Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS)

Strengthening agricultural and rural statistical systems to facilitate evidence-based decision-making
Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS)

Several challenges persist in the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) of developing countries:

- Data gaps due to a lack of integration of agricultural statistics
- Weak institutional structures & processes
- Insufficient financial support

These challenges should be addressed to produce adequate statistics that result in effective policies.

Why are agricultural and rural statistics important?

The agricultural sector plays a vital role in rural development and in the economic advancement of developing countries, by:

- Acting as a driver to promote economic growth and sustainable development.
- Serving as a supplier of food, feed, fibre and fuel, as well as environmental services.
- Contributing to the well-being of rural populations by increasing food security, reducing price volatility and enhancing incomes by absorbing rural labour force.
Why is a strategic planning approach needed?

- To develop sustainable statistical systems.
- To better integrate agricultural and rural statistics into NSSs and National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) in terms of content, schedule and approaches.
- To optimize the use of limited resources across priority areas.
- To prioritize statistical programs and interventions, particularly in the areas of technical assistance, research and training.
- To provide a framework for mobilizing, harnessing and leveraging resources to accomplish a sustainable national agricultural statistical system.
- To raise the profile of statistics and increase the demand for statistical products and services.
Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS)

What are SPARS?

A strategic approach developed and recommended by the Global Strategy to improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (GSARS), which supports the development of long-term sustainable agricultural and rural statistical systems at the national level.

The Main Building Blocks

1. MECHANISM FOR CONSULTATION, BY PROVIDING MAIN STAKEHOLDERS WITH A PLATFORM FOR COORDINATION
   WHO DOES WHAT AND HOW?

2. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT AGRICULTURAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM: DATA AVAILABILITY, METHODOLOGIES, EXISTING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS, PRODUCER AND USER PERSPECTIVE
   WHERE ARE WE?

3. VISION AND MISSION: EXPECTATIONS OF GOVERNMENTS, PRIVATE AND INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
   WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

4. IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGIC GOALS TO OVERCOME CONSTRAINTS, ACHIEVE VISION AND PRIORITIZE ACTIONS
   WHAT MUST BE CHANGED, HOW, WHY AND BY WHOM?

5. DETAILED ACTION PLAN: TIMEFRAME, BUDGET, FINANCING PLAN
   HOW TO GET THERE?

6. MECHANISMS TO MONITOR PROGRESS; INDICATORS AND REPORTS TO PROVIDE UPDATES ON STRATEGY ADAPTATION
   HOW TO MAINTAIN PROGRESS?
What is the SPARS process?

Generally, the SPARS process involves the following steps:

**Launching Phase**

**Preparation:**
- National authorities and key stakeholders must understand and acknowledge the importance of SPARS, and commit towards planning and implementation.
- Build a constituency, establish a design team and develop a roadmap.

**Assessing Phase**

**In-Depth Country Assessment (IdCA):**
- Helps understand users’ expectations and needs.
- Results may be used as inputs for designing strategic objectives and action plans, and as a benchmark for measuring subsequent progress.
- It can be used as an advocacy tool for statistical capacity building programs.

**Planning Phase**

**Results-Based Management Approach:**
- Clear vision and mission statements.
- Setting strategic objectives, i.e. goals and related outputs.
- Developing an action plan.
- Costing the action plan and preparing a financing strategy.
- Designing Monitoring and Evaluation plans.

**Implementation Phase**

**Execution:**
- Leverage existing governance and management structures.
- Verify consistency and feasibility of action plans.
- Continuously monitor, evaluate and adjust plans as required.
- Execute communication and advocacy strategies.
To improve agricultural and rural statistics, it is crucial to ensure their inclusion in the NSS and their integration in the NSDS.

**SPARS design and implementation: 10 essential principles**

- **1.** Be backed by political support, and nationally led and owned
- **2.** Be designed through a sound methodological and inclusive approach
- **3.** Be developed as a building block of the National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), if any
- **4.** Cover the entire agricultural and rural sector
- **5.** Be policy-relevant and results-based
- **6.** Take into account existing structures as well as international commitments, such as the SDGs
- **7.** Draw on international statistical standards
- **8.** Set out an integrated and realistic statistical capacity building and surveys programme
- **9.** Be funded by the government, for its implementation
- **10.** Serve as the framework for external assistance

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SPARS design and implementation (2013 - 2018)

Tanzania was one of the first countries to develop an Agriculture Statistics Strategic Plan (ASSP). The objective was to improve agriculture statistical systems and enable them to generate relevant data that is vital for national development initiatives and evidence-based policy-making.

The design phase of the strategy kicked-off in 2012, led by the Agriculture Sector Ministries in collaboration with development partners and supported by FAO and USDA/NASS. As result of the design phase, a comprehensive roadmap was developed to establish a sustainable agricultural statistical system over a timeframe of five years (2014/15 – 2018/19).

In addition to domestic budgetary allocations, the key development partners pledged funds to support various areas and aspects of the ASSP during its implementation phase, e.g. Census of Agriculture – 2016 (EU & WB), Annual Agricultural Sample Survey (USDA & NASS), Improvement of Administrative Data (JICA), Improving Crop Forecasting Estimates (FAO), and Improvement of District Level Data (Irish Aid, FAO & Swiss cooperation).

Over the last six years, more than 50 countries have engaged into the SPARS process. An example of successful implementation: Tanzania