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Agenda Item 4

ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

TWENTY-THIRD SESSION

Siem Reap, Cambodia, 26-30 April 2010

EXPERT CONSULTATION ON STATISTICS IN SUPPORT OF POLICIES TO EMPOWER SMALL FARMERS

1. Introduction

The Expert Consultation on Statistics in Support of Policies to Empower Small Farmers Bangkok was organized in Bangkok, Thailand on 8-11 September 2009. The general objective of the Expert Consultation was to contribute to the improvement of agricultural statistics in the Asia and Pacific Region in support of policies to empower small farmers in the Asia-Pacific region. More specifically to (i) discuss approaches to data collection and types of information that better suit current data needs of policy-makers in the context of the changing world economy and high food prices; and (ii) to advise FAO on the development of capacity building and technical assistance programmes with a view to improving statistics in support of policies to empower small farmers.

2. Attendance:

The Expert Consultation was attended by a total of 16 participants, including experts from Australia, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Republic of Korea and Thailand, and four experts from FAO headquarters. Mr Hiroyuki Konuma, DRR, FAO RAP delivered the opening address on behalf of Mr He Changchui, ADG/RR FAO RAP.

3. Expert Consultation Results:

Sixteen technical documents were discussed. In addition, round-table discussions were held on two topics of the agenda, covering “Market information systems: leveling the playing field for small farmers” and “Recommendations on statistics strategies in support of policies for small farmers”. The Session’s Agenda included topics on:

1. Characterization of small farmers to target policy implementation
2. Strategies to meet new statistical demands in an evolving world
3. Market information systems: leveling the playing field for small farmers
4. Information at community level for the benefit of smallholders

The following were the highlights of and recommendations made by the Expert Consultation:

1. Characterization of small farmers to target policy implementation. Lack of adequate data and information on small farmers were cited as a constraint to the effectiveness of policies in support of small farmers in the context of high food prices and internationalisation of agricultural markets. Many countries used different definitions for “agricultural holding” and different size classes, making international comparison difficult. The Experts recommended that countries adopt the FAO farm size classification (18 size classes) while noting that too many size classes might increase survey costs and that size classes could be regrouped at the data analysis stage. Given the diverse agro-ecological profile of the region, the Experts recommended using sub-regional definitions for small farmers and considering sub-categorization of small farmers, taking into account factors such as productivity, cropping intensity and irrigation. Recognizing that in some countries farmers were not aware of the actual cultivated area, especially in mountainous regions, the Experts recommended that equipment such as compass, tape and GPS might be considered for objective measurement of crop area. Expressing concern about the confidentiality of information collected for direct state support interventions such as official farm subsidies, the Experts recommended ensuring the confidentiality of the information provided by individual farmers during the dissemination of data on their activities in line with national and international statistical laws and standards.

2. Strategies to meet new statistical demands in an evolving world. The Experts noted the development of a Global Strategy to improve agricultural statistics under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission in partnership with international agencies such as FAO, Eurostat and World Bank. The Experts noted that countries could benefit by supporting and implementing the global strategy for improvement of agricultural and rural statistics. The strategy has identified a serious decline in the quantity and quality of national agricultural statistics, highlighting the urgent need for improving national statistical capacities to meet the new and emerging needs of agricultural and rural development policy making in the 21st century. There is also a need to improve coordination between national statistical organizations and others producing agricultural statistics. The Experts noted that governmental awareness and commitment were crucial for improving national statistical systems and recommended governments to support the global strategy and its implementation.

3. Market information systems: leveling the playing field for small farmers. The Experts agreed that there was a high potential for tracking raw farm and market prices to assist detection of changes in price trends for products of small farmers. They agreed that this would best be applied by closely and frequently tracking price changes for a set of key products of small farmers. They noted that market information can be useful for development of statistics relevant to effective policy and decision-making if used in conjunction with appropriate quality guidelines and standards to ensure comparability of market prices. They agreed on the usefulness and

simplicity of the “simple price monitoring tool” demonstrated by HQ ESAF at the consultation and recommended it as an example of a useful market information system along with Thailand’s “farm price speedometer” to alert policy makers on changing and abnormal market conditions. The Experts agreed that transparency of market information was the most ideal situation as this assisted in the efficient and fair operation of markets. It was therefore recommended that information gathered by governments should be available as a public good. In summary, the Experts agreed that it was important that market information was made available to small farmers and their communities to assist them to operate and integrate effectively into the market.

4. Information at community level for the benefit of smallholders. The Experts noted that improved access to information or data can help small farmers take correct and timely decisions on production, use of inputs and sales. Community-level dissemination of data and information is therefore vital for empowering small farmers and some countries have already conducted community-level surveys either as an integral part of the agricultural census or as a stand-alone operation. It was noted that WCA 2010 had recommended 32 community-level data items grouped into four categories. The Experts noted good examples of community-level data such as the barangay (community) profiling survey in the Philippines and the community development survey in Thailand. The Experts recommended the development of community-level information systems using a mix of traditional and modern mass media. The Experts also recommended providing regular information to farmers about prevailing domestic and international prices through radio broadcasts, notices in villages, cooperatives, farmers’ associations, extension officers and representatives of related national or provincial governments. In addition, assistance should be provided to small farmers through programmes implemented by national or provincial governments, industry organizations or others. The Experts recommended not just making information readily and freely available, but advocating its use and supporting it with education programmes.

The report of this Expert Consultation Session was published in October 2009.