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of

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at the

Roundtable Meeting on

Programme for the 2010 Round of Censuses of Agriculture

Cairo, Egypt, 16-20 November, 2008

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

Ladies and Gentlemen; distinguished participants and resource persons

I, on behalf of FAO and on my personal behalf, am extremely happy to welcome you all to this city of ancient civilization on the occasion of this roundtable meeting of countries in the region.

This is the fifth meeting on the World Programme for the 2010 Round of Censuses of Agriculture (WCA 2010) in a series of similar meetings already held in Thailand, Uganda, Mali, and Chile. The purpose of this meeting is to advocate the Ninth World Programme for the Census of Agriculture.

The 1930 and 1940 Programmes were promoted by the International Institute of Agriculture. Beginning with 1950, FAO took over the responsibilities in providing guidance to countries for undertaking agricultural census. It has regularly published a Programme on this subject for each decade. This decennial FAO Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA) has been helping countries to carry out their national agricultural census at least once every ten years using standard international concepts, definitions and methodology. I am happy to note that for during the last round (1996-2005), about 120 countries took advantage of this important FAO programme in designing their national agricultural censuses. The new programme would be useful to the countries, which plan to conduct their national censuses during the decade of 2006 - 2015. Some of countries in this region have already made use this programme for their recent censuses of agriculture.

I am pleased to note that participants from 10 countries are attending this meeting. Interest and enthusiasm of the countries in the new FAO programme for agricultural census is evidenced by the fact that some countries have sent more than one participant to the meeting. I note that you all have long experience in agricultural census and surveys and are the potential leader of agricultural censuses in your country. I hope that you will not only learn from FAO, but will also make technical contributions to the meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Increasing globalization of economies and the climate change, is leading to a structural transformation of agricultural sector in many countries. Particular care needs to be taken to safeguard interests of the poor farmers, particularly in the countries where agriculture is fragile. Recent surge in food prices has raised an alarm for us. In this scenario, planning process for a food secure world makes an increasing demand on the statistical systems. More recent, more frequent and reliable information on a variety of new subjects is being sought.

Diversion of agricultural land for urban and industrial purposes on the one hand, and degradation of existing agricultural land on the other raise concerns, which need to be monitored through reliable periodic data. Environmental aspects of agriculture, such as sinking water table and desertification are engaging attention of policy makers in many countries of the region. The role of data in studying agricultural practices or as an input into policy making process can hardly be underestimated.

Meeting the above increasing demand for data calls for more frequent specialized surveys to collect data on a variety of subjects relating to food and agricultural sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Based on existing data, FAO has estimated that the number of undernourished people in the developing world in 2003-2005 was 832 million. Out of these nearly 28 million come from 9 countries of this region. This region during 1990-92 had about 7 percent of under nourished population, which rose to 11 percent and has remained stagnant at this level for nearly a decade. Access and affordability to food is challenge for many countries, thus still a major concern for many. Countries need to step up the pace of progress to reach the MDG and WFS targets by 2015.

Country-level monitoring of the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has thus become an important element in formulating economic development strategies, and countries have begun to focus on the need for MDG-related indicators as a key component of the national statistical programme. A variety of data sources are being sought for this purpose. A census of agriculture is one of the largest national statistical operation undertaken by a country, and its use as a potential source of data for monitoring the MDGs should be taken into consideration in the census planning and design.

The goals of “eradication of extreme poverty and hunger” and “empowerment of women” are particularly relevant to the agriculture sector. Often the low ranking of countries on these types of indicators is related to “structural causes” rather than “temporary causes”. Data on such aspects is particularly suitable for collection through the agricultural censuses. I am happy to note that the new FAO World Programme for Census of Agriculture has taken cognisance of this requirement and has rightly added “Monitoring of MDGs” as one

of the objectives of agricultural census. It gives me immense professional satisfaction to note that the subject of Household Food Security, which is often difficult to measure, has been covered in agricultural census.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

More and more countries are now realizing the importance and contribution of “rural sector”, which goes beyond the “traditional agricultural sector”, in their economic growth. I am glad to note that the WCA 2010 document gives countries an option to use their agricultural census as a vehicle for collecting data on rural sector. The document on the new WCA, also available in Arabic, gives guidance to countries on how to extend the census operation to non-agricultural households. Many countries of Asia, like China, Vietnam and Malaysia have already taken a lead in extending the scope of their agricultural censuses to cover the non-agricultural activities in the rural areas.

For effectively targeting the growth of rural areas data is needed not only on agricultural holdings, but also on communities about availability of rural infrastructure and access to basic services. A community-level data collection may cover agriculture-related data that would not be collected from holdings, such as the area of communal pasture land. Data on whether the community is prone to natural disasters or subject to seasonal food shortages is important for planning to ensure food security at household level. Community-level data would be of immense value in formulating, executing and evaluating community projects.

Given the strong demand for community-level data and value accorded to this type of information, a community-level component has been included in the WCA 2010. I would strongly encourage countries to include this component in their censuses, according to their national circumstances and data requirements. Besides providing the data on agriculture sector, such an approach permits a juxtaposition of data on various economic and geographical aspects of the community. An interfacing of community-level data with climatic data will help in the analysis of agro-ecosystem of communities and will aid in identifying appropriate agricultural practices for ensuring the sustainability of their livelihood systems and ecosystem.

I hope the participants would find this meeting an appropriate forum for exchange of experiences on this important subject.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A well planned agricultural census is a precondition for preparing a national survey programme for the agricultural sector. The data collected through agricultural census provides the essential building blocks for the national Food and Agricultural Statistics System. The agricultural census provides key data which form the basis for planning additional sample surveys for collection of detailed data.

The WCA 2010 stresses that the opportunity for coordinating the various national census activities should be actively explored at an early stage in the census planning process, and be taken into consideration in developing national statistical plans. Countries should make the necessary administrative arrangements to ensure close collaboration between the census development teams and to ensure that all avenues for coordination are explored.

My colleagues will be dealing with the technical details of the identified strategies for integration of censuses and surveys with in the national statistical system in the appropriate technical session.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I hope that the scarcity of resources for statistical activities will not be aggravated in the wake of a global recession. Revolution in IT technology, not only for data processing but also for analysis and building of databases, and its fast reducing costs offer greater opportunity for making optimal use of data collected. I hope that in the light of these welcome developments the countries will find the new World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010 as a handy reference book for designing their National Census and Survey Programme for the agriculture and rural sectors.

Before concluding, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to your governments for nominating you to attend this very important meeting.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the local staff supporting this meeting. I also thank my colleagues from FAO Headquarters for their dedication and hard work in organizing this meeting.

I wish you all success in your deliberations and a pleasant stay in Cairo.

Thank you.