



Food and Agriculture
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FAO proposal for a proxy of SDG indicator 2.4.1 on “productive and sustainable agriculture”

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2.4.1: Need for provisional proxy measure

- In August 2022, FAO for the first time presented to the IAEG-SDG a proposal for a proxy of SDG indicator 2.4.1 on “productive and sustainable agriculture”.
- The proxy proposed by FAO consists of a set of **established metrics of sustainability and productivity in agriculture**, based on widely available national statistics linked mainly to FAO annual reporting processes.
- The reason for proposing a proxy was the **very low data availability of the official indicator**: this was reported for the first time only in 2023 and only by a handful of countries (42 countries provided partial data, but only 2 countries provided data for computing the full indicator).
- The low country reporting is due to a multiplicity of factors, including the low frequency of the principal data source, i.e. agricultural surveys in countries (which took an additional hit with COVID), the low technical and financial means to include the 2.4.1 module in new agricultural surveys, and the absence of alternative data sources

Timeline of relevant decisions (August 2022 – October 2023)

- In August 2022, FAO first presented its proposal for a proxy of 2.4.1 to the IAEG-SDG
- In November 2022, the IAEG-SDG agreed that “Proxy indicators can be considered if the current indicator is...challenging and the proxy has a sound methodology and good data coverage”.
- In December 2022, the IAEG-SDG endorsed the initial FAO proposal for a proxy of indicator 2.4.1
- In March 2023, when the proxy was discussed at the UN Statistical Commission, a small group of countries objected to certain proposed constituent proxy metrics
- To resolve the impasse, the IAEG-SDG Co-Chair convened a small informal group of countries to review the constituent metrics of the proxy proposal and suggest a new proposal. The informal group included members from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Germany, Eurostat, France, Japan, Norway, Russia, Sweden and USA and met four times: on 11th May, 1st June, 30th June, and 3rd October
- As a result, seven proxy metrics were finally agreed, which partially correspond with the official SDG indicator’s 11 themes as follows:

Final proxy proposal for 2.4.1 versus original SDG indicator

Dimension	2.4.1 sub-indicator theme	Proposed Proxy metric	Proxy country coverage
Economic	Profitability		
Economic	Land productivity	Gross production value per hectare	96%
Economic	Resilience	Gross output diversification	96%
Environment	Soil health		
Environment	Fertilizer pollution risk	Nitrogen Use Efficiency	81%
Environment	Water use	Agriculture component of water stress (ind. 6.4.2 disaggregation)	90%
Environment	Pesticide risk		
Environment	Biodiversity		
Environment	[no equivalent theme]	Greenhouse Gas emissions intensity in agriculture	80%
Social	Food security	Agricultural value added per worker	72%
Social	Land tenure		
Social	Decent employment	Informal employment in agriculture (SDG indicator 8.3.1 disaggregation)	51%

Characteristics of final 2.4.1. proxy proposal

- The final proxy proposal retains the main characteristic of the earlier proposal: The proxy metrics are all widely established and widely available (“Tier I”-type) indicators
- Contrary to the official SDG indicator, for which data are supposed to be collected at the farm level, data for the proxy metrics are collected and analysed directly at national level.
- The proxy proposal also includes a method to synthesize the information across the constituent metrics (this was never questioned by any country and hence was not discussed in the recent consultative process)
- As a reminder, the constituent proxy metrics will be assessed both in terms of their **trend** and **current status** according to the system-wide methodology adopted for the **global SDG Progress Chart**.
- Subsequently, scores assigned to each proxy metric will be averaged, and the average score will then determine the classification of the country into one of five bands with respect to the overall trend and status towards productive and sustainable agriculture.

Controversial aspects: organic agriculture and pesticide use

- **Organic agriculture area** originally considered as a proxy measure for the biodiversity theme was not accepted by countries participating in the consultation process.
 - **Reasons:** not necessarily a universal measure; organic certification driven by different mechanisms and criteria in different countries
- **Pesticide use per hectare** or alternatively **per value of agricultural production** proposed as a proxy measure of the health- and environmental impact of pesticides was also not accepted by countries participating in the consultation process.
 - **Reasons:** Countries called for a more nuanced measure of pesticide toxicity, which, however, is not covered by existing national statistics

Conclusion / next steps

- FAO looks forward to the IAEG-SDG's endorsement of the final proxy proposal for 2.4.1, which benefits from an additional extensive consultation process.
- A full methodological document was shared with the IAEG-SDG in advance of this meeting.
- If the proxy proposal were to be accepted by the IAEG-SDG, FAO would be able to publish national, regional and global analyses as early as February 2024
- **The use of a proxy indicator for SDG indicator 2.4.1 is not a proposal for replacement of the official indicator in anticipation of the upcoming 2025 comprehensive review, but a gap filling measure until the number of reporting countries on SDG indicator 2.4.1 reaches 50%.**

Thank you