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Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI)

Pilot testing of new approaches for the long-term sustainability of ASTI

Lao People's Democratic Republic, 1 and 2 August 2024

Mission FAO-ASTI Team

1. BACKGROUND

The Agricultural Sciences and Technology Indicators (ASTI) has been a global leading program in compiling and analysing agricultural research data for over two decades. It focuses on institutional developments, investments, human resource capacity, and research outputs in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and has functioned through a vast network of national research agencies, regional coordinating bodies, and international organizations. ASTI's evidence is widely respected and extensively utilized by international organizations, regional bodies, donor organizations, and the international research community to assess the performance and impact of agricultural research in LMICs and set policies and investment priorities for increased agricultural growth and productivity worldwide.

In the past, the data collection involved national survey rounds conducted in collaboration with country focal points, mainly from national agricultural research institutes (NARIs) or similar institutions within the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS). This data collection relied on donor funding and faced variability in the frequency. The program also faced challenges with respect to coverage, timeliness and sustainability.

ASTI program, previously managed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), is now transitioning into FAO, to reinvigorate, expand and make it sustainable. This transition involves both challenges and opportunities for ASTI, requiring improved operational mechanisms, such as a redesign of the data collection process and an expansion of the network of partners involved. The overarching goal of this transition is *to standardize, harmonize and improve the overall quality, timeliness and completeness of the ASTI dataset while making it more sustainable and country owned*. In this context, the role of NARIs will remain crucial for this purpose. At a global level, FAO is working in collaboration with regional organisations to coordinate ASTI while the FAO country offices will articulate with NARS institutions, policy makers, the National Statistical Office (NSO) and the collecting agencies at the national level, fostering dialogs between local actors. In addition, broader institutionalization of ASTI and the adoption of a new data collection model will involve NSOs to facilitate national validation and the integration of ASTI into National Statistical System mechanisms, as a means of enhancing country ownership and use.



2. ASTI COUNTRY PILOTS

To test the new data collection approach and the redesigned questionnaires, FAO and ASTI partners will carry out the pilot in 11 countries. Insights gained from these pilots will help build a solid foundation for the long-term institutionalization of ASTI through the adoption of fit-for-purpose data collection models and the integration into official mechanisms at country level. The country pilots will aim to (i) test institutional arrangements among in-country coordination and data collection agencies, (ii) conduct capacity-development workshops to familiarize countries with the new data collection models and questionnaires and to discuss approaches to survey implementation, (iii) test the new questionnaires and data collection model and collect data in 11 selected countries and (iv) analyse the results and feedback from the piloting phase. In order to evaluate the success of the pilots carried out in each of the 11 selected countries, the following aspects, among others, will be considered:

1. Implement strategies that positively impact response rate and time to data.
2. Establish institutional arrangements to validate data, improve response strategies and institutionalize the survey at the national level.
3. Satisfactory testing of the questionnaires based on the observations made by the respondents in the evaluation instruments.
4. Integrate ASTI as an official survey into the country's statistical system.
5. Entry of results and testing of the Data Management Portal (DMP) provided by FAO, if applicable.
6. National publication of ASTI survey results and their inclusion as periodic report in the national statistical publication schedule.

The outcomes of the pilot will serve as a critical input to designing the ASTI survey for the global roll out in 2025 and the lessons learned will be presented to the rest of the countries on a Regional Workshop in late 2024.

3. INCEPTION WORKSHOP

To initiate the pilot projects, FAO will organize an inception workshop to convene key stakeholders. The workshop will introduce them to the ASTI methodology and procedures and initiate dialogues between relevant stakeholders, such as the NARI and the NSO. These dialogues are intended to unveil and present the new data collection approach, while discussing and exploring strategies for the effective integration of ASTI into the National Statistical System (NSS) mechanisms, a crucial step in providing collection agencies with a clear mandate, quality assurance and official data validation.

4. OBJETIVES

The specific objectives of the workshop are to:

- Introduce the ASTI program and its new operational mechanisms
- Discuss strategies to enhance the long-term institutionalization of ASTI and to maximize policy uptake of ASTI outputs at the national level



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- Initiate dialogs between NAFRI and LSB to build a common understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the new approach
- Train participants on the ASTI methodology, data management portal and survey processing monitoring
- Discuss and collectively formulate an agreed methodology and way forward for implementation of the ASTI pilot in each country, including series of activities to be carried out during the country survey pilots

5. AGENDA Lao People's Democratic Republic

Key themes of the presentations:

1. Introduction to the ASTI program and its transition to FAO.
2. Implementation of the country-pilot project for testing data collection models and the questionnaire.
3. Methodology and operational mechanisms

Thursday, August 1

Morning: Presentation of the ASTI program, its transition to FAO and the new data collection approach to relevant institutions and high level authorities.

Location: FAO (TBD) – Hybrid meeting.

Proposed institutions:

- The National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (NAFRI)
- Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)
- Ministry of Education
- NARS data providers (in-person or virtual):
 - National University of Laos – Faculty of Agriculture & Faculty of Forest Science
 - University of Savanakheth – Faculty of Agriculture
 - University of Souphanouvong – Faculty of Agriculture
 - Champasack University – Faculty of Agriculture
 - National University of Laos
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Afternoon: Workshop with technical teams to discuss methodology and operational mechanisms.

Ubicación: FAO (TBD)

Entidades propuestas:

- NAFRI
- LSB

Friday, August 2

Bilateral meetings with high-level authorities of relevant institutions, as well as continuing discussions with technical teams on joint implementation. Proposed entities:



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- NAFRI
- LSB

ANNEX 1

Agenda: “Pilot project kick-off workshop: New approaches to long-term sustainability of the ASTI program”

Date	Time	Activities
Thurs, 1 Aug 2024	Morning	
	10:00 - 10:30hs	Welcome and introduction of participants (NAFRI / LSB / FAO)
	10:30 – 11:00hs	Introduction to the ASTI program and the transition process to FAO (FAO)
	11:00 – 11:15hs	Q&A
	11:15 – 11:30hs	Coffee break
	11:30 - 11:45hs	ASTI data collection in Lao PDR (NAFRI)
	11:45 – 12:00hs	Pilot project in the context of the institutionalization of ASTI (FAO)
	12:00 - 12:30hs	Discussion - Institutional roles and commitments
	Afternoon (technical team)	
	14:00 - 14:30hs	Review of the ASTI methodology, questionnaire, and data collection process (FAO)
	14:30 - 15:00hs	Characteristics of the National Agricultural Research System (NAFRI)
	15:00 – 15:15hs	Characteristics of the National Statistical System (LSB)
	15:15 – 15:30hs	Coffee break



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	15:30 - 16:15hs	Implementation of the pilot in Lao PDR- Discussion of the work plan
	16:15 - 16:30hs	Closing (NAFRI / LSB / FAO)

ANNEX 2

List of collaborators and institutions in ASTI database

Organization	State	Email	Agency type	Contact_name	Contact_email
Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry- Champasack University	Champasack Province	agri.chu@gmail.com	Higher Education	Souksakhone Vivasane	soukcu@gmail.com
International Water Management Institute		www.iwmi.org	Nonprofit	Viphakone Sirivong, Office Manager	v.sirivong@cgiar.org
Laos NP Agency			Nonprofit		
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry- Department of Planning and Cooperation			Government		
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry- National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute	Vientiane Capital	admin.nafri@gmail.com	Government	Phonepaseuth Vongsipasom	phonepaseuth1981@gmail.com



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