

# USAID, FAO collaborates on improved agricultural data collection for developing countries

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and FAO signed a \$15 million agreement with the aim to boost the capacity of developing countries to track key agriculture data-information. This information is essential to good policymaking and will help track progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The second of the SDG goals is to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.



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"In the decades to come, humanity will need to produce more food for a growing population using natural resources such as water, land, and biodiversity in a sustainable way - while coping with the challenges imposed by climate change," said FAO director-general José Graziano da Silva.

## Feeding the future

"Our ability to boost food yields sustainably and meet the SDG hunger eradication target will hinge on the availability of better, cost-effective and timely statistical data for agriculture and rural areas" he added.

"USAID is very pleased to have the opportunity to collaborate with the FAO on this important endeavor that will help build sustainable agricultural and food systems," said Beth Dunford, Assistant to the Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Food Security and Deputy Coordinator for Development for the US Government's Feed the Future initiative.

"Strong national data systems are critical for governments and private sector actors to make informed and smart decisions that foster food security and economic prosperity. Our work with FAO under the Feed the Future initiative builds on years of success and lessons learned, and is essential to bring about the types of data systems to support the more catalytic investments needed to achieve a food-secure world by 2030" she added.

## Broader approach to data collection, new tools

The USAID donation will cover the first phase of an FAO-led project that will run from 2016 to 2021 starting with pilot efforts in four developing countries, two in Sub-Saharan Africa, one in Latin America and one in Asia. A dialogue is underway with eligible countries.

The goal: to design and implement a new and cost-effective approach to agricultural data collection in developing world contexts, known as agricultural integrated surveys (AGRIS).

The AGRIS methodology will not only capture improved annual data on agricultural production, but also broader and more detailed structural information relating to farms, including employment, machinery use, production costs, farming practices, and environmental impacts. It will incorporate recent innovations like remote sensing, GPS, mobile technology and various uses of "big data." These tools will introduce more objective approaches to measuring agricultural performance, in some cases replacing traditional, more expensive methods.

In addition to better and more detailed data, AGRIS will also promote the integration of disparate data sources, improve data timeliness and usability, and cut data collection costs. The end result will be high-quality data on a wide range of technical, economic, environmental and social dimensions of agriculture that will help governments analyse and understand the impacts of agricultural policies, assess progress toward the SDGs and other goals, and shape better policies.

## **A new era in agricultural data collection**

The need for better, cost-effective and timely statistical data for agricultural and rural areas is widely recognised. Critical gaps in data production and dissemination persist in several countries - a consequence of long-standing issues such as shortages of financial and human resources, and the resulting limitations in technical capacities.

FAO has already been addressing such issues through the "Global Strategy To Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics" (GSARS) programme, an umbrella effort working to enhance the capacity of developing countries to produce and use agricultural and rural statistics and to strengthen statistical governance mechanisms. AGRIS is a spin-off of the Global Strategy's research programme. "With efforts like our Global Strategy and 'next generation' tools like AGRIS, we're engaging with partners to spark what we hope will be a new era in agricultural data collection," according to FAO chief statistician Pietro Gennari.

AGRIS is being implemented by FAO within the context of the multi-agency Global Rural and Agricultural Integrated Surveys (GRAInS) Partnership, which is currently establishing in Rome, a Global Survey Hub.

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