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Brief report on

Roundtable Meeting on Programme for the 2010 Round of Censuses of Agriculture

The purpose of the meeting was to provide to potential census leaders from selected countries, in-depth knowledge of the new World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010 (WCA 2010), in particular, the innovations and new features of the programme as compared to past programmes and also to promote exchange of experiences among countries. The meeting also reviewed the plans of the countries for implementing the agricultural census and surveys. It also addressed some region-specific issues connected with structural data collection, e.g. estimation of livestock population and allocation of land area to different crop in mixed cropping or mixed land use situations.

Apart from the Meeting Secretariat, 12 country participants from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu attended the meeting. The participants from Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea could not attend. Two staff from FAO headquarters and the Senior Statistician from the FAO-RAP were part of the technical organizing team, who made the lead presentation in each technical session and facilitated the meeting.

The meeting was conducted in English and was held in the premises of the FAO sub-regional office for the Pacific Islands. The meeting was officially opened by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Samoa, Honourable Taua Tavaga Kitona Seula with a Key Note address.

The meeting was structured into 12 technical sessions, apart from the opening and concluding sessions. Each technical session, including the two roundtable discussions focused on a specific technical aspect of the WCA 2010. In addition, one open-house session was added on the last day of the meeting on demand from the participants. This session mostly concentrated on issues related to data-processing technology.

The meeting was conducted in a highly interactive mode to promote an understanding of technical issues. The sessions were mostly chaired by the country participants. Each technical session comprised a lead presentation from FAO, followed by presentations from selected countries. In order to promote information sharing, country participants were assigned topics of their presentations in advance, taking into account the statistical system of the country. Lead discussants of each session were also pre-assigned.

A total of 29 technical papers were presented and discussed. Some room documents were also circulated.

A field trip to observe local agricultural farms and a Government Livestock Research Centre (both located out side Apia) was organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of Samoa. This visit provided the basis for discussion of statistical treatment of land use in a complex agricultural system. A visit to the National Statistics Office of Samoa was also organized for the interested participants.

Conclusions, issues and recommendations

The following general conclusions and issues came out of the meeting:

- The participants unanimously appreciated the usefulness and effectiveness of this meeting for the development of structural agricultural statistics in the region.
- In view of rapid changes in agriculture and vulnerability of the region to climate change, more frequent than decadal agricultural censuses are required in the Pacific island countries. A frequency of five years was suggested.
- The participants expressed the need for some technical guidelines on standardized data processing methods for agricultural census and related software packages. They advised FAO to take a lead in building data processing capacity in the region. Steps that will need to be taken in this direction are to: evaluate the available data processing software(s), identify the suitable one, and make arrangement for continued support from the provider (e.g. CS-Pro from the US Bureau of Census), issue guidelines and train the manpower in the statistical offices of the region. It was noted that the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) was also doing some capacity building in this field.
- Samoa and Niue expressed that an understanding of role and contribution of individual members of agricultural household is important. Sub-holder concept is relevant in this regards, particularly to provide information on the role of women in agriculture.
- In response to issues connected with collecting data in situations where many non-standard units of measurement exist, it was concluded that it would be preferable to collect data in the units commonly used by farmers. The difficulties in enumeration could be overcome by better training for field work.
- Regarding the land use of parcels where permanent crops and pastures co-exist on the same land, it was concluded that the issue could be decided at local level with

due consideration to the main intended use of land. In cases where both uses of land are intended, the area of land could be apportioned for allocation to the two land uses.

- Countries showed interest in the FAO publication (1982) on estimation of crop areas and yields. They recommended that this publication should be put on the website of FAO Statistical Division for wider dissemination and providing easy access to interested statisticians.
- It should be examined as to: (1) How the WCA document meets the requirements for reporting on climate change? (2) How does this document align to guidelines prescribed by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)?
- It was agreed that the countries should consider preparing a coordinated Statistical Development Strategy for their national statistical systems.