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AFRICAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

19th SESSION

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ADDRESS BY Mr. OLOCHE A. EDACHE

FAO ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GENERAL AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
FOR AFRICA¹

Mr. Chairman

His Excellency, Honourable Minister of Agriculture

His Excellency, Honourable Minister of Planning and Development

His Excellency, Honourable Minister of Industry and Commerce

His Excellency, Honourable Minister for Women and Social Affairs

Members of the Diplomatic Corps in Mozambique

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director General of FAO, Dr Jacques Diouf, it is for me a great pleasure to address this 19th Session of the African Commission on Agricultural Statistics (AFCAS).

First of all, I would like to welcome all the distinguished delegates, coming from different parts of Africa and Observers from different parts of the world.

I take this opportunity also to express my gratitude to the Government and people of Mozambique for accepting the invitation to host this meeting which is the first in any Portuguese Speaking Country. I would also like to thank the authorities for the excellent facilities put at our disposal and for the warm hospitality we have been privileged to receive so far, which testifies to the true spirit of African hospitality for which Mozambicans are renowned.

¹ Speech read on behalf of the ADG/RR, RAF, by the FAOR Mozambique

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many African countries continue to face the challenge of eradicating poverty and finding long-lasting and sustainable solution to the problems associated with malnutrition and food insecurity. For most African countries, poverty and food insecurity are fundamentally rural problems, as the majority of the poor and undernourished people live in rural areas and are dependent on rural-based activities for their livelihoods. Yet, despite its unquestionable importance to us all, it is probably the sector of the economy about which we know the least in terms of hard facts and statistics.

To achieve any significant reduction in poverty and food insecurity in Africa, efforts have to be focused on rural areas and rural populations. And for these efforts to achieve the expected results, the intervention programmes must be designed on the basis of real facts, focus on the right targets and have their results regularly assessed.

Relevant and accurate statistics on food, agricultural and rural sector will provide immeasurable support in our battle to break the vicious circle of poverty and food insecurity. Policies are designed on the basis of available information. Programmes and projects aimed at increasing agricultural productivity, stabilizing food supply, developing and improving agricultural services and infrastructures for a more equitable access to food will only succeed if backed-up by timely and reliable statistics. Decision-makers need quantitative information to analyze constraints, identify benchmark situations, set quantified objectives, monitor implementation and measure the impact of policies and programs.

At present, many African countries do not have adequate systems of food and agricultural statistics nor the capability to use the information that is available for analytical studies despite the increasing demand. Even where data are available, their reliability is often questionable.

At the same time the tools for data collection and dissemination have seen rapid changes and technological development – we live in the information age – and we must harness this technology to help us improve our food and agricultural information base.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The African Commission on Agricultural Statistics, in conformity with its mandate “to review the state of food and agricultural statistics in the region and advise member Nations on the development and standardization of agricultural statistics within the general framework of FAO’s work in statistics...” has played and is playing a significant role in ensuring that FAO contributes effectively in overcoming the deficiencies in and constraints to the development of national agricultural statistical systems and programmes.

AFCAS is the only forum of its kind which brings together agricultural statisticians from the different countries of the region. I hope that the Commission will continue to play a catalytic role and to provide a forum for discussion and exchange of viable strategies and solutions for strengthening national food and agricultural statistics systems in the countries in support of development policies and programmes.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the last Session of the Commission held in Yaoundé, Cameroon in 2003, FAO’s programme for the development of food and agricultural statistics in the countries of the region has been pursued within the context of significant developments and innovations undertaken by the FAO Statistics Division and which will be discussed in detail during this session. FAO’s activities and technical assistance in statistics has been aimed at improving the capacity and capability of countries to produce reliable and timely agricultural statistics and establish sustainable data collection systems at national levels.

This 19th AFCAS follows an intensive international workshop on strengthening food and agricultural statistics organized 20-22 October 2005 in Maputo, jointly by FAO and the OECD-based Consortium “Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century

(PARIS21), back-to-back with this 19th AFCAS. The workshop which was attended by high level experts from African Countries and Cooperation Agencies, discussed important topics such as good country practices and innovative methods and tools, strategic planning and advocacy and the support needed for the development of modern, relevant and sustainable food and agricultural statistics systems in African Countries. I am convinced that the technical recommendations from this workshop will constitute valuable inputs to your deliberations.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking at the agenda of this meeting, I note with great interest that the new development of FAO World Database on Agriculture FAOSTAT and its companion programme being tested at country level, CountrySTAT will be presented and discussed in detail. I also note that the new World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010 is included in the agenda of your meeting. I would not like to pre-empt the discussions that would take place on these topics, or indeed on the other topics in the agenda, but would simply wish to point out that there are eminent statisticians present in this august gathering that are quite capable of handling the issues involved. I have confidence that the decisions reached would be particularly effective in improving food and agricultural statistics systems in member countries, especially in the African region.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my belief that this nineteenth Session of AFCAS would go down in history as the one that laid the foundation for a substantial improvement in agricultural statistical endeavours in the African countries.

I wish you all success in our deliberations at this 19th Session of African Commission on Agricultural Statistics.

Thank you.