



*Setting up a network
that works for you*

FSIN Launch and Technical Meetings

Meeting Reports

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	4
Results-Oriented Priorities	4
Priorities Concerning the Structure, Governance, and Management of FSIN	7
Key Recommendations.....	8
Proceedings	10
Session on food and nutrition security information	10
Session on market information systems	12
FSIN Side Event at the CFS.....	16
Summary	16
Discussion.....	17
Annexes	18
Annex I – Summary FSIN Online Stakeholder Consultation	18
Annex II - Agenda FSIN Launch and Technical Meetings.....	21
Annex III – List of participants FSIN Launch and Technical Meetings	23
Annex IV – Agenda: FSIN Side Event at the CFS	25
Annex V – List of participants FSIN Side Event at the CFS.....	26
Annex VI - FSIN Advisory Board Members/Attendees	27

Introduction

Officially launched on 11 October 2012 in the presence of a wide range of stakeholders, the Food Security Information Network (FSIN) is a global community of practice that aims to strengthen food and nutrition security information systems and networks at the country and regional levels to feed into greater evidence-based decision-making by all actors, including governments, NGO's and the private sector. The launch activities consisted of:

- The first FSIN Advisory Board meeting (10 October 2012): Mr. Baba Dioum was elected as Advisory Board chairperson. Mr. Dioum is also the Coordinator of the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of West and Central Africa (CMA/AOC). The Advisory Board members agreed on terms of reference and provided guidance, among others, on how FSIN can add value to existing initiatives.
- The launch event: the launch kicked off with an opening session (11 October 2012) hosted by senior managers from FAO, WFP and IFPRI, who confirmed their commitment and institutional support to the FSIN. The FSIN Secretariat and the Advisory Board Chairman then presented FSIN's vision and objectives, while valuable feedback was received from the full Advisory Board and the audience in two panel sessions.
- Technical meetings: two technical sessions (11-12 October 2012), including panel discussions, were held on (i) food and nutrition security information, and (ii) market information systems. These sessions provided participants with an opportunity to share knowledge on these topics based on country, regional and global experiences.
- A Procedural meeting: an afternoon session was organised (12 October 2012) to discuss the next steps of FSIN; priorities and recommendations for start-up activities.
- FSIN side event during the CFS: on 16 October 2012, a side event was held during the annual session of Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as an information session for a broad audience. The FSIN Secretariat and key partners gave their perspectives on the objectives and relevance of FSIN; CFS delegates and other participants showed a high interest in the initiative.

The outcome and key recommendations of the Friday afternoon procedural meeting are captured in the **Executive Summary**. In the remaining part of the document, technical meetings are summarised. Although procedural issues were occasionally also discussed during the technical sessions, the Executive Summary compiles all procedural issues. The third section summarises the **FSIN Side Event at the CFS**.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This document summarizes the meetings that were part of the launch of the Food Security Information Network (FSIN), which took place on 11-12 October 2012 at FAO Headquarters in Rome.

More than fifty participants representing approximately thirty institutions from a diverse group of regions and countries contributed to active discussions that led to consensus regarding FSIN's vision *as a global Community of Practice (CoP) sharing best practices and working to strengthen information systems for food and nutrition security*, and validated FSIN's three core objectives:

- Strengthen national and regional food and nutrition security information systems;
- Establish standards and harmonize methods using a bottom-up approach, from country level, to regional level, to global level; and
- Strengthen the links between food and nutrition security information, analysis, and decision making for programming and policy.

The FSIN launch deliberations also produced a set of recommendations and priorities for FSIN's strategic direction, which are summarized here and organized as follows:

- For each of the FSIN's anticipated results, the key questions that were raised are mentioned, as well as the decisions and priorities that emerged;
- The outcomes of discussions on the structure, governance, and management of the FSIN are presented; and
- Key recommendations proposed by the Advisory Board members (see Annex VI) and FSIN stakeholders to guide the FSIN's strategic direction are described.

Results-Oriented Priorities

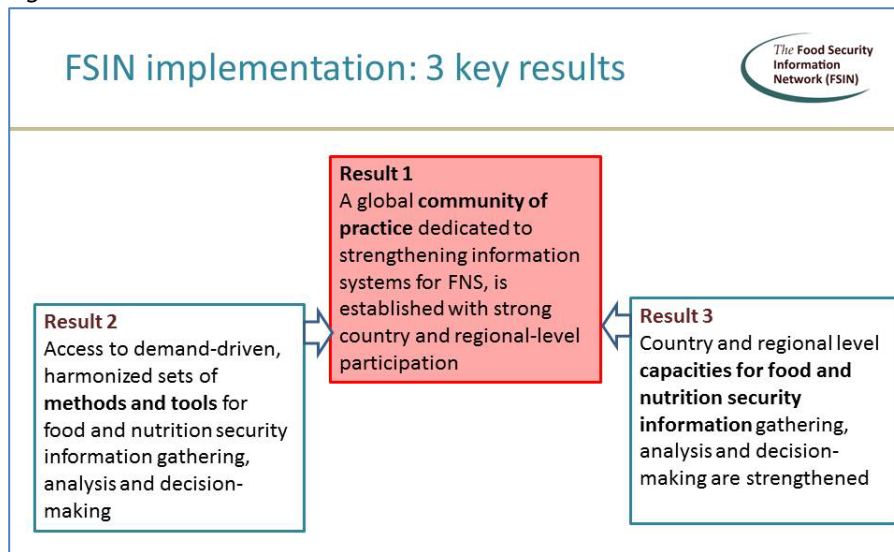
Results and priorities for achievement were discussed within the context of FSIN's three result areas (see Figure 1). The questions that were raised and the recommendations that were made are presented below.

Result 1: A global Community of Practice

Key questions:

- Who should be members of the CoP? What criteria should be used to establish members, and how loose or selective should such criteria be?
- What incentives should exist to encourage prospective members to join the network, and how might incentives encourage active participation after joining?
- What are the key services that the FSIN should offer members via a FSIN website?

Figure 1: FSIN Result Areas



Recommendations and priorities:

- Develop membership criteria for the FSIN Community of Practice. Criteria are needed at the individual and institutional level. Procedures should exist for both initiating and discontinuing membership.
- Once criteria have been established, issue and promote a call for membership among institutions and individuals.
- Focus on the promotion of membership at country and regional levels.
- Develop a FSIN website, and begin offering key services to members. As the FSIN network becomes established, it is envisioned that network members will have access to services and resources such as:
 - A library of key tools/resources for undertaking food security and nutrition analysis. Such tools would be validated or tested by a network of experts applying best practices.
 - An internet based web portal for access to data through links.
 - A forum on specific technical topics to discuss problems and solutions of analysts, practitioners, and decision makers. Topics could touch on data collection, analysis, reporting, programme design, policy formation, or a wide variety of other issues.
 - Journal of publication of the network. Much of the dialogue related to the proposed journal focused on creating publishing, “recognition,” and career development opportunities for authors.
 - A pool of experts who can provide advice.
 - Regular events for sharing practices (country or regional level).
 - Exchange/Advice on good training opportunities.
 - Information/connection to existing food and nutrition security networks at different levels.

Incentives and services that FSIN offers members will expand and evolve over time. An experimental approach will be used in order to effectively respond to changing needs and interests.

Result 2: Access to demand-driven harmonized sets of standards, methods, and tools

Key questions:

- Should a bottom up approach be pursued?
- Should the FSIN Secretariat conduct an initial inventory of standards, methods, and tools currently used for food and nutrition security analysis?
- How should indicators for harmonization be prioritized?
- How should tools, data, and protocols be shared through an FSIN platform?

Recommendations and priorities:

- A bottom up approach should be pursued.
- FSIN should leverage existing networks, initiatives and capacities to better understand needs. NEPAD's Planning and Coordination Agency (NPCA) and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) were highlighted as examples of existing capacities.
- Promote regional and continental level links to more aggregate global information systems through global level institutions such as the CFS.
- Regarding an initial inventory of standards, methods, and tools currently used for food and nutrition security analysis, a less ambitious and more practical approach is needed.
- A few priority thematic areas could serve to narrow the scope of such an inventory; thereby making the process more achievable.
- A clear priority for FSIN is the development of a process for the harmonization of indicators and tools. Examining how other organizations successfully managed similar challenges (UNICEF and their SMART¹ approach was cited as an example), was promoted as a learning opportunity that FSIN should explore.
- Harmonization work should begin at the indicator level. FSIN should "map out" the current utilization of various food and nutrition security indicators and then provide context specific guidance on indicator use.
- Endorse an analytical framework, and show how the harmonization and utilization of standards, methods, and tools will contribute to improved analysis. Examine how improved analysis can be better integrated with decision making processes, for positive impacts on food and nutrition security.
- Develop a framework of indicators, and provide guidance to users to address questions such as "Which indicators are most appropriate for different contexts and situations?"

Result 3: National and regional level capacities are strengthened

Key question:

- What role should FSIN play for capacity strengthening?

Recommendations and priorities:

- FSIN should mostly play a "facilitating role," as opposed to a more direct "implementing" or hands-on capacity strengthening role. Opportunities for facilitation were identified, related activities include:
 - Identifying and highlighting capacity development priorities through "mapping" work),

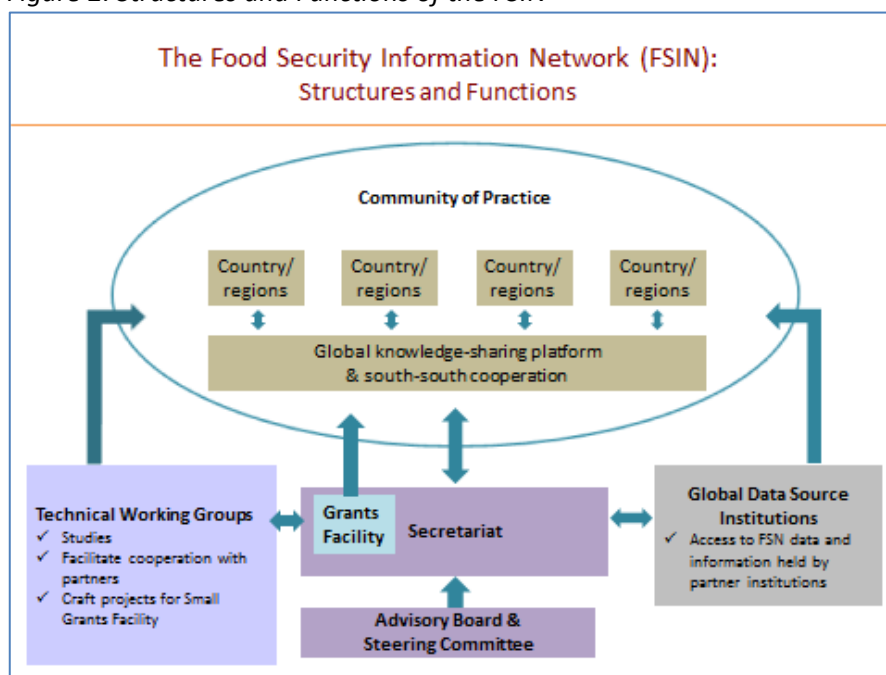
¹ SMART/Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions <http://www.smartindicators.org/>

- Making available effective training materials and best practices,
 - Promoting “training of trainers” activities, e-learning, and face-to-face learning
 - Offering a pool of experts that FSIN members could contact when faced with challenges pertaining to data collection, analysis, reporting, or other professional duties and responsibilities.
 - Encourage work with Universities at country and regional levels.
- Five clear priorities for FSIN were identified with regards to Result 3:
 1. Develop a typology of countries so an appropriate selection of countries for mapping exercises can be made. The selected countries (and/or regions) should have expressed a clear demand for a mapping exercise, and should be representative of the typology, including countries with need and countries from which we can learn.
 2. Map existing ongoing capacity strengthening efforts.
 3. Identify key priorities for capacity strengthening initiatives.
 4. Identify key trainings to be offered and shared through a FSIN platform.
 5. Identify the most appropriate training delivery means (e-learning, face-to-face, etc.), for certain situations.

Priorities Concerning the Structure, Governance, and Management of FSIN

In addition to prioritizing planned achievements and result areas, discussions about FSIN’s structure, governance, and management (see Figure 2) took place. The main decisions and priorities that emerged from these discussions follow the diagram below, which depicts the envisioned FSIN structure.

Figure 2: Structures and Functions of the FSIN



Recommendations and priorities:

- Meeting participants emphasized the need to strive for and maintain as much simplicity as possible with regards to FSIN's structure and operational processes.
- Establish a FSIN Secretariat. A relatively small number of staff to constitute the Secretariat needs to be recruited and hired. In the interim, staff from FAO, IFPRI and WFP will continue to volunteer time to push the FSIN agenda forward.
- Finalize a FSIN Secretariat Terms of Reference.
- Finalize a 2012-2013 Secretariat workplan².
- The agreed term/duration for Advisory Board service will be two years.
- Develop a set of defined procedures for electing Advisory Board members.
- Finalize a Terms of Reference for the Technical Working Group (TWG).
- Define selection criteria for TWG members.
- Develop a Grants Facility Terms of Reference that clarifies the role of the facility, and its operations and management.
- Attention needs to be given to the schedule of the AB's meetings as well as to maintaining regular communication between the AB, the Secretariat, and the Technical Working Group (TWG).
- Liaise with donors to develop a longer term FSIN funding strategy (for beyond 2013).
- Organize FSIN-related meeting, workshops, seminars, etc.

Key Recommendations

Fourteen important recommendations emerged from the FSIN meetings:

1. FSIN should act as a knowledge sharing platform and network; essentially a **Community of Practice (CoP) aimed at strengthening food security and nutrition information systems.**
2. **FSIN should not do capacity development itself, but rather facilitate capacity development** through the numerous initiatives that already exist.
3. **FSIN should avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts** by striving to improve coordination between the various players, institutions, and networks.
4. **FSIN needs to be demand-driven**, meaning it will have to respond to capacity strengthening needs and demands originating from country and regional levels.
5. **Adopt an integrated approach** by addressing all four pillars of the food security definition and the key determinants of good nutrition. Hence, nutrition should be an integral part of the scope of FSIN.
6. **Produce early results.** FSIN will have to produce very clear, tangible and measurable results during its first years of existence, to prove its value.

² Many meeting participants highlighted the fact that individual FSIN stakeholder institutions (for example FAO, IFPRI, WFP and many others) already have "FSIN-like" or "FSIN-complementary" activities incorporated within their single agency work plans. In addition, FAO and WFP have an existing work plan associated with their Joint Strategy for Strengthening Information Systems for Food and Nutrition Security. The main point related to these discussions was that the FSIN work plan should clearly distinguish between outputs and activities that are "new and additional" as compared to outputs and activities that are already ongoing or planned.

7. **Be clear about the FSIN Governance structure.** The Advisory Board should provide strategic advice to the FSIN Secretariat. Daily operational decisions and related activity matters are the responsibility of the Secretariat.
8. **Project documents should be revised.** Project documents prepared by the FAO, IFPRI and WFP need to be revised, taking into account the feedback received from the Advisory Board and other stakeholders. The revised version should be clearer about what FSIN will achieve, with reference to benchmarks.
9. **FSIN should serve as a knowledge platform, for value-added analysis.** As data and analytical outputs are shared amongst members, new opportunities for follow-on value-added analysis will emerge. For example, an analysis of trade across borders between two nations could later be replicated and expanded to incorporate additional national datasets, resulting in an expanded and fuller picture of regional trade dynamics.
10. **Establish and promote a diverse group of stakeholders within the network.** Institutions from the public sector, the private sector, and from broader civil society are all needed.
11. Ensure that a **critical mass** of individuals with both **technical** and **management** profiles are members of the network; both sufficient technical expertise and **decision makers** are needed.
12. The **structure and management of the FSIN network should be** as **simple** as possible, and linked to other existing networks. Avoid multiple vertical layers within the structure. **Ensure and strengthen ties between technical experts and decisions makers** that have responsibility for programme management or policy formation.
13. A clear strategy is needed to **ensure sustainability**. **Give adequate attention to resource mobilization, ownership, and buy-in** at all levels within the network.
14. **Adopt and embrace a results oriented framework** that is supported with efficient management and governance.

Proceedings

Technical Meetings

Session on food and nutrition security information

The following paragraphs summarise key discussion points from 'Technical Session 1':

Information must be demand-driven

Food and nutrition security information is collected for different purposes and audiences. Some of the most common purposes are programme planning and investment, policy development, food security monitoring and early warning, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Users of information are not just governments, but also farmers, donors, researchers and many others. As different users have different needs, the information must be disseminated in different formats. Therefore, information systems for food and nutrition security (ISFNS) have to be carefully designed to respond as much as possible to the needs of their users to maximize ownership and the impact of the limited resources available.

Limited sustainability of capacities developed through donor-funded projects

There has been limited sustainability of project-driven technical assistance to strengthening food and nutrition security information activities at country and regional levels. Institutional structures and capacities developed during the course of a project tend to weaken substantially, once donor-funded project support ends, as there is often insufficient ownership or funding from the national government. Therefore, when projects are designed, the exit strategy should be well thought through. The most sustainable systems are those that respond to a clear local demand, which usually ensures their continued funding, combined with a partnership or network approach that involves government leadership and collaboration with development partners (see below). To become less dependent on donor funding, national information systems may also identify alternative financing mechanism. A way to do that is by requesting payments for data or information that is provided to certain users. This strategy has a disadvantage in that it impedes the sharing of data as a public good.

Network approach as a viable alternative

A network approach is crucial to create sustainable, low cost structures that can pull together information and expertise from different government agencies and ministries, development agencies, NGO's and the private sector. By including users and producers it also enables a continuous dialogue that ensures the information produced is demand driven. Examples of applications of networks approaches at country level that were presented include Mozambique's Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition (SETSAN), Cambodia's Food Security Forum (FSF) and Technical Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition (TWG-FSN) and the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG).

Linking information to decision making

Much of the food security information produced is not used for decision making. This is mainly because the information is either not demand-driven, not analyzed properly or of poor quality, or because communication skills are lacking to convey the key messages (including proposals for action). Another reason can be that the lines of communication are not well organized between information producers and users. It is important to recall that there is a wide range of decision makers beyond government, and therefore data and analysis is most valuable when shared with others as a public good.

The need for analysis across sectors

Integrated, multi-sectoral analysis is needed to address the food and nutrition security problems holistically, based on the four pillars of food security (availability, access, utilization, stability) and the three main determinants of good nutrition (access to food, care and feeding practices and health and sanitation). This means that the ISFNS data, indicators and analyses need to cover all of the food security and nutrition dimensions across different sectors (agriculture, health, markets and trade, finance, etc). The “independence” of analysis also needs to be ensured, to avoid situations where governments or agencies try to understate or overstate the seriousness of the situation.

There is a strong need to improve access to existing methods, standards and tools for food security and nutrition data and information collection and analysis, especially at the national and sub-national level. At the local level, simple tools are needed that can be easily used. The formats for data collection that are used by governments in some countries make analysis of these data more difficult. Harmonization of production calendars could be useful for comparability of data regionally and globally. Agencies with global mandates should harmonize the methods, standards and tools they promote (often separately) at country or regional levels. They should also work towards the harmonisation and/or consolidation of the variety of food and nutrition security indicators released globally.

Capacity development needs

Over the past 20-30 years, many ISFNS capacity development efforts have not had a lasting impact, often as a result of staff turnover or other factors reported above. Staff turnover is often the result of developing country governments not being able to retain well-trained food security analysts. The answer is not just matter of higher wages, but also better career prospects, education and other incentives to encourage government staff to stay longer in their position. Another option is to train more people at national level to become food security and nutrition analysts and hence build a pool of future experts to replace those who move on. An advantage of a high turnover is that people trained in food and nutrition security information analysis end up in various organizations; this potential for a broad organizational reach is useful when building a community of practice.

Capacity development is not just needed at country and regional level, but importantly also at the sub-national level. This calls for the development of dedicated food and nutrition security curricula, in addition to other face-to-face learning and e-learning, which can play an important role. Several priority capacity development needs were identified, including soft skills (e.g. report writing and presentations); better understanding of the food and nutrition security concepts – particularly for decision makers, politicians and the media; language and communication skills; use of ICT; training of trainers; and the creation of a critical mass (or pools) of experts at country level. Often people have all the hard skills required, but lack the ability to communicate results to decision makers. Development of certain soft skills may help, but the problem might also lie in the institutional setting in which the food security and nutrition analysts work.

Furthermore, capacity development efforts must respond to the needs and demands in the respective countries and regions, which may differ considerably from one to the other. Thus, it is important to identify capacity development needs, while closely involving the beneficiaries at individual and institutional level. Follow up training is important to ensure acquired skills are put into practice.

Data dissemination and communication

It is important that data and information is disseminated and communicated quickly and efficiently, as there is often a limited window of opportunity during which the information can influence timely decision making and action. In regard to data sharing, cooperation between different government agencies, ministries and other entities is often still lacking. A multi-sectoral food and nutrition security policy framework can encourage different government entities to share their data and information and cooperate better. Regional information systems often depend on country level data or information to be sent regularly. Thus, delays in generating and disseminating country-level data affect the timeliness and effectiveness of these regional information systems. The value of data increases when it is widely shared, also because it enables comparison with other data in surrounding countries.

Session on market information systems

A separate session was dedicated to market information systems, as a particular category of ISFNS. Market information systems play an important role in providing market transparency, while also strengthening the understanding (and addressing the impacts on developing countries) of the global food price shocks seen over the last years. Various agencies with a global mandate (including FAO, IFPRI, FEWSNET and WFP) maintain their own global market information systems and databases, and there seems to be a scope for enhanced cooperation and/or harmonisation of the data sets and analysis.

Food and nutrition security analysis based on market information

For market information to be useful for decision makers – especially in the trade sector and among the farming community – it has to be timely. For a more comprehensive analysis, information is needed on many factors, beyond just food market prices: market intelligence, food price time series, volumes of trade, amounts sold and consumed by households, harvest times, production estimates, and food balance sheets. A residual food balance sheet is sometimes the only possibility to obtain complete information, as private traders are not always willing to provide data on their stock levels.

Understanding cross border trade is also important for analyzing the food security situation. Even when there are export bans, cross border trade usually continues informally. Regional market information in general is needed to understand the specific situation in the separate countries. Hence, regional trade information systems that receive inputs from all countries in the respective region are important.

Some country and regional representatives highlighted the importance of being able to estimate future prices in food and nutrition security analysis, but it was acknowledged that is very difficult. In particular in Africa, price determinants go beyond production forecasts, especially in countries subject to internal conflicts. Importantly, for price forecasting, one needs to have a good understanding of the market's characteristics. Tools are also needed to help determine the impact of (often changing) government policies on prices. Furthermore, market data collection methods and terminology need to be harmonised to enhance comparability and wider use of market data.

Use and purpose of market information

Users of market information include farmers, traders, and government, but also others such as banks who use grain as collateral for loans. Traders in particular want frequent information. Governments use the information, among others, for policy analysis. Market information can help farmers and traders to know where they can sell or buy, and for what price. Although farmers will not always get the advertised price, knowing the going price helps them to bargain. In West Africa, the RESIMAO market information

system provides the contact details of traders to facilitate contact among buyers and sellers. Creating market transparency with good market information also helps to calm markets and prevent price shocks that have a negative impact on food and nutrition security.

Capacity development needs

Individual capacities need to be developed to improve the effectiveness of market information systems and to influence decision making. This requires development of general analytical skills, communication skills, and training of producers, traders and decision makers to better access, understand and use market information. If government decision-makers, including politicians, understand the value of market information, it is also more likely the systems will receive appropriate funding and will be sustained. Other needs that were expressed are website development, improved infrastructure, and staff incentives to perform well.

Sustainability of market information systems

As with other information systems, market information systems need to be demand driven to be sustainable. Therefore it is crucial to understand the demand well. Market information systems are also looking for different ways to find a sustainable funding mechanism. The Cambodian Agricultural Marketing Office (AMO) is generating funds by selling time slots that accompany radio broadcasts of market information. Possible ways to reduce costs and at the same time increase timeliness include the use of SMS systems or making contributors directly responsible for putting information online.

Global market information systems

A number of global market information systems were presented and discussed (see below). Although their roles seem to be largely complementary, some overlap was observed and therefore there appears to be ample space for increased cooperation and harmonization of efforts. Many of these systems also support capacity development at the country and regional level. It has to be ensured that these systems strengthen and build on country and regional level systems, rather than undermine them by creating parallel structures.

AMIS

The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) is an interagency initiative that was set up by the G20 in 2011 to enhance international market transparency and to improve policy coordination in times of crisis. The system covers four key commodities: wheat, rice, maize and soybeans. Besides the G20 countries, AMIS includes seven other major food exporting and importing countries. Together these countries represent the lion's share of world food production and trade. AMIS aims to produce a global good that is relevant for all countries, and is trying to create synergies with existing systems and fill the gaps. It is not a replacement for country and regional level market information systems. AMIS plans to support capacity development in the participating countries. Constraints that AMIS has experienced so far include a lack of reliable harmonized data (especially on stocks) and weak forecasts. For increased comparability of data, there is a need to harmonize the starting points of production calendars. Also, there is currently no clear indicator that determines whether there is a food market crisis or not.

IFPRI's food price volatility tool

IFPRI's food price volatility tool identifies whether prices are erratic at a certain point in time, in particular during food price crises. This is useful for food importing countries, which will be able to detect when international prices are not supported by market fundamentals. During such times, it would be unwise for countries to buy large quantities of food, as the price is likely to come down later to

a lower price level. In addition to this tool, the need was expressed for a tool to better understand transmission of international prices to the national level.

FAO's GIEWS

FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS) monitors the food security situation around the world, in assembling and analysing data and information obtained from all countries. Regular reports and information is published at the global level. GIEWS monitors crop conditions, crop production forecasts, food prices, food policies, and access to food. It also monitors the food supply and demand situation through food balance sheets. The system received much attention and was strengthened during the 2008/2009 food price crisis, when there was a clear need at the international level to know which countries were worst affected. There was also strong demand for information from NGOs and the media.

Constraints that the system faces are that in some countries there is lack of data, and in other countries there is 'too much' data, with different entities collecting the same information. GIEWS is working with India and other countries to adapt the GIEWS analytical tools at country level. To facilitate data exchange with countries, it is exploring web-server functionalities so that databases can be linked in a dynamic way. GIEWS has recently started a new tool through which food prices (wholesale and retail) of the main products in 82 countries can be monitored. The national level sources are provided to give credit to the agencies that collected the information. Participants at the meeting questioned whether the IFPRI and GIEWS global price volatility tools could be harmonised.

USAID's FEWS NET

USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) is using market data and information collected at national and sub-national level by in-country market information systems. FEWS NET conducts its own food and nutrition security analysis of those data. Month on month changes in food prices are an important indicator. The level itself does not indicate very much, but the direction of the price change, combined with the usual trend during the respective part of the year, provides indications on how the food and nutrition security situation is evolving.

It was found that FAO's food price index is not a good indicator for food security at country level, because it is based on international prices. FEWS NET developed regional food price indices for different regions in Africa, which proved to be better indicators for food security analysis at country level. FEWS NET doesn't see data collection and storage as its core task. It would gladly rely on another information system, as long as that system responds to its information needs. It is expected that information that is provided by 'the crowd' is going to be an important data source in the future. Aware of the increased value of data when shared, FEWS NET is ready to share its data with other entities. Of major concern to USAID is the poor state of basic country food production data; thus it was suggested that FSIN work with the Global Strategy on Rural and Agricultural Statistics to ensure its success.

IFPRI's food security portal

IFPRI's food security portal is a website that brings together different sources of market information.

WFP's food price monitoring

WFP collects food price information only in countries where WFP is active. The system primarily serves demand within the organization to support decision making. Many of WFP's food assistance interventions are now market based (vouchers, cash for food); hence, good market information is

essential. But the information generated has also become a public good that is used by other parties, including companies, INGOs, donors and research organizations. The Programme also publishes a global bulletin based on the collected information and analysis. WFP either works with the national agriculture (or other) ministry to obtain the data from their market information system, or sets up its own local level data collection system when the existing system does not fully cover WFP's information needs. Of the 70 countries covered by WFP, 20 countries have a system that is run by WFP. In these countries, the government market information system usually is either not active in area(s) of concern for WFP, or the system does not provide information at a sufficiently low level. WFP cooperates with its government partners to develop their capacities; for example, it is investing in SMS systems in some countries.

IFPRI's SAKSS

IFPRI's Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (SAKSS) is a system set up with support from USAID to monitor the impact of investments in agriculture and food security in Africa. SAKSS nodes in different countries collect information, usually from the same national information systems that are used by other global market information systems. However, the information is synthesized for monitoring country progress in agricultural development. The information collected for the different countries feeds into the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS), which is used to monitor progress under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

FSIN Side Event at the CFS

16 October 2012

Summary

The FSIN Secretariat organized a Side Event during the 29th session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which took place at FAO headquarters in Rome from 15-20 October 2012. Given the CFS's heavy agenda with a number of parallel sessions, the FSIN Side Event had to be held in the evening, which significantly reduced the number of expected participants. Fortunately, those who did participate had a strong interest in FSIN, and a very interesting discussion took place following a panel presentation by a four persons, who introduced the FSIN while also giving a country and a donor perspective:

Roy Stacy, FSIN Consultant, with longstanding experience in the field of food security information, gave an introduction to the FSIN initiative. He explained how several events led to the launch of the FSIN, including the 2009 Joint Evaluation of FAO and WFP support to Information Systems for Food Security, the FSIN Symposium in 2010 organised by the European Commission, and the consultative conference on FSIN held in 2011 in Nairobi.

Joyce Luma, Chief of WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) unit and member of the FSIN Secretariat, gave an overview of the FSIN initiative. In her presentation, she explained FSIN's objectives, expected results, priorities for its first year of operation, and organizational set up.

Nasser Farid, Director General of the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) in Bangladesh and Secretary of the Bangladesh National Food Security Committee attended the FSIN launch and technical meetings from 11-12 October, and was also a delegate at the CFS. He gave a country perspective on the FSIN initiative. He said he hoped FSIN would help Bangladesh to strengthen its food and nutrition security analysis, so he can provide the Cabinet with more reliable information. He also expressed his expectation that FSIN will enable the international agencies to align their efforts, so that countries receive harmonized technical support from these agencies, and international information streams are consolidated.

Elisabeth Kvitashvili, Alternate Permanent Representative of the United States Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome, and Humanitarian Affairs Counsellor at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) gave a donor's perspective on the FSIN. She explained that USAID has invested considerably in its FEWS NET system, which has become an important tool for USAID's internal decision making. However, she prefers to see countries develop their own systems, so they can properly analyze the food and nutrition security situation themselves, and express their assistance needs to donors accordingly. FSIN can help developing countries doing that. By bringing together different information streams, both from the development side and the emergency side, FSIN is also expected to play an important role in the renewed international focus on resilience building. Representing one of FSIN's initial donors, she said FSIN would have to show its ability to bring together the different international agencies, each with its own interests, and align their efforts to support country-led development.

Discussion

During the discussion that followed, participants asked for more clarification on FSIN's role and its relation vis-à-vis a number of existing regional and global information systems and initiatives, in particular FEWS NET, VAM, AMIS, AFSIS, SADC, and the CILSS Cadre Harmonisé (Harmonized Framework) for conducting food security and vulnerability analysis. It was clarified that FSIN aims to cooperate with these and other initiatives, while also strengthening them. FSIN is a network, not an information system, and will not produce data itself or replace other systems. However, FSIN will provide a platform for exchange of knowledge and ideas, while also bringing different information streams together, so users can have a better overview of the different data available and have better access to knowledge, data and information.

The added value of FSIN also lies in its role to increase cooperation and promote the harmonization of practices, while aiming to reduce duplication of efforts. To harmonize the approaches and tools that are used by the different agencies, an interagency initiative is needed. Three agencies, FAO, IFPRI and WFP, have taken the lead in setting up this network, but they intend to work together through the network with many more institutions. FSIN will also facilitate capacity development at country and regional level, and will form a Community of Practice to help food security and nutrition professionals in their analytical and information systems work. There are big opportunities for cooperation among developing countries to learn from each other (e.g. through south-south cooperation), and FSIN aims to facilitate that. Members of the network will be comprised of individuals and institutions (ideally, with individual experts representing their respective institutions).

Questions were also asked about the current status of FSIN, and how interested parties can buy into it – and become members of the community of practice. It was explained that FSIN was launched in the week preceding the CFS meetings, with the first Advisory Board meeting held on 10th October 2012, followed by an official launch, and a series of technical sessions. During these meetings, substantial feedback was received from approximately 50 participants representing a wide range of stakeholders. FSIN's work plans will be redrafted following these discussions. The different components of the FSIN still have to be set up. Furthermore, while some start-up funding has been received from the EC and USAID, additional funding will be needed in subsequent years for FSIN to become fully operational.

Annexes

Annex I – Summary FSIN Online Stakeholder Consultation³

5 September - 3 October 2012

Overview

The FSIN online stakeholder consultation solicited interventions on 3 topics:

- Topic 1 - Do you support the idea of a Food Security Information Network (FSIN)? What are your expectations?
- Topic 2 - What are the information gaps and related capacity gaps?
- Topic 3 - How to make the FSIN work for you?

Each of these 3 topics corresponds to one of 3 specific predefined objectives of this consultation:

- To validate whether the overall thrust of the FSIN initiative fits the perceived needs
- To identify key gaps in food security and nutrition information, and related capacity development
- To identify how the FSIN can best communicate with its members

Each topic was introduced with a short introductory statement; in addition, a number of specific questions were presented for participants to respond to. Based on the various interventions, we collected a good number of views, opinions and ideas from the participants. Each topic was wrapped-up with a synthesis note by the facilitator that summarized the points raised in the different interventions on the topic in question.

Overall summary and outcome of the FSIN Forum discussion

On the whole, the FSIN Forum discussion yielded good feedback, although the number of responses received was very limited (only 17 contributions across the three topics out of a total of 340 invited participants). Nevertheless, the summary notes (below) provide some very interesting inputs for shaping the FSIN as it is being rolled out. In that sense, it can be concluded that the objectives of the consultation were met.

All of the participants received updates through a listserv that was created. The list of participants at the on-line consultation included the participants to Brussels symposium of September 2010 and the consultative conference in September 2011, where the idea for a FSIN was first conceived and a road map for its establishment was endorsed.

Furthermore, field staff working on food and nutrition security information of the three organizations supporting the establishment of FSIN (FAO, IFPRI and WFP) were invited, in addition to known experts from respective countries or regions (working for a national or regional level organizations, such as a

³ Full proceedings and other information related to the FSIN Online Stakeholder Consultation is available on <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/fsin/>

government ministry or agency, a local NGO, a local university or a regional organization). It is difficult to understand why only a few persons on the listserv contributed to the consultation, but it is important to draw lessons for FSIN's future communication with its members. Some possible explanations for the low response rate may have been related to the following:

- The timing of the consultation at the end of the summer period (people may not have had sufficient time, as they were busy with picking up on their activities following the holiday period)
- People did not see the urgency of responding – either because they already knew about the FSIN or they may not have felt sufficient ownership (yet) in the FSIN and its objectives.

A useful outcome of the consultation is that FSIN now has a listserv with around 340 experts, which it can use as the basis of its network/community of practice. While the majority of these people did not participate actively in the online stakeholder consultation, they have been thoroughly informed of the FSIN initiative and its objectives.

Summary of the three discussion Topics

Topic 1 - Do you support the idea of a Food Security Information Network (FSIN)? What are your expectations?

- There is wide support for the FSIN initiative and its overall thrust. All participants welcomed the initiative.
- The strong focus on capacity development under FSIN is acknowledged as key to meeting FSIN's objectives. Standardization of methods for data collection and analysis was stressed by some participants as another area where they expect FSIN to play a key role. Advocacy and awareness raising were also mentioned as important roles of FSIN.
- Participants seem to be motivated and ready to cooperate with other stakeholders. To ensure a bottom up approach it was suggested that countries learn from each other.

Topic 2 - What are the information gaps and related capacity gaps?

- There are important gaps in data collection, storage and access. Strengthening capacities for data collection and transfer, development of standardized tools and instruments for data collection, development of protocols for data sharing and enhanced cooperation between different information gathering actors were suggested as ways to remedy these gaps.
- There are important gaps in data analysis. Strengthening of analysis skills, in particular multi-sectoral institutional analysis capacities, and provision of analytical tools were suggested to address these gaps.
- There are important gaps in communication, coordination and decision making. Development of communication and presentation skills and strengthening of the capacities of decision makers were suggested.
- General issues mentioned included lack of government ownership, weak means of operation (internet, IT equipment and others), and lack of finances and capacities at regional networks to sustain their activities, and support decision making at the regional level.

Topic 3 - How to make the FSIN work for you?

- Participants stressed the importance of using lessons learnt in some countries, to support existing food and nutrition security networks. In addition, a number of concrete suggestions were made on how FSIN could support existing networks

- Learning from the experiences of others is also important for facilitating the creation of national and regional networks where they don't exist yet. To that end it was suggested to facilitate direct communication between members of existing networks and those who are interested to create one.

- Suggestions on how FSIN could use its future website and other means of communication to support national and regional level food and nutrition security network included interactive exchange of information between members, providing relevant documents of standards, methods and tools, and providing access to relevant new research.

Annex II - Agenda FSIN Launch and Technical Meetings

Thursday, 11 th October		
Time	Topic	Speakers
FSIN Launch (AUSTRIA ROOM, C building, 2nd floor, C 250)		
08:30 – 09:00	Arrival of participants	
09:00 – 10:00	FSIN Overview presentation Background, Vision and Objectives	<i>Roy Stacy</i> , Senior Consultant <i>Maximo Torero</i> , IFPRI
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee Break	
10:30 – 11:15	Official Launch of the FSIN	Senior managers of FAO, IFPRI and WFP Chairman of the Advisory Board
11:15 – 12:00	Panel 1 : Advisory Board Members perspective on FSIN Initiative Endorsement and national / regional perspective	<i>Baba Dioum</i> , Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of West and Central Africa <i>Ana Patricia Palma</i> , SICA, El Salvador <i>Michael Roberto Kenyi Legge</i> , Minister of Agriculture & Forestry, Central Equatoria State-Juba, RSS <i>Sheryl Hendrix</i> , University of Pretoria
12:00 – 12:45	Panel 2 : Donors perspective on FSIN Initiative Support, challenges and expectations	<i>Jon Brause</i> , USAID <i>Maria Paris-Ketting</i> , EC <i>Christopher Delgado</i> , World Bank
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch	
Technical Session 1 - Food and nutrition security information : analysis and capacity development at country and regional levels (MEXICO ROOM, D building, 2nd floor, D 273)		
14:00 – 15:30	Panel 1 : Gaps and constraints relative to access to demand-driven, harmonized sets of standards, methods and tools for food and nutrition security information	<i>U Tin Htut Oo</i> , SEC, Myanmar <i>Francisca Cabral</i> , SETSAN, Mozambique <i>Srun Darith</i> , TWG-FSN/CARD, Cambodia <i>Thomas Awuor</i> , KFSSG, Kenya
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee break	
15:45 – 17:15	Panel 2 : Capacity development needs relative to food and nutrition security information in terms of skills and institutional /organizational development	<i>Ana Patricia Palma</i> , SICA, El Salvador <i>Nasser Farid</i> , Ministry of food & disaster management, Bangladesh <i>Merna Hasun Naser</i> , Ministry of Planning & International Cooperation, Yemen <i>Kay Sharp</i> , Save the Children
17:15 – 17:30	Wrap-up TS 1 and FSIN priorities	
18:00 – 19:30	Cocktail (<i>FAO Terrace, AVENTINO ROOM</i>)	

Friday, 12 th October		
Time	Topic	Speakers
Technical Session 2 - Market information systems, analysis and capacity development at country and regional levels (MEXICO ROOM, D building, 2nd floor, D 273)		
08:30 – 10:00	Panel 1 : The demand for market information and market transparency Associated constraints and capacity development needs	<i>Meach Yady</i> , Agriculture Marketing office, Cambodia <i>Janet Kalulu Ngombalu</i> , EAGC, Kenya <i>Salifou Diarra</i> , MIS / RESIMAO, Mali <i>Denis Drechsler</i> , AMIS
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee Break	
10:30 – 11:45	Panel 2 : The response to the demand Examination of how the demand is covered currently, what are the main challenges and constraints, and what are the implication in terms of capacity development priorities	<i>Apichart Pongsrihadulchai</i> , AFSIS <i>Maximo Torero</i> , IFPRI <i>Liliana Balbi</i> , GIEWS <i>Gary Eilerts</i> , FEWSNET <i>Issa Sanogo</i> , VAM
11:45 - 12:15	Wrap-up TS 2 and FSIN priorities	
12:15 – 13:30	Lunch	
FSIN - Next steps (MEXICO ROOM, D building, 2nd floor, D 273)		
13:30 – 14:30	FSIN Community of Practice to respond to decision makers' needs Main components and role, Functioning Principles, Success factors to support a demand driven approach	Members of the AB and of the informal committee of the FSIN (Others tbd)
14:30 – 15:30	FSIN Priorities Future FSIN investments, initiatives, support for regions, countries	
15:30 – 16:00	Closing	
16:00 – 17:30	IPC Technical Manual Version 2.0 – Launch (AUSTRIA ROOM, C building, 2nd floor, C 250)	

Annex III – List of participants FSIN Launch and Technical Meetings

FSIN Launch and Technical Meeting 10-12 October 2012 - List of Participants			
Name	Organization	Position	Email
Advisory Board Members			
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Community of Practice - FSIN Meeting Participants			
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Thijs Wissink	FAO, Thailand	Consultant	thijs.wissink@fao.org

Annex IV – Agenda: FSIN Side Event at the CFS

16 October

- 18:00 – 18:05 **Welcome, FSIN Secretariat**
- 18:05 – 18:10 **Introduction and background, Roy Stacy, FSIN consultant**
- 18:10 – 18:25 **Food Security Information Network overview, Joyce Luma, Chief, WFP/VAM**
- 18:25 – 18:30 **A country perspective: Nasser Farid, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Bangladesh**
- 18:30 – 18:35 **A donor perspective: Elisabeth Kvitashvili, U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome**
- 18:35 – 19:00 **Questions & Discussion**

Annex V – List of participants FSIN Side Event at the CFS

Name	Organization	Email	CFS delegate
Marcus Carter Mathiasen	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark	marmat@um.dk	yes
Jose Capitan	EU delegation Rome	jose-manuel.capitan-romero@eeas.europa.eu	yes
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Duncan Samikwa	SADC	dsamikwa@sadc.int	no
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Thijs Wissink	FAO/ESA	thijs.wissink@fao.org	no

Annex VI - FSIN Advisory Board Members/Attendees

Name	Title	Organization/Affiliation
Ms. Patricia Palma de Fulladolsa	Director	Central American Regional Program on Food and Nutrition Security (PRESANCA)
Mr. Baba Dioum	General Coordinator	Conference of Ministers of Agriculture of West and Central Africa (CMA/AOC)
Hon. Michael Roberto Kenyi Legge	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry	Central Equatoria State, South Sudan
Mr. Jon C. Brause (replacing Ms. Nancy Lindborg)	Deputy Assistant Administrator	Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, USAID
Mr. Christopher Delgado	Team Leader, Economics and Policy Team	Agriculture and Environmental Services Department, World Bank
Prof. Sheryl Lee Hendriks	Director, Institute for Food, Nutrition and Well-being	University of Pretoria, South Africa
Ms. Maria Paris-Ketting	Head of Policy and Planning, Rural Development, Food Security and Nutrition Unit	DG Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid, European Commission