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HIGH LEVEL REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS IN SUPPORT OF FOOD POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Accra, Ghana, 19 – 21 September 2005

ADDRESS

BY

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Mr. Chairman,

Honourable Minister for Food and Agriculture,

Distinguished Guests,

Honourable Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director-General of FAO, Dr. Jacques Diouf, it is for me a real pleasure to be here with you at the opening of this High Level Regional Seminar on the Development of Integrated Agricultural Statistics Systems in Support of Food Policies and Programmes in Africa.

On behalf of FAO I wish to express my very sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Ghana for hosting this High Level Seminar. Honourable Minister of Food and Agriculture, I believe that your presence at this opening ceremony this morning underscores the importance that your Government attaches to the development of agricultural statistics systems in support of effective planning, decision-making and food security.

I would also like to welcome all the delegates who have come from ECOWAS Member States to attend this very important High Level Regional Seminar. Similarly I welcome the development partners present here with whom we have a shared vision for the elimination of the scourge of hunger and poverty.

Food, as we are all aware, is of fundamental importance to the well being of the citizenry, and to the economic progress and security of nations. It is also a major aspect of human rights. In this regard, the development of agriculture and food production for human consumption is a crucial policy area.

*Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Our generation and the future ones to come are faced with acute challenges relating to the eradication of poverty and of finding long-lasting and sustainable solution to problems associated with malnutrition and food insecurity. For most African countries, poverty and food insecurity are fundamentally serious problems. Yet, despite their unquestionable importance to us all, they are probably the sector about which we know least in terms of indicators and statistics.

To achieve any significant reduction in poverty and food insecurity in Africa, we must focus efforts on rural areas and rural populations because the greater preponderance of the poor and the hungry in our Region reside in the rural areas and work on the land. And for these efforts to help achieve the expected results they must be designed on the basis of real facts, focus on the right targets and have their results regularly assessed.

*Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Reliable and accurate data on the agricultural and rural sector will no doubt provide immeasurable support in our battle to break the vicious circle of poverty and food insecurity facing our Region, given the fact that policies are shaped out of available information and that reliable data are needed for better targeting of development programmes and services at the poor and the food insecure and for the monitoring and evaluation of the results and impacts of Policies and Programmes.

Decision-makers need qualitative and quantitative information to analyze constraints, identify benchmark situations, set quantified objectives and monitor the implementation of policies and programmes.

At present, many African countries do not have adequate systems of agricultural statistics nor the capability to use the information that is available for analytical studies, in spite of the increasing demand for this service. Today, we live in the “highway technology of information”, and we must harness this technology to help us improve our food and agricultural information base. FAO is firmly committed to the effort to strengthen National Capacity in Food and Agricultural Statistics. We believe in the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to the development of sustainable agricultural statistics systems driven by data needs to support priority policies and programmes.

It is against this background that this seminar has been planned with a view to assisting ECOWAS countries to design strategies for the development of agricultural statistics, in the overall framework of their National Strategies for the Development of Statistics, with special attention to the data needs for regional integration and support to Food Security Policies and Programmes.

*Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

To facilitate access to, and use of available data on agricultural production for all African countries and for the Regional Economic Communities in the continent, and in order to contribute to the development of policies for the agricultural sector, the FAO Regional Office for Africa has produced the first edition of *Africa Statistical Yearbook and Selected Indicators of Food and Agriculture*, in English with French translation covering the period 1993-2003. Work on the second issue is already underway. It is our hope that ECOWAS Member States and indeed the Member States of the other Economic Groupings in the Continent of Africa will find this highly informative resource material a useful tool for developing their food and agricultural policies and programmes and for comparative assessment of country and sub-regional performance.

Regarding the follow-up action to the 1996 World Food Summit and the search for an appropriate solution to agricultural statistics constraints, FAO has promoted the development of Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems (FIVIMS) at country level, in order to monitor on worldwide basis the progress towards food security and to identify the food insecure and the vulnerable people.

I would urge you all, distinguished participants, to examine the issue being placed before you at this Seminar closely and in depth, in order to formulate clear and realistic recommendations for the development of food and agricultural statistics systems in Africa.

From another standpoint, this High Level Regional Seminar should open new avenues for building technical strategies and support to strengthen the capacity of Africa's agricultural statistics systems in favour of ECOWAS agriculture policy.

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you.