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CURRENT ISSUES IN TECHNICAL COOPERATION

AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN STATISTICAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION

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No doubt considerable improvement of food and agricultural statistics occurred in most of the developing countries since FAO has been active in this field. Appropriate methods of measuring this improvement have not, however, been developed and only subjective views on this matter exist. FAO is endeavouring in this period to evaluate the success of individual projects through measuring the impact of projects on the development of country capabilities. Many successful projects, in the sense that they produced an immediate output (for example, an agricultural census report) often do not have a significant impact as the work was done mostly by foreign experts, with data processing sometimes done abroad.

Another important issue refers to FAO efforts to integrate various national activities done by different national offices in the field of agricultural statistics, through a long term country programme, the preparation of which should involve both users and producers of agricultural statistics. In recent years the need for integrating all statistics at country level, and not only agricultural statistics, is becoming obvious as FAO is interested in all statistics referring to rural sector, needed for building up the system of socio-economic indicators and for other purposes. In spite of international recommendations which call for the development of national integrated statistical programmes, many countries have not yet reached an adequate level of coordinated programme, not even for agricultural statistics alone. Sometimes ad hoc surveys are organized by different units, not always using the same concepts or definitions; they are done to meet their specific needs without regard to national priority in data collection in the same field. Countries need to coordinate better their statistical activities in order to make the best use of limited resources.

Regarding the current priorities in technical cooperation, FAO is now promoting the 1990 World Census of Agriculture. This activity has become a tradition in many countries where agricultural censuses are organized regularly at ten-year intervals or shorter periods. The total number of countries (developed as well as developing countries) that participated in the different programmes for the World Census of Agriculture is as follows: 78 in the programme for the 1950, 94 for 1960, 102 for 1970 and 99 for 1980.

A major activity that has gained more and more interest and importance is the food information and early warning system. Most countries have installed, or are in the process of doing so, an Early Warning System which, inter alia, had proved very effective in forecasting shortfalls in agricultural production. Such systems have been generally set up with FAO assistance, and it is foreseen that more expertise and assistance are needed in this area, especially in the Africa region.

A number of countries, especially in Asia, are embarking on new areas of data production. These include community level statistics, socio-economic indicators, nutrition planning, crop insurance scheme, market margin studies, cost of cultivation studies, statistics relating to rural development including women and people's participation.

Regarding methodological issues, research on application of remote sensing is going on but results so far were not found satisfactory because of high costs involved. FAO is particularly interested in use of remote sensing for construction of area sampling frame which is more efficient for agricultural purposes than list frames. The present trend, particularly in Africa, is, however, to use list frame developed through NHSCP activities. Similarly, research on collecting crop production data through farmers' interview vis-à-vis objective measurements, which is much more expensive, is also being undertaken in a number of African countries.

Concerning content of technical cooperation, major changes are taking place in view of the continuous improvement of national capabilities in most of the developing countries. Thus emphasis in current field projects is being given to highly technical areas such as data processing, sampling design, etc. There is a trend of using increasingly short term consultants, specialists in their areas, recruited internationally or locally. In fact, an increasing number of qualified specialists exists in developing countries, but salaries offered by statistical offices are not usually attractive, particularly for computer experts.

The forestry and forest industry sector is increasingly recognized as of importance to countries. Most developed countries provide production and trade statistics to FAO on a routine basis. 74 tropical countries collaborated in an assessment of tropical forest resources carried out by FAO in a cooperative project with the United Nations Environment Programme under the global environment monitoring system.

Development of national fishery statistical systems has been an uneven process during the period under consideration. While a few excellent systems mainly in South East Asia and Latin America) are now in operation, producing comprehensive and reliable information, in many other countries the quality and coverage of the data produced has declined due to a reduction in the field staff. Statistics on marine fisheries are generally more reliable than those for inland waters and data on trade more reliable than those on production. Considerable efforts have been made in the field of training, but without noticeable long term effect on the quality and availability of national data concerning fisheries.

Training has been an important activity for all the countries. Better qualified staff and an increasing number of statisticians are employed by national statistical services. Most high level statisticians of developing countries have been trained in specialized institutions abroad. Other institutions provide training to lower level staff, which are located either inside or in a nearby country. In general more thought and progress have been noted in schemes for higher level personnel than for lower levels. More should be done particularly for the middle/upper level francophone and anglophone statisticians in Africa. The main problem FAO is facing is lack of international training centres specialized in agricultural statistics. Most of the fellowships granted through FAO are used for training in general statistics with field projects playing an important role in supplementing this training with specialization in agricultural statistics.

Most of the training of national staff continues to be given through field projects. This refers particularly to training given to lower level staff, i.e. field enumerators and supervisors who are traditionally recruited on a temporary basis and are usually not available for the surveys organized in future years. One of the main objectives of FAO efforts to integrate statistical activities at national level is to make possible full time use of field staff for different purposes.

A new type of project with training as main objective is being undertaken by FAO in the People's Republic of China, entitled "Italy/FAO Food and Agricultural Statistics Centre, China". As a part of preparations China is making to undertake its first Census of Agriculture, a permanent training centre is being established in Beijing. The main activity of this Centre is organization of a four-month course for senior provincial statisticians, who are expected to organize similar training at lower level. The ultimate training objective is to provide training to more than 1,000,000 enumerators expected to be recruited to enumerate about 180,000,000 farm households.