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STRENGTHENING REGIONAL DATA EXCHANGE SYSTEM ON
FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN
ASIA AND PACIFIC COUNTRIES
(GCP/RAS/184/JPN)

**Proceedings of the
First Focal Point Meeting**

Bangkok, Thailand, 6-7 August 2002

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I. Background: meeting and venue

1. The First Meeting of Focal Points was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 6-7 August 2002. Its primary objective was to discuss the current situation on agricultural statistics and the future activities of the Project GCP/RAS/184/JPN. It was also planned to provide a complete report of the evaluation mission for GCP/RAS/171/JPN *"Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries"* with recommendations for the successor project GCP/RAS/184/JPN. A Technical Consultation that would firm up a configuration and an implementation strategy for the Regional Data Exchange System was scheduled for the 8th of August 2002. (The agenda and timetable for the Focal Points meeting is shown in Annex 2.)
2. Participants included officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan, FAO statisticians; Project staff; observers from the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok; and delegates from the following Participating Countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. The country delegates were the Focal Points in their respective countries, comprising in the main the officials responsible for agricultural statistics or, in instances when the Focal Point could not or was unable to travel to Bangkok, a high-level statistician in the same organization as the Focal Point.
3. The participants to the Technical Consultation were, on the other hand, technical staff members of the respective participating countries' statistical organizations who would be called upon to provide leadership in the implementation of the Regional Data Exchange System. (The list of Participants for the Focal Points meeting is shown in Annex 1.)

II. Opening ceremonies

Agenda item 1

4. The Opening Statement was delivered by Mr. Dong Qingsong, FAO Deputy Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific and Acting Assistant Director-General of the FAO Regional Office. He thanked the Japanese Government and FAO headquarters (represented by Mr. Hiek Som) for the establishment and support extended to the Project *"Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries"* (GCP/RAS/184/JPN), which has as its main objective, the implementation on a pilot basis of an electronic-based regional data exchange system covering the 16 participating countries.
5. He said that Japan was now a major contributor to the FAO food and agricultural statistics programmes with two regional projects at RAP, and country projects being carried out in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. He requested the delegates from Japan to convey to the Japanese Government, FAO's appreciation for its support to the Organization's efforts to strengthen food and agricultural statistics in the Asia-Pacific Region.

6. The First Meeting of Focal Points for GCP/RAS/184/JPN, he added, would serve as a forum to introduce the Project activities and to discuss future outputs. The ultimate beneficiaries of the Project were the individual countries participating in this project, and mentioned the need to think beyond the Project period, and solicit support for the post-project activities that would further support the statistical development of the participating countries which could derive maximum benefits from the resources available.
7. He encouraged the Participants to actively participate in the discussions and verbalize their needs and expectations from the Project, so that, even if these could not be immediately addressed, FAO could take serious note and work with its partners in development, including the Government of Japan, to find ways of helping the Member Countries. He exhorted the Participants to use their expertise to come up with useful, practical and doable recommendations, and extended his best wishes for a successful meeting with positive outputs and for an enjoyable stay in the City of Bangkok. (The full text of the opening statement is in Annex 3.)

III. Overview and election of officers

8. The overview and objectives of the Focal Points Meeting were presented by the Agricultural Statistics Expert for GCP/RAS/184/JPN, who said that the aim of the member countries of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS) was to have a sound statistical system capable of (a) providing data and information for planning and policy making in the food and agriculture sector to raise the living standard and nutritional status especially of the rural poor, and (b) exchanging these data with other countries to support national, regional and global food security programmes and policies. The First Focal Points Meeting would be held on 6-7 August, to be followed by the Technical Consultation on the third day.
9. The delegate from the Donor Government, Mr. Masataka Hishiyama of the Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, stressed the importance of statistics and reviewed the sequence of events that led to the establishment of the predecessor project, GCP/RAS/171/JPN. He said that the high-level cooperation of the 16 participating countries and their respective Focal Points had contributed to the establishment of the follow-up project that started in December 2001.
10. He expressed his appreciation to the participating countries and other institutions concerned. The present Project, he continued, if successfully completed, would make a great contribution to the economic development of the region. To assure this, he requested that all countries should state their needs in terms of statistics and information. The role of the Focal Points, he ended, was quite significant, involving the collection of information and coordination with organizations concerned. He thus requested everyone to understand the significance of the project and to cooperate in its implementation.

Election of Officers

11. Upon the nomination by the delegate from the Philippines, Mr. Choiril Maksum of Indonesia was elected as Chair, the delegate from Sri Lanka, Mr. AMU Dissanayake as Vice Chair, and the delegate from Laos, Mr. Savanh Hanephom as Rapporteur.

IV. Report of the evaluation mission

Agenda item 4

12. Mr. Yoichiro Kawasaki, Consultant in agricultural statistics, who was a member of the Evaluation Mission, presented the report on the evaluation of the predecessor project managed by Mr. Ryuki Ikeda. The evaluation provided an objective assessment of all key aspects of GCP/RAS/171/JPN and suggested additional points for the succeeding (present) project, GCP/RAS/184/JPN. The Mission comprised a representative from the donor country, Mr. Kawasaki, and a representative from FAO headquarters.
13. The first project had two immediate objectives: first, the drawing up of national statistical development strategies and second, preparation of a plan for the establishment of a database system with equipment procured for data transfer in electronic format. The expected outputs for the first objective were in-depth studies and national and regional workshops for at least 200 national statisticians and data users. Of the expected outputs for Objective 2, the most important was the Plan for the establishment of a database system with equipment facilities procured for data transfer capabilities.
14. The major points of the Evaluation Report were the following:
 - The achievements of the first project were deemed at a good level, including nine in-depth studies and eight national seminars which enabled the identification of constraints and formulation of recommendations for improvements. Six technical workshops at regional and sub-regional levels were implemented (some jointly with FAO and other organizations), leading to improved knowledge on advanced statistical methods and approaches. Finally, preparations were made for the establishment of a regional data and information exchange system, leading to the development of a follow-up project document, which is the present project.
 - The Evaluation Mission felt that the one shortcoming of the first project was its optimistic objectives. The drawing up of national statistical development strategies and plans was a major undertaking that would take time to complete, requiring a number of long-term consultations with different sectors within the government, including policy planners, budget departments, and technical people. Instead of development plans, the first project was able to formulate recommendations. The second objective of establishing a database system and procuring equipment facilities could not be done given the time frame since the information exchange system still needed to be defined.
 - However, the Evaluation Mission did not discount the large and considerable efforts made by the first Project. It had set the stage for the development and implementation of the data exchange system, which the second Project was now about to do. The Mission requested FAO to focus on the institutional capacities of the statistical offices in the participating countries, find more donors, and assist the member countries in their improvement of their statistical systems, besides the assisting in establishing the model for a regional exchange system.

- ❑ Other existing efforts in food security information systems were mentioned. Japan was sharing its resources with related programmes and projects which included the Asian Food Security Information System or FSIS, Asia FIVIMS, and the SPFS.
- ❑ The Evaluation Mission recommended more frequent meetings of the Focal Points, ideally once a year which would be possible provided funds were available. The Focal Points were expected to take the lead in coordinating the regional data and information systems in each country.
- ❑ It was important for the follow-up Project to learn from its predecessor Project in terms of enabling action - for instance, an exchange of information and data that would be supported by the acquisition of computer facilities and institution of WebPages. The Project should be able to start something and build on it, rather than rely on an exchange of opinions during meeting and discussions.
- ❑ The establishment of a contact group between and among related programmes and projects such as AFSIS, Asia FIVIMS, SPFS and plans for food demand and supply forecast model was also important since it would minimize the duplication of efforts and enhance the activities of the Project.
- ❑ The Mission also recommended publishing a newsletter that would serve as the medium to transmit information among the Member Countries.
- ❑ Pilot countries would be selected for the data exchange system. The criteria for selection of the pilots would include a certain level of information technology literacy and the ability to translate metadata into English.
- ❑ The Evaluation Mission felt that some participating countries still needed improvements in their national statistical systems in terms of budgetary resources, hardware and software and human resources development.
- ❑ Some governments were facing problems in financial resources and some statistical organizations were being required to reduce manpower. This ran counter to policy requirements for data that could be released rapidly.
- ❑ More funds were needed from external donors for statistical improvements, and for this purpose, discussions and exchange of views with the statistical institutions were necessary. Another effort would be aimed towards influencing governments to raise their awareness of the importance and relevance of statistics. Consensus among countries on importance of statistics and information was needed.
- ❑ A long-term perspective was required in the matter of statistics and information development; this likewise required concerted action by all countries and relevant organizations, as well as a comprehensive system for data collection, processing, analysis, communication and dissemination.

15. The comments and points raised as a result of the Evaluation Report prepared by the Mission team were as follows:

- The Focal Point from India complemented the Mission on the comprehensive Evaluation and noted the difficulties inherent in improving statistics, particularly in consideration of the lengthy time frame and gigantic planning tasks prior to implementation. He said that establishing a common framework and having common definitions would be a “beginning” for the project.
- The representative from FAO headquarters said that while he felt that the quality of the Evaluation Report was at a high level, it failed to mention that major activities had been done at the national level through the efforts of the participating countries. He added that backstopping was available even when the Regional Office did not have a full-time Statistical Expert. The Mission pointed out that although the Report did not take into account the national level efforts, the Evaluation did not discount their importance.
- The recommendation on publishing a regular Newsletter was to be acted upon by the Regional Statistician.
- The delegate from Cambodia noted that the predecessor Project’s objectives could not have been met given its three-year duration, and agreed with the findings of the Mission on the shortcomings of the Project design. The different stages of statistical development among the participating Countries and their varying capabilities were likewise noted. The representative from the Donor Government, on the other hand, noted a recommendation on the need for three participating Governments to set up their own statistical system viewed from the long-term point.

V. The Regional Data Exchange System (RDES)

Agenda item no. 5

16. The Agricultural Statistics Expert made the presentation on the regional data exchange system on food and agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries. He provided a brief background, reviewing the transition from printed format to Internet technology. WebPages in most countries were insufficient or non-existent. Interest was focused on various levels of data - national, regional, and provincial. In the Asia and Pacific region, Internet use was rapidly progressing, and most Ministries in charge of agriculture (including agricultural statistics) were already starting their own WebPages.
17. As previously stated, an objective of APCAS countries was to have a sound statistical system capable of providing data and information for planning and policy making in the food and agriculture sector, with the aim of raising the living standard and nutritional status of the people, especially in the rural sector; and exchanging these data with other countries to support food security programmes and policies. The construction of the RDES was intended to serve this objective by setting up a network of information among Member Countries (Focal Points), and between Member Countries and the Project Office. The network would help these countries store statistical data and exchange them among users within the country as well as among countries.

18. The RDES would set up a network of computers among Member Countries and FAORAP. The system would consist of three major components: WebPages, Data and Hardware.
- a. Each Member Country would open a **WebPage** for the Data Exchange System in the appropriate office identified by the Focal Point. The WebPages would be linked, and other data would be included depending on the requirements, interests and preferences of the participating country.
 - b. The primary data of the RDES would consist of agricultural production data for national and sub-national areas such as provinces and price data for major agricultural products if available. Other data of special interest to participating countries would also be included in RDES. For the moment, the data will follow the format established by the *Yearbook of Agricultural Statistics* as published in each country; it is foreseen that at some point, the Project would attempt to establish a common data format that could be used by all participating countries.
 - c. **Hardware** - The Project would provide PCs and arrange for Internet connections, if not yet available in the specific office, in all participating countries. Hardware installation and Internet connection for ASEAN nations among the participating countries will be supported through the AFSIS Project. The Project would assume the funding for the hardware in countries which would not be covered by AFSIS. Five countries would be selected for pilot system installation by the Agricultural Statistics Expert. A small-scale country seminar on system management and utilization would be held for officials in each pilot country. On the other hand, the Project would, in the case of non-pilot Countries, provide computer equipment and Internet connection (as necessary) to assist in the execution of the analysis technique introduced by RDES. Guidance would be conducted through a regional seminar. The Project would also support translation of metadata and input of both the data and metadata.
19. The Comments and points arising from the presentation of the Regional Project were as follows:
- The need for standard definitions of concepts and common data formats was expressed by the delegates from India and Iran. The Meeting was informed that the Project, would develop a common format later, but prefers during this initial period to use the *Yearbook of Statistics* model since it would facilitate immediate outputs.
 - The critical need was expressed not only for hardware, but for software as well as training for IT staff. These were going to be addressed by the Project, in the form of technical guidance to the pilot countries and national seminars which would raise the capacity levels of implementing staff in the participating countries.
 - It was also reiterated that the Project budget covered hardware, software, Internet subscriptions where they were not yet available, meeting costs, and national seminar-workshops. It was stressed that equal attention would be provided to each participating country. Efforts would also be exerted to obtain additional funds from other donors.

VI. Introduction of FAOSTAT and FAOSTAT2

Agenda item 6

20. The presentation on FAOSTAT with an introduction to the proposed FAOSTAT2 was made by the Regional Statistician on the behalf of Mr. Edward Gillin of the FAO Statistics Unit. He gave an overview of the Statistics Division at FAO Headquarters, and said that sources of statistics in FAOSTAT were virtual questionnaires, electronic files, other questionnaires and other statistical sources. These data were analyzed and adjusted, updated, cross-checked and validated, and published as yearbooks and in other forms.
21. Statistics were available in two forms: working form (in storage) and dissemination forms (such as publications). He discussed the FAOSTAT database including the technical architecture, the structure of the commodities in FAOSTAT, the data sources (comprising FAO country-specific questionnaires, national publications and information exchanges between ESS statisticians and national experts), and pointed out the need for consistency in the type of data, methodology, and others.
22. The modernization of FAOSTAT was required, and at this time the requirements analysis and project proposal for FAOSTAT2 were underway. The modernization would seek to improve the quality of data with validation and updating at both FAO and national levels. He said that a more comprehensive presentation on FAOSTAT2 would be done during the Technical Consultation.

VII. Global issues in agricultural statistics

Agenda item no. 7

23. The global view of agricultural statistics was presented by the representative from the FAO headquarters. He said that in the past there had been considerable support from the UN and its specialized agencies until 15 years ago when there was a shift in the UN approach where assistance devolved directly to national agencies. Very little funding was also available from UNDP, less from bilateral donors and the minimum amount from trust funds.
24. However, a number of world summits, including the FAO-organized World Summit, undertaken in various years had placed importance on statistics and taken note of the limited capacity of some countries to produce agricultural statistics. He said that the delegates to the Summits had realized the consequences of lack of assistance in statistical capability building
 - One of the results of this realization was an invitation for decision makers in assistance in statistical areas to attend a meeting in Paris in 1999, organized by OECD, IMF, WB and UN. Participants were people who were the decision makers on extending assistance to statistics, including UN agencies, and selected developing countries. The Meeting considered the decreasing capacity of countries to produce statistics, and the need for technical-assistance partnerships. The

assistance given by the proposed partnerships would be implemented under the leadership of national agencies.

- The result was Paris 21, which stood for Partnership *in statistics for development in the 21st century*. The Secretariat for Paris 21 which is based in OECD had been very active in promoting statistics capacity building at country level - first by raising awareness at regional level, and now moving on to national level. Some participants made a strong representation for Paris21 to inform their respective countries to put more funds into statistics as a requisite for assistance. The Meeting established a Trust Fund, managed by the World Bank, and this Trust Fund was intended to provide grants to strengthen statistical systems.
- He encouraged the Focal Points to make use of the opportunities within PARIS21 as well as turn to other options in order to avail of funds for statistical development.

25. He said that World Summits had set targets to reach within a number of years— for example, reducing the number of poor people by a certain percentage within a certain period. For the use of the world leaders, relevant indicators were established.

26. The World Food Summit reviewed FIVIMS five years after it had been set up. The assessment found that only half of the targets had been met. As a result, the world leaders reiterated their commitment to these targets and decided to take more action to achieve them. As a result of changing priorities, there was need, he continued, to strengthen crop forecasting and to make more use of census data especially in identifying the vulnerable groups.

27. He recognized the potential of information technology, given the development of more powerful computers that were used in data analysis as well as in disseminating data.

28. He expressed FAO's hopes that the database would be improved at country levels to the benefit of global data. FAO, concerned with data quality, had reacted with plans to improve it with the development of FAOSTAT2.

29. He concluded that two major issues had emerged: (1) need for statistics capacity building at country level in partnership with the donor community; and (2) more intensive analysis of data to derive indicators useful for monitoring poverty reduction.

30. Comments and points arising from the Presentation

- The representative from Japan stated that the donor government had contributed to human resource development but noted that many trained people were moving on to other areas, to the disadvantage of agricultural statistics which would be left with inadequately trained staff. He pointed out the need to exert greater effort to maintain human resources and trained manpower.
- The reduction of inputs in terms of budget and human resources on the part of governments was also noted, as with Japan which had seen a reduction in its ODA by 10 percent. Governments should be encouraged to increase funding for its statistical activities.

- ❑ It was mentioned that a meeting of ASEAN statistical agencies would be held in January 2003 and FAO was invited to participate in the activity.
- ❑ It was explained that arresting the decline of human resources in information technology was difficult, given the high level of incentives in the private sector. However, one answer was to continue training staff, and possibly work towards the increase of salary levels to keep people at the national agencies. A model was Uganda, which, when it was faced with the same problem of decreasing number of qualified staff, instituted a major reform in the country's statistical system, whereby staffs were reduced and people were recruited for specific tasks under contracts, with financing either from the national government or donor countries.
- ❑ More training and more incentives were needed for the staff working in statistics. As national budgets were not allocated properly to statistics, the task would be to convince the users in the country to pour more resources into statistical activities.

VIII. Regional perspective on food and agricultural statistics

Agenda item no. 8

31. The regional perspective on food and agricultural statistics was given by the Regional Statistician, who said that the challenge was for statisticians to use the available resources; and for producers of agricultural statistics to ensure that staffs are well trained. Meeting these challenges was now more difficult because requirements had changed and technology had advanced.
32. The need to strengthen capacity and improve the use and analysis of data had been aptly stated by a previous speaker; at the first Focal Points Meeting of the precursor Project, a presentation had been made highlighting the diversity of the systems in the different participating countries. Changes had been implemented in methods and procedures, new data requirements such as gender statistics had been mandated by global meetings, and further information on aquaculture structure was required.
33. He reiterated that the precursor Project had made positive contributions to the development of statistical systems; it had introduced new methodologies, instituted capacity building, and coordinated its training activities with those of other agencies.
34. FAO was implementing several activities that would help meet the targets as stated in the World Food Summit, he said. He discussed the points resulting from the change in the perspective, including the elimination of jobs as a result of mechanization. Statistics agencies were now being asked to monitor changes in the sector so that they could make the policy makers aware of what kind of policies were needed. Other issues and concerns such as the requirement for sub-national level data within a short period; the higher level of education of data users and their demand for immediate data, and the need for statistical agencies to validate the data, also came up.
35. The improvement of the quality and timeliness of data, he continued, was the "history" of the agricultural statistical system in Asia. Concern was now on the capacity to analyze

and interpret data. In the last several years, technology, including the use of image scanning, had changed the manner in which data were collected, processed, analyzed and disseminated. He cited that there remained problems such as the high demand for skilled staff in the private sector, and the inability of Governments to obtain the latest technology in software.

36. The most important needs were the development of the capacity to analyze and interpret data, and the leveraging of the funds available from other projects to provide training to people who needed capacity upgrading. Another critical need was to be able to analyze the data using the new technology, which could save time and money, and enable the production of statistics in the quickest possible time.

37. Comments and points arising from the Presentation

- Several concerns were noted. First, the possibility of conducting agricultural censuses within one year; second, the loss of agricultural land for different development purposes; and third the need to use one international language within the region - preferably English - in addition to the national language; fourth, the changing trends in food consumption patterns, which have a bearing on food and agricultural statistics; the existence of confidential statistics which were necessary in the national interest; and the need for sustainability in the long run, with reference to the statistical and information exchange programs intended for the region; and the question of prioritizing funding for various activities.
- These concerns were addressed by pointing that that technology was changing very fast; there was difficulty in conducting a unified agricultural census because of the diversity among the countries of the region, and the limited funding available from the governments; confidential data and agricultural land development were hardly the concern of the statisticians and were instead the mandate of the policy makers; changing consumption patterns indeed had an impact on the agricultural statistics - such as production, education, and other areas; and the different countries had the responsibility to provide the data to FAO in an international language (English) although they were free to publish in their own language. In addition, it was felt that countries should provide the funds to conduct their own capacity building activities. For instance, China provided more materials than did the donor country during the training of the national staff on statistics.
- The use of technology in statistics – such as GIS – was minimal in some participating countries which did not have the capacity to translate the raw data into GIS. The Asia Pacific Region should therefore move towards applying technology that was available within the region.
- Interest was expressed in methodologies on horticultural statistics, and it was hoped that the FAO Regional Office would provide these to India. The representative from India also cited that its census was held once in five years and the livestock census also once in five years, and asked whether these two could be combined. It was explained that the combination of the two censuses would depend on the

methodologies used, and the horticultural methodologies for data collection would be researched and the results given.

- The need for scientific methodology that was cost-effective was cited.

IX. Food security information system for Asian countries

Agenda item no. 9

38. The presentation on the food security information system for Asian countries was made by the representative from MAFF in Japan. He said that in October 1996, the Japanese Government had submitted a proposal at the 18th APCAS to develop a statistics and information system, taking advantage of the rapid progress of computers and communication network technology. A Trust Fund was provided for this purpose. Phase 1 had identified problems and formulated a regional data exchange system; it was followed in December 2001 by Phase 2. This second phase would develop a regional data exchange system.
39. He mentioned that there was renewed Japanese contribution to the Asian region for strengthening of food security information. Two Trust Funds had been set up - one at FAO and another at ASEAN Secretariat.
40. The Trust Funds at FAO comprised the following: (a) a project to design and develop a system for a food and agricultural statistics information exchange system was planned for three years; (b) a five year project that was intended for development of middle and long-term food demand and supply forecasting models in ASEAN region; and (c) a project that was planned for food shortage analysis and mapping (ASIA FIVIMS), which would start in 2003 for a period of five years.
41. The Trust Fund for the ASEAN Secretariat was for the purpose of establishing the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS), with Thailand tasked to coordinate the improvement of the food security information system in cooperation with international organizations - FAO with its long experience in food security programmes was requested to assist the Japanese Government in implementation and funding.
42. The objectives of AFSIS were to strengthen national capacity of ASEAN member countries for food and agricultural statistics and information, which would lead to their capability in providing accurate and timely information
43. The planned activities for AFSIS were creation of an ASEAN Food Security Information and Training Centre (AFSIT Centre); human capacity building in the form of regional training and seminars for ASEAN member countries and assistance to member countries in organizing national seminars; information system development by building an AFSIS regional network for food and agriculture statistics and information; and pilot-testing of a national network for food and agricultural statistics/information.
44. Cooperation would also be obtained from other projects to enable the participating AFSIS countries to sustain the activities under the system.

45. Comments and points arising from the Presentation

- The representative from FAO headquarters inquired into the medium and long term crop forecasting – whether JICA was recommending this, and what the institutional arrangements were. The mode of FAO participation in AFSIS was also inquired into – whether it would provide cooperation or whether it would be part of the Project.
- The response was that the project for a food supply and demand forecasting model was a small but new project which would be implemented at FAO Rome. It would be a five year project, with model-building to be contracted to a group of Japanese scientists, who would build a model for ASEAN, with rice as the major commodity but to include other crops. The forecasting model was intended for the region but country models would also be available. The final details on the support from Japanese and FAO headquarters were still being prepared, and the Project would start in early 2003 depending on procedures in the donor country.
- Resources of the RDES and AFSIS project would be combined, with AFSIS to provide hardware to ASEAN countries and RDES project, to non-ASEAN participating countries. FAO would also be asked to provide technical expertise to AFSIS.
- A point was made about the need to inform the participating Countries of their role in AFSIS, and the specifics of the projects that would be implemented. It was explained that the ASEAN side of the Project would be discussed immediately after the Focal Points Meeting and Technical Consultation, including detailed activities to be implemented or planned. While it was also agreed that there should be a clear idea of the schedule and expected roles and potential benefits to the member countries, it was not possible to give these as of now.
- The representative from India expressed appreciation to the Japanese Government and understood that the details would not be clarified at this time due to constraints. It was clarified by the MAFF representative that all the previous projects had targeted Asia-Pacific countries and were now focusing on ASEAN in view of the thrusts of ASEAN for a food security information system. However, it did not mean that the Japanese Government would overlook non-ASEAN countries, as the FAO project would put in more investments on hardware for non-ASEAN countries.
- The Meeting was informed that the management of the Trust Fund would be the responsibility of the ASEAN Secretariat, including the work activities, budget allocation and other matters. The AFSIT Centre would be established in Bangkok and would serve as the Secretariat of the AFSIS meetings, besides acting as information hub and serving as training centre. Funds were from MAFF Japan and not from JICA. The Meeting was also informed that Viet Nam and Italy were now implementing a food security information system project.

X. Workplan

Agenda item 10

46. The background of the Project was reviewed, and its long-term objectives were outlined. The bottom line was to initiate a Website for agricultural statistics in every country and to assist the participating countries in providing their statistical data to Asian users as well as domestic users through the Internet. The Project would provide hardware, software, training, internet connections and upgrading of capability.
47. Major activities were the following:
- Planning/designing and programming WebPages and data input systems,
 - Pilot testing in selected countries (which was to be done in late 2002), computer installation and Internet connections; the equipment would be purchased by 2003, with the Project to purchase equipment for non-ASEAN countries; the ASEAN project would purchase equipment for its participating countries. Contracts with a private company would be made for the development of the system and pilot testing in the participating countries. It was planned to visit one pilot country in October-December 2002. After the pilot test was completed, a User Manual would be developed by March 2003.
 - By April 2003, five years of data would have been collected. In the absence of computerized data for the country, paper data would be utilized instead.
 - National seminars on utilization of data exchange system, as a separate activity from pilot testing, would be done from 2003 to 2004. National seminars on country-specific issues would be held, depending on the budget, perhaps in two or three countries.
 - Sub-regional workshops on data analysis and dissemination would be held in two separate sessions - one for ASEAN and another for South Asian countries. Since Fiji was not part of either grouping would have a national seminar of its own, to be conducted by the Agricultural Statistics Expert.
 - The second Focal Points Meeting would be scheduled by March 2003 by which time hardware would already have been installed and Internet connections set up.
 - Capacity building training on RDES would be held perhaps in May 2003; technical persons would be invited, and the objective would be to create awareness on installation of system and the WebPages. By this time all countries would have been provided with PCs.
48. The role of the Focal Points would be to (a) coordinate with other organizations involved in agricultural statistics; (b) recommend appropriate participants for regional seminars; (c) serve as a steering committee that contacts and coordinates closely with the Agricultural Statistics Expert for smooth conduct of the project; and responds quickly to queries from the Agricultural Statistics Expert; (d) make arrangements for local contracts for necessary data

input and Internet connection when the RDES is introduced; and (e) arrange for management of the webpage.

49. On the coordination between the Regional Project and AFSIS, it was explained that the Project had 16 participating countries while AFSIS had under its wing only the ASEAN countries. It was proposed that the Regional Project and AFSIS coordinate/collaborate/cooperate on the implementation of regional workshops. The Expert would be a member of the coordination body for both projects; he had already established a relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of the Royal Thai Government, which would manage AFSIS.

50. Points arising from the Presentation

- ❑ The representative from the FAO headquarters stressed the importance of a formal agreement between the implementers of the two projects, to emphasize the need for a well-designed mechanism for the cooperation. It was clarified by the representative from the donor government that the funding for AFSIS was already in place, and that discussions on the implementation would be discussed later in the week.
- ❑ Under the assumption that the Project would take off, the Focal Points would coordinate with national organizations that had website data.
- ❑ The Focal Points would have close connection with other agencies concerned with agricultural and food statistics. In some countries, the Focal Point and other concerned data and statistical organizations were under one Ministry.
- ❑ The issue of sustainability in the long term was raised, the number of countries to be visited by one person in order to get the Project moving, and the time constraints involved. The Focal Points were informed that consultants would be tapped to visit the pilot countries – especially during installation period and training - the expert input/technical assistance would be in the form of more than one person and at full-time basis.
- ❑ All persons involved in maintenance of and support to RDES would be trained about the system. A point was raised on the possibility of installation and training to occur simultaneously.
- ❑ In the event that a follow up project was formulated, it should be taken into account in the workplan. To answer the point on the sustainability of the system, it was explained that a three-year extension of the Regional Project was now being planned and that strategies needed to be formulated by the end of the project.

XI. Guidelines for the selection of project pilot countries

Agenda item no. 11

51. The Agricultural Statistics Expert clarified the criteria that would be used in determining the pilot countries in the Project. These included the availability of Internet connections,

existence of WebPages, and five-year series of data, in order to construct the Regional Data Exchange System. Data would need to be in English.

52. If these criteria were approved by the Focal Points, the Regional Project would update the data at hand and consult with the counties concerned.

53. Points and comments arising from the Presentation

- ❑ A point was made on the need for countries that have the capability to start their own data exchange system immediately, with the pilot countries to come in later.
- ❑ It was clarified that the Project would introduce the system into the pilot countries as well as in other countries simultaneously. More progressive countries would be given the materials and they could manage the exchange system. Hardware and software installation would take place almost at the same time.
- ❑ A delay in setting up the system in the ASEAN countries was possible but it was expected that by March 2003 the system would be almost operational. Technical workshops would be conducted to train technical staff on system installation.
- ❑ The Agricultural Statistics Expert would visit the five pilot countries to provide guidance in the installation of the system. For non-pilot countries, the regional/ technical seminar would provide the skills to enable their staff to manage their own regional information exchange system.
- ❑ It was noted that one visit or one regional seminar may not be able to iron out the deficiencies in the system. Where this occurred, the suggestion was to allow those countries to start, and the pilot countries to be allowed to develop and then go on to the operating stage when they were ready.
- ❑ Another suggestion was for the Focal Points to classify themselves, whether they belonged to the first or second levels or tiers of capability in terms of the selection of the pilot countries.
- ❑ However, it was pointed out the term “pilot countries” was perhaps erroneous, as the intention of the Regional Project was to select the countries which required “more intensive assistance.” It was also ideal to start as soon as possible.
- ❑ It was added that priority should be given those countries that did not have anything in terms of the information exchange system. The Project also intended to enable the participating countries to have access to FAO statistics.
- ❑ Rather than two tiers or levels, it was suggested that the Focal Points call this approach as “two-pronged.” The idea would be to determine which of the countries or nodes already had the capability, and to develop the rest, so that the Regional Project could start collecting data from all 16 nodes.
- ❑ The concluding comment was that the pilot countries would be selected based on the criteria set out for the selection, and that the WebPages would be set up as soon as possible.

XII. Other matters

54. While there was no budget available for evaluation of the Regional Project, it was agreed that an evaluation process was necessary so as to create impetus for the continuation of the Project. The evaluation could be funded from another source and so stated in the workplan.
55. The representative from Fiji expressed concern that the Pacific countries did not receive much benefit from regional projects, and stated that the Regional Data Exchange System was coinciding with the needs of his country. After he reiterated his hope that Fiji, however small, would be included as a beneficiary, he was given assurance by the Agricultural Statistics Expert that Fiji would receive the technical assistance.

XIII. Adoption of highlights and major recommendations

Agenda item no. 12

56. The Draft Recommendations were presented by the chairman to the body. The Focal Points were asked to provide their comments and/or objections. After a discussion of the details, they approved the recommendations as follows:
- ❑ *The Regional Data Exchange System, as outlined and discussed in the Meeting, was relevant and appropriate. Accordingly, in order to meet project targets, participating Countries not having a WebPage for food and agriculture statistics should endeavour to establish WebPages; while the participating Countries having WebPages should further develop them. Common formats should be used whenever possible.*
 - ❑ *The proposed "Project Work Plan" discussed in the Meeting was comprehensive and appropriate, and accordingly the Country Focal Points should pursue it actively during its implementation at their Countries.*
 - ❑ *In order to avoid any duplication of activities, there should be close cooperation and coordination with the projects on food security information in Asia and the Pacific region. The Agricultural Statistics Expert of the Project should maintain a close contact with the proposed ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) Project and with FAO projects related to food and agricultural information. Likewise at the national level, there should be strong coordination and cooperation among the concerned agencies.*
 - ❑ *The Regional Data Exchange System will be implemented on a pilot basis in certain Countries. These Countries should be selected on the basis of priorities as outlined in the "Guidelines" during the Meeting and after taking into account certain country-specific conditions.*
 - ❑ *The Meeting of the Focal Points should be held once a year, as suggested by the Evaluation Report of the predecessor Project GCP/RAS/171/JPN. The Second Meeting should be planned for March 2003 and the agenda should include, inter alia, the plan for implementation of the Regional Data Exchange System in detail, including hardware/software installation, application of the model WebPage, and related training.*
 - ❑ *To ensure sustainability of the Project after the Project period, approaches and/or mechanisms would be identified and discussed at a later time. PARIS21 and the*

establishment of the Trust Fund for Statistics Capacity Building may have implications for national systems of food and agricultural statistics in the Region. Countries should explore the possibilities of using these resources.

XIV. Closing session

Agenda item no. 13

57. The Agricultural Statistics Expert thanked the delegates from the participating countries, the representatives from MAFF Japan, and the representatives from FAO headquarters and the Regional Office for their contributions to the activity. He reiterated the invitation from the Deputy Regional Representative to a reception to be tendered in honour of the Focal Points.
58. Appreciation was extended to the Chair of the Session, who was requested to serve as Moderator to the Technical Consultation which would be held on the following day.
59. The First Focal Points Meeting was adjourned at 15.40 hours.

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Agenda and Timetable

1. First Focal Points Meeting

Tuesday, 6 August 2002

- 09.00 - 09.30 Registration
- 09.30 - 10.00 Introduction of the participants
- 10.00 - 10.30 Coffee break
- 10.30 - 11.00 Agenda Item 1 - Opening Session
- Opening Statement, *Mr. Dong Qingsong, FAO Deputy Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific*
 - Overview and objectives of the meeting, *Mr. Kimihiko Eura, Agricultural statistics expert, GCP/RAS/184/JPN*
 - Address, *Mr. Masataka Hishiyama, Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (SID/MAFF), Japan*
- 11.00 - 11.10 Agenda Item 2 - Election of officers
- 11.10 - 11.20 Agenda Item 3 - Adoption of the agenda and timetable
- 11.20 - 12.00 Agenda Item 4 - Report of the Evaluation Mission for GCP/RAS/171/JPN and GCP/RAS/184/JPN, *Mr. Yoichiro Kawasaki, International Consultant on Agricultural Statistics*
- 13.00 - 13.45 Agenda Item 5 - Outline of Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries, *Mr. Kimihiko Eura*
- 13.45 - 14.30 Agenda Item 6 - Introduction of FAOSTAT and FAOSTAT2, *Dr. Frederick Baker, Senior Statistician, FAO/RAP*
- 14.30 - 15.00 Coffee break
- 15.00 - 15.45 Agenda Item 7 - Global issues in Agricultural Statistics, *Mr. Hiek Som, Chief, Statistical Development Service, FAO/HQ*
- 15.45 - 16.30 Agenda Item 8 - Regional perspective on Food and Agricultural Statistics, *Dr. Frederick Baker, Senior Statistician*

Wednesday, 7 August 2002

- 09.00 - 10.00 Agenda Item 9 - Outline of the Projects on Food Security Information System for Asia Countries, *Mr. Yoshio Yoshida, SID/MAFF, Japan*
- 10.00 - 10.30 Coffee break
- 10.30 - 12.00 Agenda Item 10 - Presentation of Workplan, *Mr. Kimihiko Eura*
- 13.30 - 15.00 Agenda Item 11 - Guidelines for selecting project pilot countries, *Mr. Kimihiko Eura*
- 15.00 - 15.30 Coffee break
- 15.30 - 16.10 Agenda Item 12 - Adoption of highlights and major recommendations
- 16.10 - 16.30 Agenda Item 13 - Closing session

Opening Statement

Mr. Dong Qingsong
FAO Deputy Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific

Distinguished Participants, FAO Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to extend to you a warm welcome to this First Meeting of the Focal Points for the project "*Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries*" (GCP/RAS/184/JPN). This project is a follow-up to the initiatives of the project "*Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries*" (GCP/RAS/171/JPN). Its main objective is the pilot implementation of an electronic-based regional data exchange system covering the 16 participating countries

The importance of strengthening mutual co-operation and the establishment of a system for collection and dissemination of statistics among member countries were discussed during the Sixteenth Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS). These two regional projects were developed and have been carried out by FAO with the generous financial contributions of the Government of Japan.

I am greatly pleased to know that a distinguished delegation from Japan is present for this workshop and will be participating in its discussions. The support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has been invaluable in the implementation of these projects. Let me thus take this opportunity to personally request the members of the delegation to convey to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, FAO's gratitude and appreciation for your Government's continued trust and support to FAO as an effective catalyst for food and agricultural development in general, and for agricultural statistics, in particular.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are living in an environment where an ever increasing population requires a sustained and stable food supply for survival. Food and agricultural statistics have been playing an important role in this effort by providing decision-makers with a reliable and timely description of the agricultural sector. This information enables them to develop appropriate policies on agriculture and on the development of rural areas, while ensuring adequate supplies of food to the population, and to the achievement of sustainable growth of the national economy. It is no wonder therefore that every country makes efforts to improve its agricultural statistics.

Utilisation of agricultural statistics and of agricultural sector information is no longer confined to the governmental sector. Their use has expanded and has become a stimulus for growth of the private sector, consistent with the progress of country economies and with the shift of government policies to diversify agriculture from subsistence level farming to a more profitable business venture.

Furthermore, with globalisation now spreading rapidly to most countries in the world, the demand for accurate, timely and comparable information about the countries is increasing. Countries which have embraced this global co-existence are intensifying their interdependence

in many fields. Agricultural statistics is no exception to this trend. With the increasing importance of agricultural world trade, many countries have taken cognisance of the need to obtain timely and accurate statistical data about other countries' production, prices and share in the international market. In tandem with these developments, there is an increased need for international agencies to collect and share agricultural statistics as a guide to problem solving, to the stabilisation of food supplies and to the maintenance of a delicate balance between demands for food, on the one hand, and to conservation of environment on a global basis, on the other.

Thus, food and agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries has undergone dramatic changes during the last twenty years. Although reporting systems continue to be a major source of data in many countries, particularly among the former centrally planned economies, sample surveys have been gradually introduced into the statistical systems. National statistical programmes in many countries in the region now include regular agriculture surveys and censuses. Most of the surveys have concentrated on production statistics. However, food consumption surveys, household income/expenditure surveys and fishery censuses have also been undertaken in a number of countries. National statistical publications are now also being issued on a regular basis. In addition, many countries are introducing modern information technology systems for data processing, analysis and dissemination. These improvements in food and agriculture statistics are expected to benefit national agricultural development, food security and poverty alleviation, and policy development, evaluation and monitoring.

Under this environment of fast changing conditions, the project GCP/RAS/184/JPN is undertaking the establishment of a regional data exchange system on food and agriculture statistics in Asia and Pacific countries so that it is possible to access current agricultural sector data in this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I understand that this First Meeting of Focal Points for GCP/RAS/184/JPN will serve as a forum to introduce the project activities and to discuss future outputs. Let me emphasise that while FAO is taking the lead in the implementation of this project with support from the Government of Japan, the ultimate beneficiaries of the project are the individual countries participating in this project. It is therefore appropriate to say that this project is your project. You should take advantage of the opportunities available and ensure that your country receives the maximum benefits from this project.

During this two-day meeting, therefore, I would like to encourage you to actively participate in order to have a more fruitful discussion. Please tell us your needs and your expectations from the project. While not all of them could immediately be addressed, let me assure you that we at FAO will take serious note and work with the Government of Japan and with our other partners in development to find ways of helping you, either individually or jointly. Your discussions, I am certain, will be beneficial not only to the project but also to your countries and to the whole region of Asia and the Pacific.

Finally, my best wishes for a successful meeting with positive outputs and for an enjoyable stay in the City of Bangkok.

Thank you.

Statement by the Delegation of Japan

Mr. Masataka Hishiyama
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It is my pleasure to speak to you at the First Focal Point Meeting of FAO Project “Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries”, representing Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan.

In our efforts to improve global food security situation, Japan recognizes vital importance of all member countries being capable of obtaining reliable statistics and information for the food and agricultural sector and sharing the data among countries. Based on this recognition, Japan proposed a joint undertaking for the improvement of agricultural statistics, standardization, and exchange of data in the Asia and Pacific Region, at the 16th Meeting of APCAS convened in Tokyo in 1996. To our great pleasure, the proposal was unanimously supported by the Meeting.

In order to materialize the proposal, Japan contributed to a Trust Fund to FAO for the project “Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries” which started in 1998. A Japanese Expert was sent to Bangkok to manage the project.

16 countries out of 24 APCAS members participated the project. Through the project, 10 countries conducted in-depth studies of national agricultural statistics systems and national seminars for discussing problems and their future development plans. It also prepared the plan of the successor project for the regional data exchange system. The project came to a successful end in April 2002.

Prime vehicle for success of the project was active participation of member countries under close coordination by National Focal Point Persons, many of whom are present at this Meeting. Equally important, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific gave strong support all through the project period. I would like to express our utmost gratitude to all persons and institutions concerned.

Building upon the output of the project, a successor project “Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries” was initiated in December 2002

The new project is understood, based on statistical improvement through the predecessor project, to develop a system of exchanging statistical data among member countries so that the data may be utilized by these countries for agricultural policies and food security improvement.

Member countries are in different state of development of food and statistics. However, it is vitally important for all countries in the region to come up with statistical data with equal reliability and accuracy so as to serve regional food and agricultural policy planning and implementation.

The project aims at providing and sharing information which reflects the real situation of the agricultural sector of Asia and Pacific region as a whole, coupled with efforts to standardize statistics. I am convinced that the project, if it is successfully completed, will make great contributions to the economic development and food security of the region.

In implementing the project for Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics, which is the main theme of this meeting, all countries are requested to actively participate in it. It is our hope that member countries in different development situations in terms of statistics and information will combine their efforts and work jointly for the achievement of project targets.

I also believe that the role of country Focal Point Persons is quite large. Your input would be greatly appreciated in managing technical matters, collecting necessary information, and coordinating with national agencies concerned.

Once again, I request all people attending this meeting to fully understand the significance of the project and to cooperate for its implementation.

Thank you for your attention.