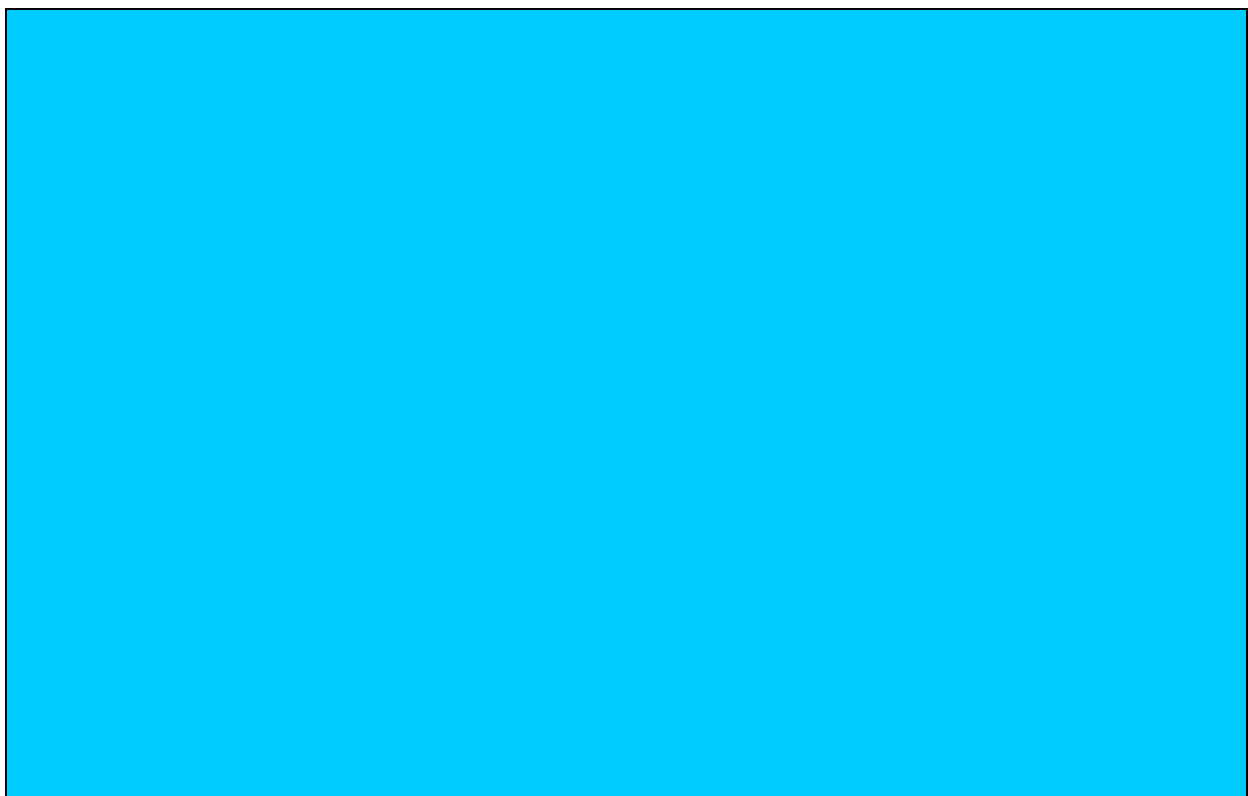


**Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on
Food and Agricultural Statistics
in Asia and Pacific Countries (GCP/RAS/184/JPN)**

Report of the Third Focal Points Meeting

Pattaya, Thailand, 12-13 October 2004



**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok, Thailand**

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Third Focal Points Meeting of the Project Strengthening Regional Data Exchange on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries (GCP/RAS/184/JPN)

Long Beach Garden Hotel, Pattaya, Thailand
12-13 October 2004

Introduction

1. The third focal points meeting of the Project *Strengthening Regional Data Exchange on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and the Pacific Countries* was attended by representatives from 16 participating countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), observers from two countries (the Republic of Korea and Malaysia), representatives of the Government of Japan, experts from the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and representatives from JICA. (The list of participants is shown in Annex 2.).

Overview and objectives

2. The Agricultural Statistics Expert, Mr Kimihiko Eura, in presenting the overview of the project, stated that it had developed the Regional Data Exchange System (RDES) and established the project website (www.faorap-apcas.org). Focal points had been uploading data on agricultural statistics to this website, and the project was now moving to the next step.
3. The third focal points meeting, he continued, had the objectives of reviewing the RDES and discussing its future activities.

Welcome address

4. The welcome address was delivered by Mr Hiroyuki Konuma, Deputy Regional Representative of the FAO Regional Office, on the behalf of the FAO Regional Representative. He welcomed the participants, stating that the main objectives of the project were to implement an electronics-based regional data exchange system for the participating countries and strengthen national capacities to analyse data on food and agricultural statistics.
5. The project commenced in 2001 as the follow-up to the precursor project "*Improvement of agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries*" (GCP/RAS/171/JPN), and would be extended for three years as a second phase, focusing on capacity building for data analysis.

6. He expressed FAO's gratitude and appreciation for Japan's continued trust and support for food and agricultural development in the region, specifically in the sector of agricultural statistics. He mentioned that the project with the help of the focal points had developed the RDES, which gave users an opportunity to review at national and sub-national levels, information on major agricultural commodities (area, production and yield) and about livestock numbers in participating countries.
7. The third focal points meeting, he continued, offered a timely opportunity to review the needs and expectations from the project, and reiterated that the participants, being the "owners," should derive the maximum benefits [from the project]. He called upon them to join with FAO to continue their efforts at improving agricultural statistics in their respective countries and to provide reliable indicators to decision-makers in the development of policies and monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness.
8. Finally, he wished the participants a successful outcome for the meeting and an enjoyable stay in Pattaya. (The welcome address is shown in Annex 3.)

Opening statement from the representative of the donor government

9. The opening statement was delivered by Mr. Michiya Otsuka, Deputy Director of Statistics Planning Division, of the Statistics Department, MAFF, Japan. He stated that Japan had deep appreciation for the continuing activities of FAO in the improvement of agricultural statistics throughout the history of the organization, especially in the Asia and Pacific Region.
10. Japan considered it vitally important that all countries should produce reliable statistical data for the food and agriculture sector and share these data among the member countries in the region. Owing to this recognition, it had contributed to a trust fund to FAO since 1998 for the improvement and standardisation of agricultural statistics as well as statistical data exchange in Asia and Pacific countries.
11. The second stage of the project started in December 2001, with the objectives of improving agricultural statistics in member countries and developing a Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries. The project had already succeeded in opening web pages for the regional data exchange network, enabling the sharing of food and agricultural statistics on the national and regional levels among countries in Asia and the Pacific region and FAO.
12. He announced that the first phase of the project would end in December this year, after which the second phase would start. The second phase would (i) widen its coverage of food and agricultural data; (ii) broaden country participation; and (iii) strengthen analytical capacity of member countries for food and agricultural statistics in member countries.
13. Side by side with this project, an ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) Project, which began in January 2003 under a Japanese grant, worked for the development of human resource capacity for food and agricultural statistics in member countries and built an ASEAN Food Security Information Network. An AFSIS website was built on the basis of the software system developed by the FAO project and food and agricultural data from the ASEAN+3 countries. These two projects shared the common

target of assisting the member countries in collecting reliable food and agriculture data and exchanging these data with others.

14. Finally, he requested that the focal points work actively on the management of the data exchange system, collection of necessary data, and collaboration with country institutions and agencies involved in effective data utilisation. Their efforts in these activities, he continued, would lead to the attainment of the project targets. (The statement is shown in Annex 4.)

Election of officers

Agenda item 2

15. The representative from Indonesia, Mr Choiril Maksum, Director General of BPS-Statistics Indonesia, was elected as chair and the representative from Sri Lanka, Mr AMU Dissanayake, Director of the Agriculture Division, Department of Census and Statistics, as vice chair.
16. Elected rapporteur was the representative from Bhutan, Mr Tshering Jambayang, head of the Statistics Unit of the Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Agriculture.

Adoption of agenda and timetable

Agenda item 3

17. The provisional agenda and timetable were adopted with no revisions. (The agenda and timetable are shown in Annex 1.)

Report on the 20th Session of the APCAS

Agenda item 4

18. The report on the 20th session of the APCAS, which was held in Delhi on 20-24 September 2004, was presented by the Senior Statistician of the FAO Regional Office, Mr Frederick Baker. The Session had the following objectives: (i) assess the current status of food and agricultural statistical development in member countries; (ii) review the FAO activities in food and agricultural statistics during 2002 - 2004 in Asia and the Pacific; and (iii) discuss new developments in agricultural statistics.
19. The Session was attended by 86 delegates and observers from 16 member countries, and senior officers of the Government of India who were present for the opening ceremonies. Seventeen technical documents were discussed, in addition to the summary of country questionnaires. The Session's agenda included: FAO's activities in food and agricultural statistics during 2002–2004 in the Asia and Pacific Region, including fisheries and forestry; FAOSTAT2, CountrySTAT, and the Japan/FAO cooperative project, "Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System (RDES) on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries" and the proposed follow-up activities. The World census of agriculture 2010 and issues in the analysis of agricultural censuses and surveys were also discussed.

20. The Session agreed on several recommendations for the consideration of FAO: (i) further strengthening international cooperation and partnership among national agencies to complement efforts on the improvement of food and agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries; (ii) maintaining a medium-term indicative schedule of potential APCAS hosts; (iii) including, in the development of CountrySTAT, standardisation of definitions and classifications across countries and, if possible, allowing it to be a vehicle for member countries to satisfy a range of international reporting requirements; (iv) providing feedback on the data that member countries would contribute to the RDES and preparing comprehensive guidelines for countries to provide the desired statistics/information; and (v) redesigning the APCAS country questionnaire to include information on collection and processing of statistics on crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries as well as remarks about selected key issues and new and innovative developments.
21. Also recommended was the inclusion in the guidelines for WCA 2010 core questions from an agriculture census questionnaire that future population census questionnaires might incorporate as a means of reducing costs and providing a basis for effective and efficient data collection and analysis.
22. The Session also formulated the following recommendations for the APCAS member countries: (i) reviewing existing data and identify gaps; (ii) allocating resources to enable implementation and maintenance of national CountrySTAT, when it becomes available; (iii) considering remote sensing techniques as an important tool in providing estimates of crops and other agricultural products and information on fisheries and forestry especially during times of emergencies and calamities, remembering that using and maintaining such technology could be expensive; and (iii) ensuring that statisticians and policy makers work more closely together.
23. A relevant recommendation for the focal points was for the RDES focal point institution to compile and enter the required statistical data into the RDES system using common formats for data tables. Data at the community level collected in agricultural censuses should also be complementary with village level data collected during population censuses, wherever applicable.
24. For FAO and member countries, he continued, the recommendations were (i) for continuing action to improve the reliability and international comparability of statistics on agriculture, forestry and fisheries for a better understanding of the changing food and agricultural situation in member countries; (ii) for RDES to provide a common presentation format across countries and have a common look and feel with FAOSTAT (along this, the development of the RDES should be coordinated with the development of the AFSIS); (iii) exploring the possibility of including countries outside APCAS and considering information related to other issues such as food and food security; (iv) including in future population census questionnaires a few of the core questions from agriculture census questionnaires as per the draft guidelines on WCA 2010.
25. The Session also recommended that FAO and the donor community should provide increased technical assistance in the field of statistics to strengthen national capability to use acceptable statistical methods for collection, processing, storage, analysis and dissemination of food and agricultural statistics.

Report of country implementation of RDES

Agenda item 5

26. The Agricultural Statistics Expert reported that, since the second focal points meeting in March 2003, he had visited all the participating countries (except the Philippines) and had been provided with the data requirements for the website. He demonstrated the country pages that had been developed by the member countries, and discussed the points that were inadequate or that needed improvement.
27. Examples of the various components of the country pages were shown, including administrative maps, organizational charts, production tables by commodity, and institutional information. No two country pages were the same. It was pointed out that the countries earlier visited had since then added new data to their country pages such that the summary presentation shown during the meeting may not be the updated pages. An increase in the number of website visitors had been observed over the past 12 months.

Country presentations

28. The focal points presented brief reports on the status of the RDES in the respective member countries as well as issues and their recommendations on the system. Among the highlights of the country presentations were reports on the current status of their country pages, the varying constraints faced by the focal points, the usefulness of the website data for other government agencies, the major users of the websites and requests for standardisation (formats, data units and item names), and expansion of coverage to include countries not presently within the system, as well as other commodities. Capacity building needs were also mentioned by a number of the focal points.

Development of standards for RDES data and extension of data items and countries of the RDES

Agenda item no 7

29. The Agricultural Statistics Expert reported that more than 200 data records had been stored into the RDES database. Most of these data were historical and were on production of crops and numbers of livestock at the sub-national level. He stated that standards for data of the RDES had not been developed yet, and that the RDES required more data for food security. The RDES should also consider covering all APCAS countries
30. Several suggestions for the improvement of RDES had been advanced at the 20th Session of APCAS, including the following: (i) a common look and feel with FAOSTAT; (ii) the need for good communication with AFSIS; (iii) expansion of information into other issues such as food and food security, capacity building, etc; (iv) expansion of coverage to include non-APCAS countries; (v) allowing the presentation by commodity as well as country; and (vi) quality data across countries.
31. The definitions of RDES data should follow FAO definitions. Commodity should follow the [FAO Definitions and Classification of Commodities](#), and data should be categorised by description code.

32. The second focal points meeting held in March 2003 had adopted the use of the proposed common basic format for the RDES data tables. Accordingly, it was agreed that the focal points should use this format for data storage in the system. Following this, most countries were using this format. Excel was recommended as file format as it was easier to utilise for analysis, re-tabulation, and so on.
33. In the development of standards, it should be noted that most data of the RDES were crop production and livestock data. Other data for food security were required by users, among them land area, population, prices, fisheries, but the project had to consider that not all countries had available sub-national data.
34. The RDES should be extended to all APCAS countries, since the Commission included among its development objectives (i) providing data and information for planning and policy making in the food and agriculture sector with the aim of raising living standard and nutritional status of people, especially the rural poor; and (ii) exchanging these data with other countries to support national, regional and global food security programmes and policies.

Capacity building in agricultural statistics, Japan

Agenda item no. 8

35. The report on capacity building in agricultural statistics in Japan was presented by Mr. Michiya Otsuka of the MAAF. His presentation consisted of two parts: the first on training of staff of agriculture, forestry and fisheries statistics in Japan; and the second on the training for overseas participants through JICA.
36. Staff training for the MAFF was composed of the basic training program offered one year after staff employment; and the training program on strengthening of policy information of which there were three courses. A third was the statistical survey planning and analysis course, which came in four courses.
37. The central and regional training were implemented to provide specialised knowledge that responsible officers needed on statistics theory to enable them to plan and design statistical surveys and practice the analysis and presentation of such surveys. Succeeding higher level courses provided the staff and officers with higher levels of specialised knowledge in advanced technologies.
38. Field training on the other hand enabled the staff and officers to experience life in rural communities and thus gave them practical knowledge in agriculture, forestry and fisheries management.
39. The training for overseas participants through JICA would be divided into that conducted in Japan (technical training, overseas student program, and youth invitation program) and overseas training (which would be made up of third-country training courses and local in-country training).
40. The technical training would be group training courses which were issue-focused (e.g. agricultural statistical courses for senior statistical officers); and country- and region-specific training courses. The individual training courses under technical training were

counterpart training, local government-proposed training courses, and others not belonging to either of the types above. The overseas student program on the other hand were long-term training, the Japanese Grant Aid for Human Resources Scholarship, and the Scholarship for ethnic Japanese (NIKKEI) students

Introduction of GCP/RAS/184/JPN

Agenda item 9

41. The Agricultural Statistics Expert presented an introduction to the proposed extension project that would expand the RDES from sixteen countries to all APCAS countries. In the first regional project the types of data analyses for agricultural policy that had been implemented by the countries in the region were reviewed. This review concluded that national statistical data analyses were in various stages of development in the region and that the countries needed continued technical assistance for developing and/or strengthening national capacity of analytical technologies for the food and agricultural statistics.
42. The first objective of the new project would be to implement the RDES for food and agricultural statistics in all APCAS countries. The first output would be region-wide standards for data in the RDES and modification of the system to facilitate sustainability after completion of the project.
43. The second objective would be to strengthen national capacity to analyse food and agricultural statistics in support of national agricultural development policy and planning, including associated food security and poverty alleviation concerns.
 - It would hold meetings of national focal points to discuss specific subjects of the project; national seminars, regional workshops and capacity building training which would be focused on use of statistics data for analysing issues on sustained agricultural development, food insecurity and poverty.
 - It would also develop recommendations of food and agricultural data statistics analysis techniques in support of effective decision making, planning, targeted policies and programmes formulation such as GDP analysis, food balance sheet, mapping, country- and sub-country profiles, etc, and develop capacity building tools for strengthening the analysis skills at national level. These tools would include training videos, manuals, and demonstration web pages.
44. The inputs of APCAS member countries would be to nominate national focal points who would act as the liaison concerning project activities and who would participate in regional meetings as may be required. Developed member countries of APCAS would be welcome to participate in activities of the project, especially in the regional-level undertakings.
45. The donor government would provide the funds for the activities of the project. FAO on the other hand would provide the office space and other logistical requirements for the day to day management as well as meetings and conferences.

Adoption of highlights and major recommendations

Agenda item 10

46. The focal points discussed the issues relating to the RDES website and the various country pages, and agreed on several recommendations to further improve the system. Aside from the recommendations and comments from the 20th Session of the APCAS which were adopted by the focal points, the following were also recommended:
- Standardisation of the formats of databases, data units and item names, and expansion of the scope of RDES in accordance with Annex 5 to the Report of the Agricultural Statistics Expert.
 - More advocacy and capacity building (IT-related).
 - Exploring the possibility of linking and integrating with other websites in each country.
 - Exercise care in posting data on the website (for instance, standardising crop names to internationally-accepted definition; also calendar vs. agricultural year).
 - Preparation of a regional web page in order to access information for the purpose of comparing agricultural production for national level.
 - Investigation of the possibility of accommodating data files as well as graphics, textual descriptions and analysis in the future, and the inclusion of supplementary information in both quantity and value indicators (in particular, share of agriculture to GDP).
 - Inclusion of monthly wholesale prices on a trial basis, in view of the very rapid changes in prices of commodities.
 - Consistency of information reported to FAO (national level) with the data on the RDES.

Closing Session

47. The focal point from Bhutan, on the behalf of the participants, expressed gratitude to the Japanese Government for supporting the project, and on behalf of the chair, vice chair and focal points, appreciation for the efforts of the Agricultural Statistics Expert and the Senior Statistician in holding the meeting, and the Deputy Director of the Statistics Department for the comprehensive information on capacity building in statistics.
48. The representative from the Japanese Government said he hoped that this project and the next one would be successful.
49. The Agriculture Statistics Expert thanked the participants for providing inputs and suggestions which would be very useful for the next project, and thanked the chair and vice chair for their excellent leadership which enabled the success of the meeting. He also expressed his gratitude to the Senior Statistician and other colleagues at the FAO Regional Office for their full support, and his staff for their full cooperation throughout the implementation of the project. He said that his work would be completed by the end of the year, but hoped that in his work at the MAFF where he would be in charge of international projects, including this project, he would have the opportunity to meet with the participants in future focal points meetings.

50. The Senior Statistician meanwhile stated that the FAO was very happy with the project and was pleased with the contributions of the focal points. He acknowledged the high level of competence of the Agricultural Statistics Expert, and hoped that he would be able to return for the next focal points meeting. Likewise, he expressed his and FAO's appreciation to the Government of Japan for the support to the RDES.
51. The chair closed the Session at 1545 hours.

Agenda and Timetable

Third Meeting of Focal Points for the GCP/RAS/184/JPN and Technical Session on Analysis of Data in National Statistical Databases

1. Third Meeting of Focal Points

Tuesday, 12 October 2004

- 08.30 - 09.00 Registration
- 09.00 - 09.30 Agenda Item 1 - Opening Session
- Opening Statement, *Dr. He Changchui, FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific*
 - Overview and objectives of the meeting, *Mr. Kimihiko Eura, Agricultural statistics expert, GCP/RAS/184/JPN*
 - Address, *Representative of the donor country, Statistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan*
 - Introduction of the participants
- 09.30 - 09.35 Agenda Item 2 - Election of officers
- 09.35 - 09.40 Agenda Item 3 - Adoption of the agenda and timetable
- 09.40 - 10.30 Agenda Item 4 - Report of the twentieth session of Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (20th APCAS), *Mr. Frederick Baker, Senior Statistician, FAO/RAP*
- 10.30 - 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.00 - 12.00 Agenda Item 5 - Report of country implementation of the Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries (RDES), *Mr. Kimihiko Eura*
- 12.00 - 13.00 Lunch
- 13.00 - 14.30 Agenda Item 6 - Review of the RDES and the project website in the participating countries, *Focal Points*
- 14.30 - 15.00 Coffee break
- 15.00 - 16.30 Agenda Item 6 - Continued

Wednesday, 13 October 2004

- 09.00 - 10.30 Agenda Item 7 - Development of standards for data of the RDES and Extension of data items and countries of the RDES, *Mr. Kimihiko Eura*
- 10.30 - 11.00 Coffee break

11.00 - 12.00	<u><i>Agenda Item 8</i></u> - Capacity Building in Agricultural Statistics, <i>Japan</i>
12.00 - 13.00	Lunch
13.00 - 14.30	<u><i>Agenda Item 9</i></u> - Introduction of GCP/RAS/184/JPN – Phase II, <i>Mr. Kimihiko Eura</i>
14.30 - 15.00	Coffee break
15.00 - 15.50	<u><i>Agenda Item 10</i></u> - Adoption of highlights and major recommendations
15.50 - 16.00	<u><i>Agenda Item 11</i></u> - Closing session

2. Technical Session on Analysis of Data in National Statistical Databases

Thursday, 14 October 2004

09.00 - 09.10	<u><i>Agenda Item 1</i></u> - Overview and objectives of the Technical Session, <i>Mr. Frederick Baker, Senior Statistician, FAO/RAP</i>
09.10 - 09.40	<u><i>Agenda Item 2</i></u> - Disaster Management
09.40 - 10.10	<u><i>Agenda Item 3</i></u> - Farming systems
10.10 - 10.40	Coffee break
10.40 - 11.30	<u><i>Agenda Item 4</i></u> - Food security, <i>Mr. Naoki Minamiguchi, Vulnerability Analysis Coordinator, GCP/RAS/170/JPN (Asia FIVIMS)</i>
11.30 - 12.00	<u><i>Agenda Item 5</i></u> - Poverty
12.00 - 13.00	Lunch
13.00 - 13.45	<u><i>Agenda Item 6</i></u> - CountrySTAT
13.45 - 14.30	<u><i>Agenda Item 7</i></u> - Review of the current state of data analysis on food and agricultural statistics in the participating countries, <i>Focal Points</i>
14.30 - 15.00	Coffee break
15.00 - 16.00	<u><i>Agenda Item 7</i></u> - Continued
16.00 - 16.30	<u><i>Agenda Item 8</i></u> - Summary of the Technical Session and Closing

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OPENING ADDRESS

of
He Changchui
Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific

(delivered by
Hiroyuki Konuma
Deputy Regional Representative)

It is my great pleasure to extend to you a warm welcome to this third meeting of the focal points for the project *Strengthening regional data exchange system on food and agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries*. The main objectives of the project are to implement an electronics-based regional data exchange system for the participating countries and to strengthen national capacities to analyze data on food and agricultural statistics.

The project commenced in 2001 as the follow-up to the precursor programme *Improvement of agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries* whose activities were mainly focused on the development of a regional data exchange system. The present assistance will be extended for three years as a second phase, focussing on capacity building for data analysis.

The project has been carried out by FAO with generous financial contributions provided by the Government of Japan. I would like to express FAO's gratitude and appreciation for Japan's continued trust and support for food and agricultural development in the region, specifically in the sector of agricultural statistics.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The international community, at the 2002 World Food Summit: *five years later* organised by FAO, noted that efforts to reduce the number of hungry have not met short-term objectives, and reaffirmed their commitment and resolve to accelerate progress toward meeting the WFS goals.

Over 842 million people still live without enough to eat according to FAO's latest estimates. Food and agricultural statistics should play 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 the development of rural areas, while ensuring adequate supplies of food for the population and the achievement of sustainable growth by the national economy.

Food and agricultural statistics in Asia and Pacific countries have undergone dramatic changes during the last twenty years. Although reporting systems continue to be a major source of data in many countries, sample surveys have gradually been introduced into statistical systems. FAO has always been at the forefront of promoting and providing

technical assistance to member countries in establishing and developing strong agricultural statistical systems at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels.

National statistical publications are now regularly issued. In addition, many countries are introducing modern information technology systems for data processing, analysis and dissemination. These improvements in food and agricultural statistics are expected to benefit national agricultural development, food security and poverty alleviation, and strengthen policy development, evaluation and monitoring.

Under the present environment of rapidly changing socio-political as well as technological conditions, the project with your help has developed the Regional Data Exchange System (RDES). The RDES is a valuable addition to the databases for the region, since it gives users an opportunity to review at national and sub-national level, information about area, production and yield of major agricultural commodities and about livestock numbers in participating countries. Statistical agencies are thus better able to respond to requests from policy makers, planners of agricultural development and data users from the private sector for more detailed, timely and reliable information.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I understand that this third meeting of focal points for the project will serve as a forum to review the Regional Data Exchange System and to discuss activities during the next phase of the project.

The meeting offers a timely opportunity to review your needs and expectations from the project. Let me reiterate 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 people in the participating countries including the hungry and malnourished whose livelihood will be better from enhanced planning and more effective policies. It is therefore more appropriate to say that this is your project. You should therefore get the maximum benefits from this project.

I, therefore, call upon you to join with FAO to make every effort to improve agricultural statistics in your country and the region and to provide reliable indicators to decision-makers in the development of policies and monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness.

I wish you a successful outcome for the meeting and an enjoyable stay in Pattaya.

Thank you.

Opening Address

Mr. Michiya Otsuka, Deputy Director of Statistics Planning Division,
Statistics Department, MAFF, Japan

It is my greatest pleasure to speak to you at the Focal Point Meeting of the Regional Project for Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics, representing the Statistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

To begin with, Japan highly appreciates the consistent activities of FAO for the improvement of agricultural statistics throughout the history of the organization, especially in the Asia and Pacific Region. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all country focal point persons for attending this meeting.

Japan considers it vitally important that, for the improvement of global food security, all countries produce reliable statistical data for the food and agriculture sector and share these data among them. Based on this recognition, we have contributed to a trust fund to FAO since 1998 for the improvement and standardisation of agricultural statistics as well as statistical data exchange in Asia and Pacific Countries. A Statistical Expert was also sent the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok to promote the implementation of the project.

The second-stage of the project came into operation in December 2001, whose objectives were to improve agricultural statistics in member countries and to develop a Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries. The project has already succeeded in opening Web Pages for regional data exchange network. The network enabled us to share food and agricultural statistics on national and regional levels among countries in Asia and Pacific region and FAO. I would like to congratulate FAO for this achievement.

The first phase of the project will come to an end in December this year. The second phase is expected to start immediately after the termination of the first. I understand that the new-phase project will (1) widen its coverage of food and agricultural data, (2) try to broaden the country participation to the project and (3) strengthen analytical capacity of member countries for food and agricultural statistics in member countries in order to assist agricultural development policy and planning, for food security and poverty alleviation in particular. Japan intends to continue its assistance and requests active participation of member countries.

Side by side with this project, an ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) Project, introduced in January 2003 through Japanese contribution, works for the development of human resource capacity for food and agricultural statistics in member countries and build an ASEAN Food Security Information Network. An AFSIS website was built up on the basis of software system developed by the FAO project and food and agricultural data from the ASEAN+3 countries. On behalf of the AFSIS project donor, let me express our deep appreciation to the technical assistance from the FAO project to AFSIS.

These two projects share the common target of assisting the member countries in collecting reliable food and agriculture data and exchanging these data with others. I believe that close collaboration between the two will make greater contributions to the regional food security.

In the Focal Point Meeting today and tomorrow, as I understand, the member countries will report their project activities; the FAO Statistics Expert will explain his prospects for data standardisation and propose new data coverage for the Data Exchange System. The Technical Meeting which follows this Focal Point Meeting will listen to data analysis by the Asia-FIVIMS project and discuss the FAO plan for CountrySTAT and the present status of data analysis and its future prospect in the member countries.

As I mentioned earlier, the project will make a fresh start for further development of the Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics. Its success depends for the most part upon the member countries' participation. I request that all the Focal Point personnel attending this meeting will work actively on the management of the Data Exchange System, collection of necessary data, and collaboration with country institutions and agencies concerned for effective data utilisation. Your efforts in these activities will lead our project to fully attain its target.

Thank you for your kind attention.