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Opening remarks

by

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On the occasion of

FAO Regional Clarification Workshop on the WTO Framework Agreement and Related Regional Trade

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*Mr Chairperson,
Honourable Minister,
Distinguished Guests,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, the Regional office for Africa and on my own behalf to express utmost thanks and appreciation to the Government and the people of Ghana, for the warm hospitality extended to us in hosting this important Meeting. I should like to thank you, Honourable Minister of Trade for finding time to be here to participate in this Session of the Workshop, and more importantly to formally open the Workshop. I also wish to extend a very warm welcome to our distinguished guests, and particularly to all the participants who have braved the current difficult travel conditions in the sub regions to attend this crucial Workshop which FAO is organizing in the context of the ongoing WTO Trade Negotiations and related regional trade issues of interest to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). I therefore wish, on behalf of FAO, to warmly say to all of you, *Akwaba*, the Ghanaian expression of welcome.

It is really a great pleasure for me to address this workshop on capacity-building in agricultural trade negotiations, a theme that is at the core of the mission of FAO.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister, Distinguished Guests, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will recall that one of the most pressing issues of this millennium is the continuing food deficit facing 842 million people around the world, of this number, 204 million are living in Sub Saharan African countries and 95 million in the ECOWAS and ECCAS sub regions. These numbers are not just statistics but constant reminders of the sufferings of silent millions of west and central African people striving to make a living in our communities.

You will recall that at the World Food Summit (WFS) convened by FAO in November 1996, the nations of the world committed themselves to making substantial progress in eliminating the scourge of

hunger and undernourishment by agreeing to reduce to half, the number of undernourished people by no later than the year 2015.

Unfortunately in West and Central Africa the number of undernourished has not diminished, rather the sub-regions have seen the number of the undernourished increasing by about 10 million people since the 1996 World Food Summit. War and civil conflict are regarded as major causes of chronic hunger. At the current rate, the countries of ECOWAS and ECCAS are likely to miss the Millennium Development goals set for 2015.

It is imperative that this trend is reversed. While it is not in doubt that the underlying issues are many and multi-faceted, it should be noted that there are many actions in various stages of conception and implementation to find the right mix of solutions that will produce lasting results.

Agricultural trade and rules-based multi-lateral trading systems have evolved as the key considerations for sustainable approaches to address the increasing trend of undernourishment and food insecurity in developing countries, including those of the ECOWAS and ECCAS. Member States of ECOWAS and ECCAS, and indeed of the entire Region must work in concert with like minded members of the WTO to demand and press for fairer trading rules that will make it possible for all to play on level ground.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister, Distinguished Guests, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issues involved in global agricultural trade are complex in nature as they are demanding in their application. They demand the urgent attention of African countries. Firstly, a very clear understanding of the evolving issues of the WTO Agreements is necessary. Secondly there is the need to sharpen negotiation skills. Thirdly, there is the need for the countries of ECOWAS and ECCAS to participate actively and fully in the WTO meetings. These steps should go a long way in assisting African countries to take full advantage of the opportunities available in the Doha Round to arrest and reverse the trend toward their marginalization in agricultural trade. Presently, African countries are faced with the challenge of preparing themselves to:

1. seize the trading opportunities arising from the rules, concessions and commitments by trading partners;
2. effectively exercise trading rights in export markets;
3. fully implement trade obligations, use them to enhance the stability and transparency of trade regimes and devise and execute development policies within the framework of these obligations,
4. Take full advantage of the development issues in the Doha Round and ensure that their concerns are fully reflected in future Agreements.

The provision of information and analysis on trade issues affecting agriculture, fisheries and forestry and assistance to Member countries to build trade-related capacities have been long-standing activities of FAO. Moreover, the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit commits FAO to assist developing countries on trade issues and, in particular, in preparing for multi-lateral trade negotiations, especially as it relates to agriculture, fisheries and forestry, through studies, analysis and training. This commitment was reaffirmed by the 31st FAO Conference held in Rome in November 2001 and has been embodied in the FAO Strategic Framework.

Since the launch of the Doha Round of trade negotiations, a great deal has been said concerning progress or lack of it. Notable among the observations was the accepted failure to produce final commitments and conclusions of the Doha Round by 1st January 2005, due mainly to the discussions of parameters and modalities of several simultaneous framework agreements and proposals. This is indeed a difficult challenge for all, notably to the majority of the developing countries that lack analytical capacity to evaluate the consequences for their economies of the agreed framework and parameters. Participants should take full advantage of the learning opportunity offered by this Regional Clarification Workshop on the WTO Framework Agreement and Related Regional Trade to prepare themselves for the tough challenges that lie ahead. During the next four days, the workshop will attempt to clarify the issues, review the facts and analysis, share information and experiences on this important subject of agricultural trade, so that the Central and West African countries will be better prepared for the coming negotiations.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister, Distinguished Guests, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to conclude by pointing out, that while the negotiations continue, FAO will, within the context of its mandate and the ambit of its experience continue to undertake analytical work on all pertinent issues and to provide technical assistance to the countries in the Region.

I thank you for your attention.