Fisheries Statistics: Strengthening the Evidence Base for Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals* (Apia and Noumea, 2018).