



OPENING ADDRESS

of

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delivered by

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at the

Workshop on Strategic Planning for Agricultural and Rural Statistics

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**Distinguished Participants and Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is a great pleasure to extend, on behalf of the Director-General of FAO and on my own behalf, a warm welcome to the participants of the *Workshop on Strategic Planning for Agricultural and Rural Statistics*.

I am delighted to acknowledge with my gratitude the participation of representatives from 15 of the countries where FAO will undertake Global Strategy related activities in 2015. I am thankful for your interest in participating in the Global Strategy and for travelling long distances to participate in this event despite your busy schedule. Your active involvement in building the statistical systems to produce reliable food and agricultural

statistics for decision making are crucial for achieving success on the goal of the Global Strategy which now needs to be oriented to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I am told that nearly one-third of indicators selected for monitoring the SDGs relate to the agricultural and rural sector.

I am happy to note that many international organizations are working as a team to improve agricultural statistics. FAO is privileged to take a part in this joint effort and host the secretariat. I thank ESCAP, ADB and SIAP for partnering with us in this regional process; as well as DFID and SPC. I would like to acknowledge the presence of internationally honoured experts in this meeting. Prof Ben Kiregyera and Dr Isidoro David, I am especially thankful to you for taking time to share your knowledge and experience with us. I would also like to welcome colleagues from FAO headquarters and from other parts of Europe and from Africa and America.

The implementation of the Global Strategy in Asia and the Pacific is a long-term plan for improving agricultural and rural statistics in the countries. This workshop is of particular importance as it will focus on the development of national *Strategic Plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics (SPARS)*. These plans are the key output from the Global Strategy process and will guide donor and development activity in each country for the next 5-10 years. The workshop will provide information about the SPARS development process as well as related issues such as coordination and integration. It will also provide information on recent developments in methodologies to improve agricultural and rural statistics.

From the Timetable I note that the Workshop has been designed to bring together experience from many developed countries and well as from African countries. Sharing knowledge of best practices from different parts of the world is a pre-requisite for design of good strategies at national level in all areas, including statistics.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You are well aware, that FAO's main mandate is to combat hunger and malnutrition and monitor the progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially MDG one, Target two, aimed at reducing extreme hunger by half by 2015. Despite the rapid transformation of economies, the Asia-Pacific region is still a home to more than 500 million people who faced chronic hunger, which accounts for almost two-thirds of the world total hungry population, as estimated by FAO.

FAO estimates of hunger have been questioned by member governments on methodological grounds or the data that goes into it. FAO is not the main producer of data and relies on national statistical agencies to provide their data for FAOSTAT which is the largest database on agricultural statistics. The choice of methodology is also often constrained by availability of data. Concerns have been expressed at several international fora over the declining quantity and quality of agricultural statistics which are fundamental for policy-makers to carry out accurate assessment and take decisions on food security interventions and agricultural and rural development.

The Global Strategy is trying to address the root cause of the problem by building the capacity of the National Statistical Systems to meet demands for data at national and international level. The Global Strategy is a ground-breaking effort which has as one of the key recommendations that agriculture be integrated into national statistical systems. The Regional Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific defines the areas of support that the Asia Pacific region needs in terms of technical assistance, training and research to strengthen national agricultural statistical systems and outlines activities aimed at implementing that support in a sustainable way.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Based upon our capacity assessment work with countries so far, we have noticed that institutional and coordination issues are often the main constraining factor which slows down the progress of agricultural statistics at country level. Agricultural statistics are diverse and complex subjects which cover not only crops but also livestock, fish and forestry sub-sectors. Rural households practice economic activities in these sub-sectors along with those in other rural sectors like handicrafts making in an integrated manner for their livelihood. It is therefore important that the data on these sub-sectors should also be integrated.

Experts tell us that integrated data collection is cost-effective, minimizes efforts and produces consistent data which is reliable. Methodologies for this are being developed through the research component of the Global Strategy. In order to establish an integrated statistical system, it is important that different players make a coordinated effort at national level. The first objective to achieve this goal at national level should be to establish a National Survey Calendar, which draws upon the comparative advantage of different agencies. I do believe that pooling of knowledge, expertise and resources, and establishing a shared strategic programme for improvement of data will go a long way in achieving the goals of Global Strategy at national level.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is a historical opportunity to enable your countries to develop sustainable statistical systems which will produce accurate and reliable agricultural and rural data – comparable over time and across countries for use by decision-makers. Assistance shall be provided to countries that may require it and show political will and commitment. Governments need to demonstrate ownership and commitment by funding regular statistical services and other necessary cost-sharing contributions.

I am convinced that with our strong partnership with ESCAP and ADB, our member countries and other leading institutions, we together will improve the evidence base of policy making of the agricultural sector in the region.

Finally, let me acknowledge the hard work of the secretariat staff in FAO in the preparation and organization of this workshop.

I wish you all a successful workshop and a pleasant stay in Thailand.

Thank you.