July 2012, Dhaka, Bangladesh – The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh signed the programme document entitled ‘Improving Food Safety in Bangladesh’ on 13 June 2012 to implement a wide ranging project with the aim of improving food safety in Bangladesh. This programme (GCP/BGD/047/NET) is being funded by a generous contribution of USD 12.5 million from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the FAO, the agreement for which was signed earlier on 7 June 2012.

Mr. Iqbal Mahmood, Senior Secretary, ERD and Mr. Dominique Burgeon, FAO Representative in Bangladesh signed the agreement on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and FAO respectively. The primary stakeholders will be the food control agencies of Bangladesh including government ministries and statutory authorities involved along the food production, processing and distribution chain.

The overall objective of this programme is an efficient and well-functioning food safety control system in Bangladesh that leads to improved public health and enhanced trade in food commodities. It builds on the activities of the just concluded EU-funded project entitled ‘Improving food safety, quality and food control in Bangladesh’ (GCP/BGD./038/EC). The major components of the programme are strengthening food analysis capacity; strengthening capacity for standards formulation; enhancing public awareness and education on food safety and consumers’ health; institutionalization of food safety; enhancing food-borne illness surveillance; and strengthening the food inspection and enforcement system and further capacity development in selected subsectors of the food industry.
In his remarks, the Senior Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW, GoB), Mr. Md. Humayun Kabir described how the 3 year programme will contribute to the key element of food safety as spelt out in the Health Population and Nutrition Sector Development Programme (HPNSDP; 2011-2016) of the MoHFW. The programme is also embedded into the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) framework for the Operational Plan for the National Nutrition Services (NNS). The MoHFW will be the key implementing agency on behalf of the government of Bangladesh with FAO providing technical support and management expertise.

Mr. Md. Ashadul Islam, Additional Secretary, ERD acknowledged that the programme as a very good initiative to address the pressing food safety issues in the country.

H.E. Mr Alphons Hennekens, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Bangladesh said that this programme will contribute to the implementation of the Netherlands Development Co-operation Strategy and assist in achieving the goal of increasing food security for the most food insecure households by enabling them to access safe food throughout the year on the basis of strengthened livelihoods. He also added that the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is fully committed to ensuring food security in Bangladesh.

Mr Dominique Burgeon, FAO Representative, stated that this programme will further strengthen food security, including quality control, through improved food safety and will have a significant impact on the public health sector of Bangladesh.