



**Evidence for evidence.  
Do better statistics lead to better policy decisions? The case of food and agriculture.**

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A key challenge for official statisticians is not just to produce high quality statistics and analyses, but to persuade policy makers of their value. In some cases, statistics may not be sufficiently reliable, relevant, or timely enough to inform decisions; but even when robust statistics are available, there is no guarantee they will be used in the policy process. Does this matter? The UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) believes so. DFID is a major donor to statistics and works with country, regional and global partners to help improve the capacity of statistical systems in developing countries. Underlying this effort is the belief that policy responses to the challenges of poverty and sustainable development should be informed by evidence and that their impact on people's lives – particularly the lives of the poorest – should be measured. To understand more about whether better statistics do actually lead to better decisions (i.e. whether there is any 'evidence' for the use of statistical evidence) the paper will consider the case of food and agriculture policy. Using examples from DFID's own policymaking processes and programme design and implementation, as well as data from PARIS21<sup>1</sup> and the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation on the use of statistics in policymaking, the following three questions will be discussed: (i) is there evidence that the use of statistics can improve policies; (ii) are some statistics more influential than others; and (iii) if so, what are the consequences and recommendations for statistical systems?

**Keywords:** policymaking; informed decision making; poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century