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Achieving the vision through existing regional initiatives: agricultural and rural statistics**Progress in implementing the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics****Note by the secretariat*****Summary*

This document, prepared by the Regional Office in Asia and the Pacific of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics under the guidance of the Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific, contains a report on the progress in implementing the first phase of the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plan to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, as of 30 September 2016. It covers technical assistance, training and research activities that have been undertaken by each of the implementing partners, and includes an overview of the Global Strategy and activities of the Global Office.

The Committee on Statistics is invited to provide guidance and recommendations for the continued successful implementation of the first phase of the Regional Action Plan to 2017 and for the planning of the next phase, including on how linkages to the action areas of the collective vision may be further strengthened.

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 is the outcome of an international effort initiated by the 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 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. It covers a broad scope, including aspects of forestry, fisheries and land and water use,

* E/ESCAP/CST(5)/L.1.

** The present note was submitted late owing to the need for further consultation on the report contents among the implementing partners.

in order to address the emerging and closely related economic, social and environmental issues faced by policymakers. The Global Action Plan for implementation was endorsed in February 2012 by the Statistical Commission.

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. The framework is based on three pillars: a minimum set of core data produced by countries on a sustainable basis; integration of agricultural statistics into national statistical systems; and the ensuring of 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 have been 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 and is supported by the Global Office, which is based at 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 being 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 the Asian Development Bank (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. 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

8. 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 workplans and budgetary allocations for the Regional Office and the technical assistance and training components. To date, the Regional Steering Committee has met five times. It first met in April 2013 and most recently in December 2015. The annual workplans and budgets for 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 were endorsed by the Regional Steering Committee and subsequently approved by the Global Executive Board. The next meeting of the Regional Steering Committee is tentatively scheduled for November 2016.

9. The Regional Action Plan will assist at least 20 countries to develop and initiate 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. For the Pacific, the Regional Steering Committee recommended the Regional Office to work with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to develop a Pacific strategic plan for agricultural and fisheries statistics, covering all small island countries.

B. Regional Office

1. Coordination

10. 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.

11. The Regional Office has also developed ties with subregional bodies within the region, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), SAARC and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Representatives of these organizations have been 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.

12. The training component of the Global Strategy in the region is implemented by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, while ADB is actively collaborating and implementing research activities. ADB does not receive funds from the Global Trust Fund set up to finance the implementation of Regional Action Plan activities; it is collaborating 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.

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

2. Communication and advocacy

14. 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 promotional materials have been developed for these purposes. The Regional Office organized a briefing and partnership consultation on the Global Strategy in November 2014 and followed up with country specific workshops in 2015 and 2016, leading to increased awareness among stakeholders of the Global Strategy work.

15. The Regional Office also currently produces a number of communications products, including: (a) the bimonthly release of the "GS Asia Pacific Update" newsletter; (b) the maintenance of a Global Strategy Asia-Pacific website; and (c) 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/.

16. The advocacy activities are focused 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

17. 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

18. Most countries in the Asia-Pacific region completed a pilot country assessment questionnaire from 2011 to 2012. The information contained in the questionnaire has been used to derive a set of capacity indicators for those countries on a range of aspects of statistical capacity. Country profiles have also been produced. The capacity indicators were one of the criteria for determining which countries should be selected for detailed assessment. In 2016, a second round of the country assessment questionnaire was sent to all FAO and ESCAP member countries. The results will be processed and analysed in 2017.

2. In-depth country assessment

19. An in-depth country assessment is the starting point for work in each of the selected countries, providing a comprehensive assessment of current statistical capacity, including identification of areas of weakness. The results set the stage for all future work in the country. To date, 15 in-depth country assessments have been completed, in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. By 2017, in-depth country assessments are also expected to have been completed in four additional countries, namely China, Malaysia, Mongolia and Tonga.

3. Country proposal document

20. Information gathered during the in-depth assessment process is used to produce a country proposal document. Country proposal documents are intended to act as a basis for short- and medium-term activities, providing a prioritized list of activities that are 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.

21. 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 are used to implement activities, including country funding. Some of the approved country-proposal activities are under implementation in Bhutan, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Samoa and Sri Lanka. The technical assistance activities in these countries cover a range of topics, including improvement of administrative reporting systems, implementation of improved crops and livestock methodologies and inclusion of agricultural modules in existing censuses and surveys.

4. Strategic plan for agricultural and rural statistics

22. The strategic plan for agricultural and rural statistics is a long-term (five- to ten-year) strategy document for agricultural and rural statistics. It is intended to be compatible with, and to be 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 have been drafted in eight countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Georgia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Samoa and Sri Lanka.

D. Training activities

23. Implementation of the training component of the Regional Action Plan started in August 2013. Training strategies and priorities include: 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/subregional 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.

24. 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.

25. 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

26. 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 was started through a course on

¹ See E/ESCAP/CST(4)/12.

assessing the training needs of the statistical workforce in agricultural statistics; in-country and regional-level work was initiated in 2015. Further training has been undertaken on training of trainers.

2. Technical training courses

27. In 2015 and 2016, thirteen regional workshops on “Building training resources for improving agricultural and rural statistics” – each with a separate focus – have covered the following topics: a minimum set of core data for agricultural and rural statistics that is outlined in the Global Strategy; data collection through sample surveys; data collection through administrative reporting systems; and integrated surveys for agricultural statistics. Over 100 officials have participated in these workshops. The workshops were conducted in collaboration with various Regional Action Plan partners, such as FAO, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the World Bank and training institutes in China, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea. In 2017, regional technical training courses will continue to include the training guides being developed by the Global Office.

28. A regional training series on the application of sampling methods to agricultural data collection was initiated in 2014. Similar series on basic statistical methods were conducted in 2015 and 2016.

29. To increase the use of technology in the production of agricultural and rural statistics, training courses on computer-assisted personal interviewing were initiated in 2016. So far in 2016, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific has organized two such regional training courses. Some of the participants were from members of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific.

30. To increase capacity in the use of statistics in policymaking, a featured collaboration has been with the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture to implement an ongoing series of policy analysis workshops on food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable agriculture. Approximately 90 policymakers and researchers have participated in four such workshops. The workshops are now focusing on integrating agriculture into efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Communication and advocacy

31. 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 offices, training institutes and ministries of agriculture, have taken part since 2015. Further training workshops are expected in 2017.

4. Coordination and networking

32. The training component has 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.

33. Through the Network, a specific programme of work was created.¹ 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

34. 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. 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. This second project is called “Innovative data collection methods for agricultural and rural statistics”.

35. To identify the key methodological research areas on which to focus, ADB assisted those countries to develop their respective action plans through intensive consultations with stakeholders. In so doing, the countries were able to identify which research areas to pursue, and prioritize the activities that needed to be undertaken to achieve their desired outputs and outcome. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam were able to obtain their Governments’ approval of and support for the respective action plans.

36. Bhutan is thoroughly reviewing its current system, which employs mostly administrative reports, and is exploring other available potential data sources, such as the Bhutan Living Standards Survey, to complete its minimum set of core data items. In collaboration with Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century, which ADB requested to assist, Bhutan will document the metadata of the current agricultural data collection system. The technical paper on the comparative analysis of data sources has been completed and circulated for comments.

37. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic, on the other hand, undertook a comparative analysis of its existing data sources to improve its administrative reporting system by incorporating a supplemental approach that could render measures of reliability. The Philippines explored the use of Google Earth optical satellite imagery and the Agricultural Land Information System software to supplement its land use statistics. Viet Nam is redesigning its livestock survey to improve the quality and coverage of livestock production estimates. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam are exploring the use of optical and radar satellite imagery to supplement their respective data collection systems for rice.

38. In undertaking this methodological research with the active participation of counterpart staff in the national statistical systems, ADB conducted specific training programmes to upgrade the skill level of those involved in research and production of agricultural statistics in Bhutan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

39. The first training program on the use of remote sensing in agricultural statistics and the application of the International Asian Harvest Monitoring System for Rice – software developed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency that translates radar satellite data into rice area maps and also provides rice area estimates at the provincial level – was organized in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

40. 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 in Bhutan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

41. ADB plans to continue collaborating with the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam in adopting remote sensing methods to supplement their respective estimates for rice area and production. Three in-country training programmes on field validation and generation of rice area maps and estimation of provincial-level estimates using the International Asian Harvest Monitoring System for Rice software were conducted for each pilot country. In addition to the remote sensing training, crop cutting and farmer recall surveys were facilitated to collect other information such as post-harvest losses and sales, which will further improve the precision of yield and production estimates and allow for a value chain study of rice for the study areas. An online course on the use of satellite data for agricultural and rural statistics and a handbook are being developed by the project team. ADB will produce methodological research work using the available data from the project. The studies will focus on topics such as sampling using area frames, exploring farm size-productivity relationship, estimating crop yields directly from satellite data, and comparing satellite-based and field-based estimates to study the impact of Typhoon Lando on rice production in Nueva Ecija, Philippines. In-country and regional dissemination workshops will also be organized.

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. Most of the objectives of the Global Strategy are covered by the ongoing regular programme of FAO. 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 four years in December 2016. 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 will 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 Secretariat of 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 provide guidance and recommendations to ensure the continued successful implementation of the first phase of the Regional Action Plan, including on how linkages to the action areas of the collective vision may be further strengthened.
