

ISI Committee on Agricultural Statistics

The Seventh International Conference on Agricultural Statistics (ICAS VII)

by Pietro Gennari

The Seventh International Conference on Agricultural Statistics (ICAS VII) convened at FAO headquarters from 26 to 28 October 2016, bringing 440 experts, official statisticians from national statistical offices and ministries of agriculture, and data users in Rome from all corners of the world. The conference is held every three years to discuss cutting edge methodologies and best practices on the collection and analysis of agricultural statistics, and to share experiences on the effectiveness of capacity building efforts to strengthen national and international statistical production in this domain.

Organized under the auspices of the International Statistical Institute (ISI), ICAS VII¹ was hosted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) in close collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). A total of 244 papers were presented in the four plenary sessions and 48 parallel sessions, while 53 posters were on display, all addressing the main theme “Modernization of Agricultural Statistics in Support of the Sustainable Development Agenda”. As such, the Conference served as a timely forum to discuss pressing methodological issues in agricultural statistics and to share research studies and country experiences in developing and implementing indicators to monitor the agricultural-related SDG targets. The debates triggered by the scientific programme saw the active involvement of producers and users of agricultural statistics from government entities, other international organizations, development practitioners, and academia.

The Opening ceremony speakers were José Graziano da Silva, Director-General FAO, Pietro Gennari FAO’s Chief Statistician and Chair of ISI Committee on Agricultural Statistics, Pierfrancesco Sacco Permanent Representative of Italy to UN agencies in Rome, Andrea Olivero Italian Vice-Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, and Giorgio Alleva Istat President.²

Speaking of ‘a turning point in the global statistical system’, the FAO Director-General stressed the significance of the UN Statistical Commission’s adoption in early 2016³ of 230 different indicators set to monitor the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets. In this respect, the Director-General called on countries and international organizations to increase their investments to strengthen national statistical capacities with the aim of properly monitoring progress on the SDGs.

‘The SDG data requirements far exceed the current capacities of most national statistical systems’, he said, noting that in order to rise to that challenge, the international community must strengthen tried-and-tested statistics gathering systems but also adopt innovative and cost-effective approaches, such as the use of mobile technology or remote sensing imagery.

FAO is the custodian organization for 21 SDG indicators and a contributing agency to another six indicators, spanning SDGs 1, 2, 5, 6, 12, 14, and 15.⁴ As such, discussions at ICAS VII on modernizing statistical systems, using new data sources, and assessing

¹ <http://icas2016.istat.it/>

² <http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/4229/icode/>

³ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/en/>

recurrent challenges in gathering and interpreting data was in tune with FAO's own efforts to increase its statistical capacity support to countries.

The FAO Director-General also touched on a series of FAO initiatives being put in place to strengthen countries' capacities. Recently developed innovative survey toolkits include the Food Insecurity Experience Scale⁵ – to monitor world food insecurity – and the Agriculture Integrated Survey (AGRIS)⁶ – to monitor social, economic, and environmental aspects of farming activities. He also announced the launch of a new and improved FAOSTAT,⁷ the world's largest and most comprehensive data resource of its kind. Through it, FAO will continue to gather and harmonize data provided by countries to produce global and regional aggregates.

Leading up to the main conference was a two-day Training Seminar on Methodology for Agricultural Censuses and Surveys,⁸ organized by the United States Department of Agriculture. The training focused on methodologies for agricultural censuses and surveys. Also leading up to the main conference was the two-day Training and Outreach Workshop on Agricultural Surveys,⁹ organized by the Global Strategy to Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics (GSARS). The workshop aimed to disseminate the innovative cost-effective methodologies developed by the GSARS and to share knowledge and experiences on the most demanded research topics focused on improving agricultural statistics. Further a one day pre-conference Seminar on Strengthening Collaboration between Agricultural Economists and Statisticians¹⁰ was organized by the network of Agricultural Economics Research Institutes and Agencies (AERIAS).

The Conference and the side-events saw the participation of a large number of experts from developing countries. This was made possible thanks to generous support of many sponsoring agencies, including the International Statistical Institute. In particular, funds were provided by the African Development Bank, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federal Office for Agriculture of Switzerland, the United States Department of Agriculture, the World Food Programme, and the Global Strategy to Improve Agriculture and Rural Statistics and its main donors, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Department for International Development of the Government of the United Kingdom.

The ICAS VII proceedings will be published online on the dedicated website¹¹ in the first half of 2017.

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/>

⁶ <http://gsars.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AGRI-Brochure-2016-12-web.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/>

⁸ <http://icas2016.istat.it/young-statisticians-meeting/>

⁹ <http://icas2016.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Agenda-GS-Training-and-Outreach-Workshop-on-Agricultural-Surveys-230916-DEF.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://icas2016.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Agenda-GC.pdf>

¹¹ <http://icas2016.istat.it/>