ASTI
led by IFPRI

REVIEW AND STRATEGIZING WORKSHOP FOR ASTI FOCAL POINTS FROM AFRICA AND SOUTH ASIA

21–22 November 2016, Entebbe, Uganda

SUMMARY

Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI), led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), convened a review and strategizing workshop in Entebbe, Uganda 21–22 November 2016. The workshop followed the completion of data collection rounds in Africa south of the Sahara (SSA) and South Asia and marked the mid-way point of a 4-year phase funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Key components of this phase include increasing ASTI's policy-relevant analysis of research systems and enhancing ASTI's dissemination and advocacy activities to ensure the uptake of key ASTI messages at the national and regional levels.

The workshop aimed to elicit feedback and guidance from national focal points before ASTI embarks on new survey rounds in 2017. It also provided an opportunity for focal points from both Anglophone and Francophone Africa, as well as South Asia, to come together and share their experiences with data collection, analysis, and dissemination; and strategize for the coming two years.

The objectives of the workshop were to

- present key findings of ASTI's latest data collection and analysis;
- obtain feedback from focal points on their experience with and involvement in ASTI's national survey rounds;
- review ASTI methodology, survey tools, and data collection procedures;
- present new online ASTI tools and analytical methods; and
- discuss strategies to enhance dissemination and uptake of ASTI outputs.

Session I: ASTI program to date

(See presentations on slideshare for an overview of presented material)

- **Recent developments in ASTI**
- **Key investment and human capacity trends in SSA and South Asia**
- **New ASTI Intensity Index**

The workshop began with a welcome, an overview of recent ASTI developments, and a summary of SSA and South Asia tends in agricultural research investment and human capacity trends by Nienke

Beintema and Gert-Jan Stads. In Africa, ASTI's recent data found that the number of agricultural researchers and spending on research have both continued to grow over time. However, growth in research spending has been slower than growth in agricultural investments and agricultural output. In South Asia, research investments have also steadily increased since 2000, a trend that was largely driven by India.

Alejandro Nin-Pratt then presented an overview of his proposal for an improved ASTI intensity index as an alternative to the traditional intensity ratio to more accurately compare R&D investment intensity in a diverse group of countries. The new intensity index combines agricultural research spending as a share of agricultural GDP with additional weighted intensity ratios related to the size of the country's economy, its income, its capacity to take advantage of the knowledge produced by other countries, and the degree of output diversification in agriculture. It allows analysts to identify underinvesting countries by comparing the intensity levels of countries of similar size, similar income, and similar size of their agricultural sector. Analysts can then determine intensity gaps and define specific investment targets for different countries and regions.

Alejandro emphasized that the new index allows for more accurate comparisons between countries with similar characteristics, but cannot take every factor into account: analyzing why a country is not investing enough is the next step.

Workshop participants in general found the new index interesting, expressing a desire to use it in combination with the traditional intensity ratio.

Session II: Preparing for the next phase: indicators and data collection procedures

(See presentations on slideshare for an overview of presented material)

- **Current indicator set and observed collection challenges**
- **Demonstration of new online survey system**
- **Measuring the health of the national research system: additional indicator needs**

ASTI's current set of indicators was reviewed and discussed. The team also presented a new online method for submitting survey responses—the online survey manager—that is more user friendly and efficient than the current data management portal.

Lang Gao demonstrated this new online survey system, which is currently under development. The online survey manager will give focal points an alternative to emailing excel forms. The surveys can also be separated into modules (for example HR and financial) to allow focal points to separately submit forms that are completed by different people or departments. The new online survey forms will be flexible; not every indicator needs to be collected in every country. The surveys can be adapted on a demand basis.

Lastly, Alejandro Nin-Pratt presented a new methodology to measure the overall health of national research systems, opening up the "black box" of R&D investment.

Participants gave specific feedback on the indicators currently used, including new crop varieties, publications, technologies, other outputs, commodities, and staffing. ASTI will take the suggestions from the discussion into consideration and incorporate them in the next survey round.

Session III Preparing for the next phase: new online tools

(See presentations on slideshare for an overview of presented material)

- **Demo of ASTI Connect, discussion on building a community of national focal points**

Lang Gao and Marcia MacNeil demonstrated the new ASTI Connect platform for focal points. This private platform was created in response to requests from focal points during previous workshops for access to detailed agency data, a way to communicate with each other, and more training resources. It includes links to data from the focal points' national research agencies; a graphing and download tool; access to the online survey manager; and a library of training and capacity building resources. Lastly it includes a community section where members can post questions, comments, event announcements, and impact stories--and any platform member can respond.

Overall, participants were enthusiastic about the new platform. Their suggestions were mainly to increase and improve its accessibility and communication features (i.e. link to Facebook group, add translation feature, add user profiles), and to ensure that agency data remains private. Training will be provided, including online training or video tutorials, a help section, and a list of frequently asked questions.

It was suggested that to encourage and motivate use, web 2.0 elements such as notifications could be included, and contributors could be recognized with a "pat on the back" reward.

Session IV: Preparing for the next phase: enhancing uptake at the country level

(See presentations on slideshare for an overview of presented material)

- **Current status of the dissemination and use of ASTI data and analysis at the country level**
- **Introducing the ASTI Impact Project**
- **Sharing specific country experiences by focal points**
- **How to enhance policy influence**

Marcia MacNeil presented highlights from a recent survey sent to all focal points on the current use of ASTI data at the country level. ASTI data has had some national policy impact, but it has been intermittent and not well documented to date. Some focal points have concerns about the accuracy of the data accuracy and their understanding of methodology and definitions. However, there are many individual stories of successful impact of ASTI data and a lot to build on in the upcoming ASTI Impact Project.

Marcia then presented an overview of the new ASTI Country-level Impact Project. Funded through ASTI's current grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the project aims to identify and implement an outreach strategy for improved national policy impact of ASTI data—piloting in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Nigeria—that can be tailored for use in other countries worldwide.

Workshop participants encouraged the ASTI team to keep all focal points up to date on the progress of the project. The floor was then open for individual focal points to describe experiences in their countries where ASTI data was influential. Tesfaye Haregewoin Kassa from Ethiopia, Ferdinand Nganyirinda from Burundi, Cogou Marcellin Allagbe from Benin, Ganesh Kumar from India, and Lawrence Mose from Kenya all spoke.

In Ethiopia, ASTI data encouraged decisions to help researchers pursue higher degrees, increase the national budget for research, and more than double salary and benefits for agricultural researchers.

In Burundi, ASTI data on HR—specifically the low number of research staff with higher degrees—led the agency to create a plan for training research staff, and currently 2-3 staff are pursuing PhD degrees.

In Benin, ASTI publications helped the national research agency argue for improved capacity, and resulted in a decree that establishes the agency at the same status as a university.

In India, the agency tailored and expanded the survey to include indicators of importance to the country, and summarized the key findings and recommendations in their own report, which they disseminated widely.

In Kenya, ASTI data contributed to the merger of several institutions as part of a reform of agricultural research in the country.

In addition, focal points from Mali, Malawi, Nigeria, and Swaziland (as well as India and Ethiopia) gave filmed interviews of their experiences and impact of ASTI data in their respective countries. These interviews will be available on the ASTI website in the near future.

A breakout group discussion followed, focusing on ways to improve the policy impact of ASTI data. Groups were asked:

1. What data, messages, analyses do policy makers need? How can ASTI data help?
2. What one thing would make a difference in your country?

What policy makers need appeared to differ by country, but many discussion group participants said that policy makers need well-timed messages that include statistics for return on investment (ROI), and indicators that measure the effect of an individual research project on a target population or commodity, along with specific anecdotes, showing that research resolves farmers' problems.

Policy makers may also need:

- indicators on the capacity gap in emerging technologies/disciplines (e.g. climate change, biochemistry),
- data to help them comply with international agreements,
- information on innovation and start-ups or social enterprises, and
- education to help them see the connection between salaries and staffing of research institutions and productivity.

Suggestions for using ASTI data for this included:

- engage the media from the beginning,
- establish a network of ASTI ambassadors to champion ASTI outputs and results,

- use target audiences such as civil society, regional bodies/sub-regional organizations (SROs), farmer associations, and the private sector to lobby policy makers, and
- capture outcomes in the ASTI surveys by including specific questions on (1) outcome of research projects; (2) investment outcome by commodity; (3) spending by project (particularly commodity-based projects); (4) return on investment.

Suggested alternatives to the *traditional ASTI factsheets* to disseminate this messages included:

- a wider technical report or issue-specific briefs (written by focal points, back-stopped by ASTI),
- policy notes with bullets and no graphs,
- big posters at entrance of institutions,
- an emphasis on verbal communication: regular meetings, such as national/regional workshops, public speeches, fairs, expositions,
- case studies and analysis of policy performance in certain research areas in particular countries or in a group of countries,
- outputs that involve Alejandro's work at the national level, and
- measuring the reach of these outputs, to see if people are reading or using them.

Participants also suggested:

- mapping the different policymakers and key players in agricultural R&D funding,
- identifying different strategies/channels to address stakeholder groups, including farmer groups,
- sharing ASTI data success stories among countries,
- making NARI directors more involved,
- offering focal points more training to be able to defend the results and answer technical questions,
- analyzing local level policy impact to help make case studies,
- expanding outreach programs, at local and regional levels, and
- linking more to the institutes' management and working on internal dissemination

Session V: Next steps and way forward

There were many new tools, methodologies, platforms, indicators, etc. presented for feedback at this workshop. The way forward for the ASTI team will be to collect and evaluate the suggestions and feedback received, and move to implement them.

Specifically, the ASTI/IFPRI team will:

- Finalize factsheets, regional report (SSA, Jan-2017)
    - Publish data and update country pages and benchmarking tool online,
    - distribute factsheets in countries, and
    - discuss country outreach opportunities with focal points.
- Initiate next survey round (SSA & South Asia, Q1-2017)
    - Amend existing collaborative agreements and
    - revise existing survey tools.
- Implement analytical activities (2017)

    - Develop analysis on the “health” of research systems,
    - use the Intensity Index in addition to intensity ratio,
    - work on linking research investments to productivity trends, and
    - engage focal points in analytical activities.
- Launch the ASTI Country-level Impact Project (2017)
    - Develop mapping exercise and initiate activities in pilot countries and
    - report on progress to and seek feedback from all focal points during implementation.

ASTI Focal Points will:

- Finalize the current survey round (SSA Q1 2017)
    - Disseminate factsheets and main messages,
    - identify important meetings where messages can be delivered, and
    - identify other outreach opportunities.
- Begin to use ASTI online tools (Q1 2017)
    - Familiarize yourselves with ASTI Connect when live,
    - provide feedback on Survey Manager and ASTI Connect, and
    - explore agency data graphing and download tool for assessing and analyzing detailed data.
- Prepare for next survey round (Q1+2-2017)
    - Assess current list of agencies involved in agricultural research,
    - provide feedback on survey questions related to output indicators,
    - prepare a list of country-specific changes/additions to general survey forms,
    - assess qualitative information needed in addition to quantitative information, and
    - think about different outputs that can enhance the uptake of ASTI data/messages at the country level.