

Best Practice 1: Data Harmonization

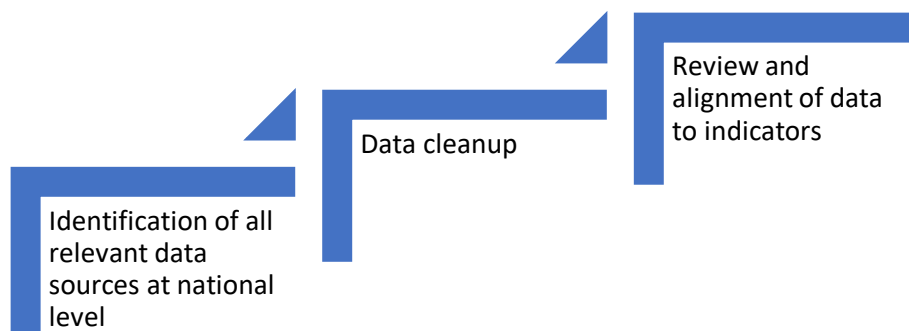
Currently, all SADC countries generate agricultural information, however, it is mostly fragmented and stored across different systems, and some of it is in different formats – paper-based or digital. When data is fragmented it delays the decision-making process since it takes tremendous time and effort to locate and consolidate the relevant information. Even if all the necessary data is collected, you may still experience problems with the quality of collected data. This is because of the different ways data is organized within the SADC countries and in some cases may even use different naming conventions to report on the same information. This can result in misinterpretation of information, and it can also result in the same information being duplicated and reported several times.

To address this challenge, the AIMS team developed a harmonized data collection questionnaire. One of the most important benefits of harmonizing your data is to obtain a single source of data. This helps reduce the time spent on verification and tracking of different data sources which translates to an efficient data collection and submission approach.

The benefits of having a common and harmonized approach to collecting data in SADC countries are:

1. Removal of data redundancies and duplication
2. Improvement of data quality which results in fewer errors
3. Streamlining the process of information generation and submission

To successfully implement data harmonization practices within the Member States, a proper understanding of the objectives of AIMS was required. Once this was clear, the following process was followed:



After these three major steps are completed, additional steps are needed to identify the different variables for harmonization, this can be challenging because data from different sources at the national level can be reported in a different format. So, it is important to find a proper balance. Finally, the data is converted into a common format that is tailored and accessible to all Member States.

The value that data harmonization adds to an organization is very easy to see, especially with the speed gained during data collection. However, the implementation roadmap can be challenging. Data Harmonization helps bring the different elements and variables and combines them into one single location which can contribute to making information quickly available for faster decision-making.