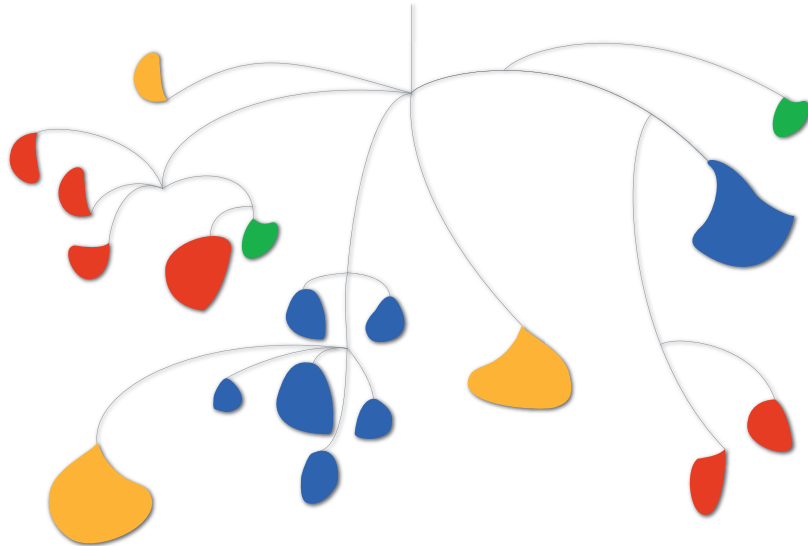


Fifth Session of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum

International Food Policy Research Institute
2033 K Street NW, Washington DC 20006

Thursday 10 March 2016
(08.30-17.00)

AMIS PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES 2015



Executive summary

Relatively calm market conditions in 2015 provided the Secretariat of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) with a good occasion to further consolidate and strengthen the AMIS initiative. To this end the Secretariat continued its regular dialogue with national focal points for the submission of commodity balances; trained participants of the second and third cycle of the AMIS Exchange Programme; and visited selected countries to establish closer collaboration with partner institutions. These efforts produced several good outcomes, most notably a special event on the “Food Market Outlook: An AMIS Perspective” during the October 2015 meeting of the Global Food Market Information Group which was led by AMIS participating countries.

The Secretariat also advanced on other crucial fronts such as the estimation of stocks positions, the identification of volatility drivers and the compilation of forward-looking market indicators. Regarding improved stocks measurement, an expert workshop in July discussed options on improving stocks and utilisation measurement in China. The workshop produced a set of recommendations which are intended to serve as the basis for an action plan for the Chinese authorities. The Secretariat also continued research activities on better understanding market volatility, for example by designing a statistical model to detect regime changes in volatility and their underlying drivers. As regards forward-looking market indicators, an expert workshop in November 2015 reviewed existing measures of AMIS member organizations and discussed options to develop an index of market sentiment. With the official launch of the AMIS Policy Database in October 2015, the Secretariat also provided an effective tool to analyse the relationship between policy decisions and market outcomes.

Other important progress was achieved in the area of capacity development. After three years of intense collaboration and information exchange between both beneficiary countries the project “Improving Rice Statistics in Thailand and the Philippines” concluded in 2015 with a final workshop in November. Most notable achievements include the promotion of computer assisted personal interviewing techniques in Thailand and the development and field testing of crop cutting surveys in the Philippines. Meanwhile, the project “Strengthening Agricultural Market Information Globally and in Selected Countries”

moved to implementation stages after detailed work plans were endorsed by each of the three beneficiary countries: Bangladesh, India and Nigeria.

The Secretariat also devoted substantial efforts to improve its outreach. For example, a section on fertiliser markets was included in the AMIS Market Monitor while the assessment of crop growing conditions provided by GEOGLAM was further enhanced and streamlined. To facilitate access to latest information and analysis, the AMIS website was completely revamped and restructured around the main communication products of the initiative. In addition, all webpages now apply a responsive design, meaning that they can be viewed easily on different devices such as desktop computers, tablets and smartphones.

For even more effective service delivery in the future, the Secretariat responded to a request from last year’s meeting of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum and established a forward-looking programme of work and budget for the years 2016-2017. Apart from highlighting main focus areas of AMIS activities, the document (AMIS: RRF/5 – 2016/3) also provides an overview of available resources and existing funding gaps. Indeed, some of the planned activities will only materialise if additional financing can be secured. As in previous years, the Secretariat therefore encourages AMIS participating countries and other potential donors to explore options for collaboration.

Main highlights in 2015

- **January 2015 – AMIS at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture:** Organized by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Germany, the event discussed how satellite information and the monitoring work of AMIS can strengthen global food security.
- **February 2015 - AMIS country mission to India:** Consultations with the Indian focal point and other national stakeholders helped clarify how Indian data may best be used for AMIS global analysis. The visit also strengthened dialogue with the Secretariat, as exemplified by India’s participation in the second cycle of the AMIS Exchange Programme.



- **March 2015 - Fourth Session of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum:** Representatives of AMIS participating countries gathered in London to assess options for ensuring the financial sustainability of AMIS, strengthening country engagement, and enhancing the effectiveness of AMIS. Countries also encouraged the Secretariat to develop surveys, guidelines and other tools to improve the measurement of stocks and utilisation in selected countries.
- **April 2015 – AMIS country mission to China:** Apart from presenting latest analysis at the Agricultural Outlook Conference of China, the mission was instrumental to establish closer collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Science, identify resource persons for the expert workshop on stocks measurement in July, and prepare the Chinese participation in the second cycle of the AMIS Exchange Programme.
- **May 2015 – Start of the second cycle of the Exchange Programme:** Representatives from China and India joined the AMIS team in Rome to improve their understanding of the work of the Secretariat, learn about the challenges of global aggregations, and familiarise themselves with different forecasting techniques. As part of their exchange, participants also visited OECD to learn about the AMIS Policy Database.
- **June 2015 – AMIS at the IGC Grains Conference:** At the invitation of the International Grains Council (IGC), AMIS Secretary Mr. Abdolreza Abbassian presented the “World Grain Market Situation and Outlook - An AMIS Perspective” at the IGC Grains Conference in London. Uniting some 300 grain traders, industry leaders and senior government officials, the event gave significant visibility to AMIS.
- **July 2015 – Expert Workshop on Stock and Utilisation Measurement in China:** International and national experts as well as government officials from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the National Bureau of Statistics of China gathered in Beijing to set a pathway for enhanced measurement of stocks and utilisation in China’s supply and demand balance sheets.
- **August 2015 – Launch of a new AMIS homepage and interactive web tools:** The AMIS website received a fresh look and improved functionalities such as the “news” feature and the resources/events database. Visitors can now get a quick overview of market updates and ongoing AMIS activities while also having an easy access to previous meetings and outputs.
- **September 2015 – Government of India endorses AMIS project proposal:** Thanks to regular exchanges with local stakeholders and a careful alignment of proposed activities with national development objectives the project “Strengthening Agricultural Market Information Systems in India using innovative methods and digital technology” was endorsed by the Government of India. With an overall budget of around USD 800 000 the project will support national efforts to improve information on crop production forecasts, market food prices and stocks by incorporating international best practices and experiences.
- **October 2015 – Countries take centre stage at the 8th Session of the Global Food Market Information Group:** Showcasing the collaborative nature of AMIS, selected national focal points presented the crop market situation and outlook for 2015/16 based on data submitted by countries and the collective assessment of Secretariat members. For the first time in the history of AMIS, the presentation of the crop market situation was open to the media and web-streamed to allow greater visibility.
- **November 2015 – Expert workshop on market indicators:** At the invitation of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Secretariat members reviewed existing market indicators to monitor price volatility and serve as a forward-looking early warning system.
- **December 2015 – Successful conclusion of the capacity development project in Thailand and the Philippines:** Most notable successes of the three-year project include the promotion of computer assisted personal interviewing techniques in Thailand and the development of crop-cutting surveys in the Philippines.



AMIS results framework

Established at the request of the G20, the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) is an inter-agency platform to enhance food market transparency and encourage coordination of policy action in response to market uncertainty. As outlined in the AMIS Terms of Reference, the initiative compiles relevant market and policy information to effectively inform AMIS participating countries and other stakeholders of the market situation and outlook. To the same end, AMIS is engaged in research activities to better understand market developments and identify meaningful indicators to monitor market and policy conditions. In addition, it detects knowledge gaps and technical needs in participating countries and gradually addresses them through capacity building activities. The initiative disseminates its information and analysis through multiple channels, including web and print media, and

promotes dialogue and policy coordination through regular meetings with participating countries. This document gives an overview of progress and activities in 2015 according to the results framework of AMIS¹ (see below).

Information collection

Work on supply and demand balances

As stated in previous progress reports, the success of AMIS critically hinges upon the active collaboration of participating countries, especially as regards the transmission of timely and reliable forecast information.

¹ A functional output has been added to the results framework in order to account for activities related to the management and coordination of AMIS (Output 6). These activities, which are not discussed in detail in this progress report, include the organization of regular meetings with AMIS participating countries, advisory and other in-kind contributions of the multi-agency Secretariat, and administrative services for hosting the AMIS Secretariat.

MAIN OUTPUTS OF AMIS

Output 1: Information collection

Available information, including both statistical data as well as market and policy drivers, concerning production, utilisation, stocks and trade of AMIS crops is collected, evaluated and disseminated.

Output 2: Research

Relevant methodologies and indicators are developed to monitor and analyse market and policy conditions, and provide improved forecasts.

Output 3: Capacity development

Capacity of national data producers is strengthened to collect and validate data on production, utilisation, stocks and trade of AMIS crops.

Output 4: Information dissemination

Policy makers in AMIS participating countries and other stakeholders are effectively informed of the market situation and outlook, including on relevant policy developments.

Output 5: Policy dialogue

Dialogue is strengthened among policy makers in AMIS participating countries and other stakeholders in international food markets.

Output 6: AMIS management and coordination

AMIS is effectively supported by its multi-agency Secretariat.



Thus, improving the quality and frequency of data transfers remained one of the main work priorities of AMIS in 2015. Apart from continuing the close dialogue with national focal points – either through regular email exchanges, country visits or by inviting selected countries to participate in the AMIS Exchange Programme – the Secretariat also established a clear timeline for the submission of commodity balances. This timeline is critical to ensure that country information can be incorporated more effectively in the monitoring work of AMIS and be reflected in the market assessments published by the Secretariat, most notably in the AMIS Market Monitor.

These measures have shown some moderate success. As illustrated in the status report on country collaboration (AMIS: RRF/5 – 2016/4) seven countries now provide complete and reliable forecasts on a monthly basis. Another ten submit information that globally meets the AMIS requirements, but might not cover all AMIS commodities. In addition, some of the ten countries only started submitting forecasts recently so the regularity of their contributions cannot be assessed. This leaves just six countries that are not complying with AMIS data requirements, which is an improvement compared to previous reporting periods. Of these, the Secretariat is hopeful that the situation will improve noticeably in the near future with India, Kazakhstan and Thailand, not least because of these countries' recent participation in the AMIS Exchange Programme (see box). By contrast, there has not been any progress as regards Egypt, Korea and Nigeria.

Particular improvements have been achieved with Indonesia and the Russian Federation. Both countries completely revised their historical balances and forecasts following intensive exchanges with the Secretariat; their submissions now comply with the AMIS requirements and are considered more reliable. In the case of Indonesia, the country's participation in the AMIS Exchange Programme certainly also contributed to the success.

To improve the timeliness of data transmissions even further, national focal points should revise balances more frequently. In many countries, revisions are currently linked to the release date of official production forecasts, which are usually published three to four times a year. However, even in the absence of new production forecasts other elements of the balance might change, and these changes should be communicated to the AMIS Secretariat as soon as they occur.

AMIS EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

Since its launch in October 2014 the AMIS Exchange Programme has proved to be an effective mechanism to familiarise national focal points with the global monitoring work of AMIS and sensitise them to the information needs of the Secretariat. Based on very promising outcomes with South Africa and Viet Nam during the first cycle of the Programme (October to December 2014), the Secretariat welcomed representatives of five additional countries in 2015: China and India (May-July) as well as Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Thailand (October-December). Especially the participation of the national focal of Kazakhstan – a country that had not collaborated with the Secretariat in the past – was a very promising development in 2015 and underlined the potential of the Programme to help increase the number of countries providing “good” data. In several cases, however, the Secretariat noticed that, while individual participants significantly broadened their knowledge on commodity balances, the quality and timeliness of information submitted by their respective countries did not improve to the same extent. This pattern can be detected for essentially all countries that participated in the Exchange Programme in 2015, albeit to varying degrees according to the specific national context. Apart from nominating candidates for the Programme, countries therefore need to show greater openness to implement measures agreed with the respective focal point. Otherwise the Exchange Programme will fail to have a meaningful impact.

Compiling market and policy indicators

Sound market and policy information provides the backbone of the monitoring work of AMIS. In 2015 the Secretariat expanded the suite of indicators that are regularly reported in the AMIS Market Monitor by introducing a section on fertilisers, a main input to agricultural production. Information on fertiliser markets is important for AMIS in several ways. Besides having an important bearing on the cost of production and ultimately the prices of the crops monitored by AMIS, fertiliser production, consumption, and trade volumes of several



AMIS countries represent a large share of global fertiliser output. Hence AMIS countries play a key role in shaping fertiliser markets and price outcomes. With this in mind, the new section aims to enhance market transparency in the fertiliser industry and to inform policy makers and other stakeholders of market uncertainties. Each month, the AMIS Secretariat reports on price trends for the main fertiliser products and regions. In addition, it provides on a biannual basis overviews of recent production, consumption and trade patterns by regions and by AMIS participating countries.

The year 2015 also saw the official launch of the AMIS Policy Database, which is expected to provide important insights into the linkages between policy decisions and market outcomes. Over the past two years, the database has been constructed and populated with policy information from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These datasets have provided a comprehensive record of historical policy information. However, the usefulness of the tool will largely depend on the extent to which the database can be kept up-to-date and possibly even be expanded. In this respect the active collaboration of national focal points will be key to regularly revise, delete and add new policy records through an interactive input tool. At the launch event during the October 2015 meeting of the Information Group five countries volunteered to test the functionality of this input tool before it is rolled out to all countries in 2016.

Expanding the list of available market indicators, the AMIS Secretariat (under the leadership of FAO) started developing an index of market sentiment in 2015 that will filter information from social media (e.g. Twitter), blogs and dedicated news services. Capturing the prevailing attitude among investors and other market participants will help assess the market's propensity to risk and hence the expected volatility in prices. In this respect the sentiment index is hoped to be a true forward-looking predictor of high prices and high uncertainty in the commodities monitored by AMIS.

In order to consolidate the work on indicators and discuss future work priorities, the AMIS Secretariat organized an expert workshop at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in November 2015. For further information on the outcomes of this workshop, please refer to document AMIS: RRF/5 – 2016/6.

Research

Research activities in 2015 centred on improving knowledge on market volatility and stocks measurement. In addition, the AMIS Secretariat was engaged in several targeted research activities in the framework of country-specific projects, which will be discussed further in the section on capacity development.

A main focus of the work on market volatility was to estimate specific points in time at which volatility in the international wheat, maize, rice and soybean markets underwent changes in "regime", i.e. a switch from a period of low volatility to one of high volatility, and vice versa. In addition, the Secretariat started examining the main drivers of volatility which will help make predictions of future regime changes. To this end, the Secretariat used a so-called "component-wise gradient boosting algorithm" that selects from a multitude of potential drivers those that seem most relevant; the algorithm also allows to model their impact on volatility in a non-linear way. Potential drivers that have been tested include dollar exchange rates; stocks to use ratios; and meteorological measures such as the Southern Oscillation Index. A first draft of a substantive paper and non-technical summary for policy makers will be presented at the forthcoming meeting of the Information Group.

Regarding the estimation of stocks positions, the AMIS Secretariat organized a one-day expert workshop on "Stock and Utilisation Measurement in China" in July 2015, in collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS). The workshop was attended by international and national experts as well as government officials from CAAS, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the National Bureau of Statistics of China. It touched upon methodological, technical and legal issues in measuring (and disclosing) stock and utilisation positions, and also addressed very practical questions such as the timing and frequency of measurement. As a follow-up to the workshop, CAAS prepared a plan of action that was presented at the October meeting of the Information Group.

Capacity development

Apart from providing regular support to national focal points, including through the AMIS Exchange Programme, the AMIS Secretariat continued the implementation of two multi-year capacity development projects in 2015. One,



financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, seeks to strengthen agricultural market information systems in Bangladesh, India and Nigeria through improved methods and digital innovations; this project is still ongoing. The other project, financed by the Government of Japan, successfully concluded in 2015; it focused on improving rice statistics in Thailand and the Philippines.

Improving rice statistics in Thailand and the Philippines

Over a period of three years (2012-2015), the project helped both countries deliver more accurate statistics, effectively monitor rice markets and produce relevant data on food security. This was done in four simple steps: (i) analyse current methodologies for the estimation of rice area, production and stocks; (ii) adjust these methodologies according to international best practice; (iii) pilot test the application of improved methodologies; and (iv) train national staff and expand knowledge to other networks. A final joint workshop in November 2015 gave both beneficiary countries an opportunity to reflect on project outcomes and discuss measures to ensure the sustainability of these achievements in the future.

A main focus of the project was on promoting knowledge exchange between Thailand and the Philippines and fostering peer learning. Several study tours between both countries allowed the sharing of experiences and know-how. These exchanges were further deepened in the framework of three annual joint workshops during which the progress of the project was reviewed and additional synergies explored. Notable achievements in Thailand include the promotion of computer assisted personal interviewing techniques, improvements in data quality control mechanisms and a better estimation of rice utilisation for the country's commodity balance sheets. In the Philippines, Thailand's experiences in yield estimation supported the methodological development and field testing of crop cutting surveys and the design of appropriate capacity building activities. The project also conducted an in-depth data analysis training. To ensure an even wider dissemination of new methods and techniques, the final workshop reached out to other countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) by inviting national focal points of the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS).

Strengthening agricultural market information systems globally and in selected countries

The project tries to achieve three main outcomes, two of which at the global level (development of appropriate IT tools and platforms; development of improved methodologies) while the other is divided into specific outputs at national level for each of the three target countries. As some of the national work programmes were only endorsed in 2015, the project has been extended by an additional twelve months until 30 June 2017.

As part of the AMIS IT Toolkit (Output 1) the AMIS Secretariat released a mobile application for the collection of food market price data as well as a platform for the real-time dissemination of this information. The mobile application has been tested and is now available for download. While Nigeria might benefit particularly from the new tool and its guidelines, the mobile application is a global public good that can be used by other interested agencies and countries. In addition, the Secretariat improved the Country AMIS Web Platform that had been developed during the previous reporting period. The platform uses the FENIX software that logically divides data into three main components: prices, stocks and forecasts. It also includes a fourth area in which combined elements of these three subjects can be viewed and analysed. Finally, in the area of global IT tools and platforms, the project supported the GIEWS Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Tool, which has been continuously updated and further expanded.

In the area of methodological development (Output 2), previously completed literature reviews on stocks estimation; crop forecasting; and market price data management were updated in 2015 and further expanded. For each of these thematic areas, the project provided additional tools and guidelines. Specifically, a stocks survey database has been compiled for release in the first half of 2016. This database provides good practices for the measurement of food grain stocks that were inventoried in several countries. Based on these good practices, the AMIS Secretariat started producing a methodological paper to guide chief statisticians and survey practitioners in the design and implementation of food grain stocks surveys, to be published in the first half of 2016. In the area of crop forecasting, good practices were compiled in a paper (to be published in early 2016) that explains the human, technical and financial infrastructure required in



the respective systems. Countries being investigated include Belgium, China, Morocco, South Africa and the United States. Finally, in the area of market price data management, the project started a partnership with the World Food Programme and the Pulse Lab Jakarta to run a pilot exercise monitoring food prices in real time. The objective of this pilot is to assess the cost-benefit ratio of crowdsourcing techniques in rural areas. After a successful first phase in the NTB province of Indonesia, the project has continued in 2016 with a more challenging implementation in the NTT province; experiences and lessons learnt will be discussed in a paper, to be published in the first half of 2016.

As for specific country activities (Output 3), the project started supporting the institutional, methodological and human resource capacity of **Bangladesh** to produce better quality data on yields, crop forecasts and grain stocks (focusing on wheat, maize, rice and potatoes). With the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics as lead coordinating agency the project was technically launched on 28 June 2015 during an inception workshop. In **India**, the proposed work programme was officially endorsed by the Government in September 2015 so the project can finally move to implementation. An inception mission was successfully concluded in December to fine-tune proposed activities; these will focus on stocks measurement; market price information systems; price data collection; and agricultural outlook models. In **Nigeria**, project implementation further advanced in 2015 with the organization of several training activities for Government staff; a high-level meeting on open data and consecutive technical workshops in Abuja and Kaduna; and a thorough assessment of the different information systems on agricultural market prices currently in place.

Information dissemination

Improving outreach and communication was one of the main work priorities of the Secretariat in 2015. Despite the overall calm market situation – and consequently low public interest in international commodity markets – AMIS succeeded in placing several stories in specialised media outlets such as Bloomberg, Financial Times and Reuters. A main achievement in this regard was the special event on the “Food Market Outlook: An AMIS Perspective” during the 8th Session of the Global Food Market Information Group, which was open to

journalists. To engage more closely with the public through online media the event was also streamed live on the AMIS website; in addition, the interested public could send questions to the commodity experts via Twitter.

The Secretariat also improved the main website of AMIS. For example, Internet users now have access to multimedia content such as video tutorials that explain some of the technical charts used in the AMIS Market Monitor. The first edition of this series was released in September 2015 and covered the “Commitments of Traders” charts. The AMIS Secretariat also released a promotional video that presents the functioning of AMIS and gives voice to key stakeholders of the initiative such as country representatives who explain the importance of AMIS for national policy making. Other web innovations include the expansion of the responsive design that was used for the Market Monitor section to all pages of the AMIS website so that content can be easily viewed on desktop computers, tablets and mobile phones alike.

To facilitate access to latest information and analysis, the AMIS website was restructured around the main communication products of the initiative. It also received a fresh look and improved functionalities such as the “news” feature and resources/events database. The improved website presents the most recent information right on the first page, including latest market updates, current events, news stories and Twitter exchanges. In addition, it provides access to previous events and resources through an electronic database. Pre-defined filters and search forms help users find what they are looking for, so even older information can be accessed easily. By providing links and suggestions to related information, the new website responds to a central issue identified in the 2014 review of AMIS web services that recommended an increased inter-connectivity between different sections.

While the AMIS website has established itself as a popular information resource (52,779 visits in 2015), the AMIS Market Monitor remains the main dissemination channel with 902 subscribers at the end of 2015. In an effort to continuously improve and expand the information contained in the report, the Secretariat added a section on fertiliser markets as discussed in detail under “market and policy indicators” above. In addition, the assessment of crop growing conditions in AMIS participating countries (GEOGLAM Crop Monitor) was further enhanced and streamlined. The Market Monitor template was adopted by South Africa for a national edition of the report, including a regional overview of crop growing conditions provided by GEOGLAM.



Based on the successful collaboration between GEOGLAM and AMIS in developing the Crop Monitor, there was interest from the early warning community to develop a similar activity focused on countries that are at risk of food insecurity. GEOGLAM took the lead in developing such Early Warning Crop Monitor in 2015, which culminated in the release of the first bulletin in February 2016. The bulletin will be released monthly, with its publication dates synchronised with those of the AMIS Market Monitor. Recognising the importance of the AMIS-GEOGLAM relationship, the AMIS Secretary was invited to join the GEOGLAM Advisory Committee.

Policy dialogue

Continuing the regular cycle of policy meetings, the AMIS Secretariat organized the Fourth Session of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum on 26-27 March 2015. Decision-making officials gathered in London at the invitation of the United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. For the first time, the meeting took place over two days, which allowed more time for presentations and discussions. The meeting reviewed progress and activities of AMIS in 2014, especially as regards country collaboration in providing complete forecast information in a timely fashion. It assessed options for ensuring the financial sustainability of AMIS and strengthening country engagement. In this regard the meeting endorsed the Secretariat's recommendation that focal points should be empowered to prepare and send more frequent updates, including by forming support teams to enhance the timeliness, quality and consistency of data submissions. The meeting also discussed options for enhancing the effectiveness of AMIS, for example by regularly evaluating its performance, agreeing on a protocol to call for Rapid Response Forum meetings, and streamlining chair handover.

At technical level, the Secretariat organized two regular sessions of the Global Food Market Information Group in 2015. Highlights of the 7th Session (14-15 May 2015 at FAO Headquarters) included an interactive discussion with all national focal points on the outlook of global food markets; a panel discussion of countries that had applied the monthly decomposition of their supply and demand balances; a presentation by South Africa

and Viet Nam on their experiences in participating in the AMIS Exchange Programme; and bilateral discussions with national focal points to resolve outstanding problems in submitting forecast information to the Secretariat. The 8th Session (19-20 October 2015) was organized in Milan. The meeting was exceptional not only for its setting at the World Exhibition (Expo) but also for its innovative meeting format. While previous sessions had mostly relied on contributions from the Secretariat, the Milan meeting gave a much more active role to AMIS participating countries. This was most evident during the outlook session in which selected national focal points presented their assessment of the current and expected future market situation of the AMIS crops. The new meeting setup was greatly appreciated by participants, as illustrated by the results of a survey conducted after the meeting (see www.amis-outlook.org/survey). The Secretariat is therefore considering to convert one of the two annual meetings of the Global Food Market Information Group into an outlook conference.

In addition to these regular events, the AMIS Secretariat worked intensively with individual countries in order to identify ways for better collaboration. For example, thanks to a project funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development entitled "Enhancing grain market transparency in Kazakhstan for informed market prospects and investment decision-making", members of the AMIS Secretariat travelled to Astana twice in 2015 to meet with national stakeholders and remind officials of their country's commitment towards AMIS. These efforts bore fruit with the nomination of a national focal point who immediately participated in the AMIS Exchange Programme. Similarly, country missions to China and India proved instrumental in preparing the participation of both countries in the Exchange Programme.

The Secretariat also engaged in bilateral exchanges on questions regarding forecasting techniques and methodologies. More importantly, countries themselves have started supporting each other and sharing their experiences. Specifically:

- The Secretariat (FAO) participated in a technical expert meeting on the EU rice balance sheet, organized by the European Commission, to review methodological issues in compiling rice data from EU member states.



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- The Secretariat (FAO), together with the United States, engaged in discussions with Indonesia on improving estimation methods for domestic maize production and utilisation.
 - Australia, Canada and the United States shared experiences with Japan on improving estimation methods.

Looking ahead: Ensuring sustainability

With the Programme of Work and Budget 2016-2017 (AMIS: RRF/5 – 2016/3) the Secretariat has outlined the main activities and thematic priorities in order to move the AMIS initiative forward. All ten member organizations in the Secretariat are committed to

ensuring the sustainability of the initiative, for example by offering analytical support, hosting meetings and providing other in-kind contributions where needed. However, AMIS is built on a partnership, so the active collaboration of participating countries will be key in order to make AMIS a success. More engagement is needed as regards the regular transmission of forecast information, but countries are also encouraged to play a more active part in supporting the initiative financially. Without additional funding, the ambitious work programme of AMIS cannot be implemented and would have to be reduced to a minimum, which might threaten past achievements. The Secretariat believes that AMIS has made good progress in 2015 and would like to continue on this path to advance even further. Let us use the current phase of calm market conditions to build a strong foundation to successfully address and hopefully prevent future food price crises.



Calendar of main meetings and events 2015

Jan 2015	Feb 2015	Mar 2015	Apr 2015	May 2015	Jun 2015	Jul 2015	Aug 2015	Sep 2015	Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec 2015
<u>15-16</u> Presentation of AMIS at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture, Berlin	<u>2-3</u> Annual review meeting with Japan, Rome	<u>26-27</u> 4 th Session of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum, London	<u>20-24</u> Country mission to China	<u>11</u> Final Communiqué of G20 Agriculture Ministers praises AMIS as a “particularly successful initiative”	<u>17</u> AMIS at the IGC Grains Conference	<u>6-7</u> Expert workshop on stock and utilisation measurement in China, Beijing	<u>3</u> Launch of a new homepage and improved functionalities of the AMIS website	<u>30</u> Government of India endorses AMIS project proposal	<u>5-8</u> Training workshop on market price systems in Nigeria, Kaduna State	<u>9-10</u> AMIS at Agritechnica Trade Fair, Hanover	<u>16</u> End of the third cycle of the AMIS Exchange Programme
<u>29 Jan-6 Feb</u> Training workshop on open data in Nigeria, Abuja and Kaduna State	<u>16-18</u> Country mission to India		<u>21</u> AMIS at the Agricultural Outlook Conference of China, Beijing	<u>13</u> 5 th meeting of the AMIS Secretariat Steering Committee, Rome	<u>30</u> Inception workshop of AMIS capacity development project in Bangladesh, Dhaka	<u>27</u> End of the second cycle of the AMIS Exchange Programme			<u>19-20</u> 8 th Session of the Global Food Market Information Group, Milan	<u>12-13</u> Expert workshop on market indicators, Washington	
				<u>13-20</u> Training workshop on SDMX in Nigeria, Abuja and Kaduna State					<u>19</u> Launch of the AMIS Policy Database	<u>23-26</u> Final joint workshop on improving rice market statistics in Thailand and the Philippines, Bangkok	
				<u>14-15</u> 7 th Session of the Global Food Market Information Group, Rome					<u>23-25</u> Country mission to the Russian Federation		

