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IN ASIA AND PACIFIC COUNTRIES
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**Proceedings of the National Seminar
On the System of Food and Agriculture
Statistics in Nepal**

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Report of the Seminar

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. A seminar on the System of Agricultural Statistics in Nepal was organized jointly by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of Nepal and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The seminar, which was held on 15 and 16 December 1999 at the Blue Star hotel in Kathmandu, was a follow-up activity of the Japan/FAO Co-operative Project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries. Representatives of various governments, private organizations and donor agencies participated in the seminar.

2. Dr Shankar P Sharma, Member of the Planning Commission of Nepal, chaired the opening session. Ms Savitri Singh, CBS Acting Director-General, gave the welcome speech. Mr Winston Rudder, FAO Representative in Nepal, delivered the opening address. Mr Ryuki Ikeda, Agricultural Statistics Expert, who is in charge of the regional project, introduced the Project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (GCP/RAS/171JPN). Mr Yadav L Baidya, Secretary of the National Planning Commission Secretariat, made preliminary remarks about the seminar. Dr S M N Subhani, CBS Deputy Director General, gave a vote of thanks to the distinguished guests and participants.

3. In her welcome speech, Ms Singh highlighted the main objectives of the seminar. The participants, who included major users and producers of agricultural statistics, were notified that His Majesty's Government of Nepal had designated CBS as the 'national focal point' for the project. Ms Singh expressed the hope that the deliberations made in the seminar would assess the existing system of food and agriculture statistics in the country and identify the critical data gaps in the sector. She also expressed her confidence that the seminar would come up with effective suggestions for improving agricultural statistics, which were indispensable for monitoring and evaluating the agriculture sector. (The full text of Ms Singh's speech is annexed to this report.)

4. In his opening address, Mr Winston Rudder, FAO Representative in Nepal, said that poverty and food security were among the main concerns of the current Nepalese government. Development meant enlarging the choices of the citizens and their command over the available resources. In the overall development process, the agricultural sector was particularly important. Mr Rudder also mentioned several issues related to the present context, including concern about the marginalized, poor and food-insecure people as well as about agricultural productivity in the country. He stressed the need for consistency in the interpretation of data related to these realities, and urged the Ministry of Agriculture, CBS and FAO to hold consistent views regarding agricultural information and to come to common decisions. Nepal has a decentralized system of food and agricultural statistics, Mr Rudder noted, and open discussion among the various agencies concerned can lead to clear conclusions for the improvement of agricultural statistics. Mr Rudder hoped that at the end of the seminar there would be agreement in respectful intelligence between institutions and between suppliers and users of agricultural statistics. He also drew attention toward the reality of the 75 districts of the country and suggested that while formulating policies and programmes in Kathmandu, the objective conditions of the districts should also be considered. He stressed that the decisions made and conclusions reached should make sense not only to the people at the central

level but also to those who were involved in agriculture throughout the country. He hoped that His Majesty's Government would consider food and agricultural information in this perspective.

5. Mr Yadav L Baidya, Secretary of the Planning Commission Secretariat, observed that the seminar had two broad objectives: to review the current situation and to identify data gaps. Recalling the three basic criteria of good data (reliability, accuracy and timeliness), Mr Baidya stressed the importance of statistics in evaluating and monitoring development projects. He highlighted the importance of agricultural dependency as well as of the food security situation of the country. He hoped that the seminar would be able to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the present agricultural statistics system and come up with suggestions for necessary improvements, and that the deliberations made in the seminar would be most valuable to Nepal.

6. Mr Ryuki Ikeda, Agricultural Statistics Expert, highlighted the main features of the Project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, of which the seminar was a part. Outlining the objectives of the project, Mr Ikeda noted that it was the outcome of the recommendation made at the sixteenth session of the Asia-Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics held in Tokyo in 1996.

7. Turning to the statistical system of Nepal, Mr Ikeda focussed on the activities and responsibilities of CBS and of the Agricultural Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture. The main objectives of the seminar were to assess the existing state of the national food and agriculture statistics services, review present activities and identify data gaps. Mr Ikeda expressed the hope that the seminar would be helpful in identifying problem areas and would make effective suggestions for improving agricultural statistics in the country. (The full text of Mr Ikeda's remarks is annexed to the report.)

8. In his address from the Chair, Dr Sharma thanked CBS for inviting him to the inaugural session and FAO for including Nepal in the Project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and the Pacific. He highlighted the importance of agriculture in Nepal in terms of GDP contribution, population dependency and labour participation. Dr Sharma pointed out that the main objective of the current Ninth Plan was the alleviation of poverty, yet the agricultural growth rate experienced by the country during the last nine years had been disappointing, as acute poverty precluded sustainable economic growth.

9. In the context of the importance of agricultural statistics, Dr Sharma talked about equality, growth and poverty, food security, multiplier effect and strong backward linkages with the development of basic industries. He also mentioned the challenges future membership of Nepal to the World Trade Organization would entail and said that, once the country joined the grouping, the most adversely affected area would be the agricultural sector due to a predictable sharp rise in food prices. Nepal should become competent and competitive in export, he cautioned.

10. Dr Sharma claimed that the government would like to see good data in terms of by how much could poverty be reduced and in terms of policy formulation and implementation to that effect. He stressed how important clean, rich and consistent data were to policymakers. He observed that an integrated approach was necessary for creating hypotheses and verifying them. Dr Sharma suggested comparing the indicators produced by different agencies as well as those of other

countries not unlike Nepal. Quality of overall data was the concern for this, he added. He pointed out that data deficiency hampered talks with donor agencies. If we had more information, we would stand a better chance of making our requests more effectively, he said. He hoped that the seminar would be very helpful in overcoming the present data gaps and stressed the important role CBS could play in improving the quality of data through better co-ordination with other agencies.

11. Toward the end of the inaugural session, CBS Deputy Director-General Dr S M N Subhani gave the vote of thanks.

12. Five papers were presented in the seminar, three on 15 December and two the following day. The topics covered were:

- Methodological review of data collection, analysis, use and dissemination of the agricultural census.
- Compilation and use of the food balance sheet.
- Data collection, analysis and use of agricultural marketing information.
- Methodological review of statistical information on agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Use of agricultural statistics in support of food security issues.

13. Ms Singh chaired the paper presentation sessions. Questions and answers and recommendations followed each paper presentation. The papers are reproduced after the main report.

Data collection, analysis, use and dissemination of an agricultural census (Session 1)

14. “Methodological review of data collection, analysis, use and dissemination of an agricultural census” was the title of the paper presented by Dr S M N Subhani, Deputy Director-General of the Central Bureau of Statistics. This overview of the important aspects of the 1991/92 National Sample Census of Agriculture (NSCA-92) outlined the census methodology, field operation and data processing and dissemination, described in detail the contents of the census and its output tables, and touched upon the analysis of the census data.

15. As the population census preceded the agricultural census, information gathered during the population census were used to construct the sampling frame for NSCA-92. Such a co-ordination of population and agricultural censuses was an important feature of the planning and designing of the agricultural census.

16. Unlike in the past, the data processing of the 1991/92 census was undertaken by CBS itself using microcomputers. The data entry work was completed within six months. The editing was designed to identify several types of errors – missing values, data inconsistencies and unusual figures. The interactive editing procedure adopted proved to be very successful.

17. The census results were published in 85 reports, each containing 22 output tables. The tables presented data on each of the topics covered by the census for each geographic level. The analytical reports published have helped the users to better understand the data.

18. Dr Shubhani's paper also outlined the programmes of the forthcoming 2001/02 census of agriculture in Nepal. In this context the paper mentioned some problems faced by CBS in the field of sample design, training and data processing.

19. The seminar was suggested that the large business enterprises in agriculture: ventures should be collected so as to make the forthcoming census more complete. This could be done with only marginal increase in expenses.

20. It was also mentioned that the Agricultural Perspective Plan of Nepal had laid emphasis on the commercialization of agriculture in Nepal

21. A further suggestion was to incorporate new dimensions in the coming census. Beside the commercialization aspect, such aspects as mechanization, improved varieties, fruit tree and nursery businesses should be covered. For instance, oranges had become more popular recently, and the next census should be able to provide information regarding orange cultivation in the country. More generally, there should be more elaborate information in order to produce more meaningful analyses about agricultural enterprises than even can be found in the Agricultural Perspective Plan of Nepal (1997-2016).

22. The seminar was assured that such suggestions would be taken into account as much as possible in the coming census.

23. It was further claimed that the users wanted information on improved varieties, thus the agricultural surveys (including annual crop and livestock surveys) should collect data to provide this information. One hundred sixty-three new varieties have been released to date and it was essential to know their impact. Information on rapeseed, for example, would be very useful in the changed context. The seminar was informed that the ongoing crop and livestock survey had already included the information on improved varieties. Regarding data collection on commercialization and on agribusiness ventures, however, it was felt that this would be better dealt with in a separate, specialized survey.

24. Further suggestions were that priorities should be established according to the targets of the Agricultural Perspective Plan; that more information on crops should be collected than was the case in the past agricultural censuses; and that the sample design of the last census should be reviewed before deciding on whether to continue with it or not, as there was concern about the availability of a suitable frame for it.

25. On a point of detail, the seminar was made aware of a mistake in the document under discussion: the number of wards in the country at the time of the 1991/92 census was about 36 000, not about 20 000 as stated.

Compilation and use of the food balance sheet (Session 2)

26. The monograph entitled “Compilation and use of the food balance sheet” was jointly presented by Dr H B Tiwari and Mr Tri Ratna Manandhar, both economists at the Marketing Development Division of the Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). The document describes in detail the existing methodology of Food Balance Sheet (FBS) preparation, its use, coverage and problems encountered. FBS in Nepal has two main components, a food balance sheet at the national level and a study of edible cereal production and requirements at district level. The sheet covers some 65 commodities, including cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, fish, beverage, etc. In assessing the edible cereal production and requirement, edible production, requirement and net balance (surplus or deficit) of rice, maize, wheat, millet and barley of each district are calculated.

27. The weaknesses in the methodological aspect are known. The main shortcomings in the preparation of FBS at present are blamed on the poor quality of data. The punctuality and reliability of FBS depend very much on the different agencies involved in producing data. Co-operation from related agencies needs to be enhanced. Inadequate food consumption surveys and lack of representative import/export data are also major problems encountered in the preparation and use of FBS.

28. The Agricultural Perspective Plan of Nepal used FBS data to project the food level for the plan period, 1997-2016. Improvement in the food security status of districts, regions and the nation are also evaluated using FBS figures. As such, to have a good-quality FBS is very important from a planning point of view. The paper suggests that FBS-related norms about feed requirement, extraction and wastage should be updated at regular intervals. The Department of Customs should orient itself so as to be in a position to provide data on import and export regularly. The formation of a central-level Technical Co-ordination Committee for the preparation and publication of FBS is also suggested.

29. The floor discussion started with a query about the different per-capita rate of cereal consumption in the Terai, the Hills and the Mountain, whereby it appeared that the Terai people ate more than did the people of the other regions. This was followed by a suggestion to use the same per-capita consumption rate for all three regions: this would help minimize the political implications.

30. The seminar was told, however, that it was natural to take different consumption rates for the three regions of the country because the people in these regions really required different rates of consumption.

31. The inherent problems associated with the collection of data in Nepal were further elaborated for the benefit of the participants, and perhaps best summarized in the formula “The food balance sheet suffers as much as the data collection suffers”. It was explained that the compilation of a food balance sheet was largely dependent on milling rate, road access, storage facilities and wastage. The basic problem lied in the source of data collection.

32. The seminar was told, however, that it should be possible to evaluate the overall consistency of data from different sources while processing the food balance sheet. The areas of inconsistency could be identified in the process and should of course be pointed out.

33. It was further suggested that the results of the Nepal Living Standard Survey 1995/96 be compared with the data used by the Marketing Development Division of the Ministry of Agriculture. Furthermore, the data used in the Nepal Living-Standard Survey should be used in the coming census instead of the figures based on the old “Basic Needs” programme. Another suggestion was to use the data collected by CBS while compiling the food balance sheet of the country.

34. The seminar was told that population growth should be taken into account while interpreting the results of the food balance sheet, as it was thought that the per-capita availability of food consumption in the country was decreasing mainly because of the growth of the population.

Data collection, analysis and use of agricultural marketing information (Session 3)

35. The paper entitled “Data collection, analysis and use of agricultural marketing information” was presented by Mr Tulsi Gautam, Agricultural Marketing Economist of the Marketing Development Division (MDD) of the Department of Agriculture, MoA. The paper gave an overview of the present status of the marketing information system in Nepal and explains in clear terms the existing methodology of data collection as well as the analysis and dissemination of marketing information services as practised by MDD. The shortcomings in the present system and recommendations for improvement are also listed. The division is responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of marketing information. It relies on the district agriculture development offices for the collection of wholesale, retail, border and farm-gate price data at district level.

36. In close collaboration with the Nepal Rastra Bank, MDD publishes current marketing information through national daily newspapers and twice-a-week radio broadcasts. The paper pointed out that analysis and interpretation of marketing information is not carried out to the desired extent. A regular monitoring system to assess the needs of the target groups was lacking. Everyone concerned was aware of the importance of marketing information. A co-ordination committee of all agencies involved could contribute to the improvement of the current market information system.

37. The seminar was reminded that the information technology was changing very fast and that, now more than ever, “Late news is no news” – what with increasing recourse to email and other Internet facilities. On the topic at hand, the documentation centre of the National Agricultural Research Council could be a source of valuable information and publications like AGRIS and CARIS could be very useful as well. Again, the creation of a co-ordination committee would help in the dissemination of market information.

38. The seminar was made aware that the Nepal Rastra Bank collected the wholesale price of commodities, that the marketing division of the Department of Agriculture collected wholesale and retail prices, and that the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) also had one section collecting national retail prices and generating agricultural production indices. Now, the bank was about to start collecting retail prices. “To be more effective,” the seminar was told, “price people should come together and there should be co-ordination and no duplication.”

39. At this point, the Chair reminded the participants of the previous two days' discussions on duplication and inconsistencies in data collection and said that all the concerned agencies should get together and come up with a conclusion.

40. Then followed the observation that, of the three prices mentioned in the paper – farm-gate, retail and wholesale – the farm-gate price was very much used in computing the national accounts. Besides, the prices were collected largely for the agricultural sector and it was suggested that the coverage of commodities for price collection should be enlarged.

41. The farm-gate price collection was a very complex operation, however, the seminar was told. In this regard, four issues could be raised. The first was that the commodities of national importance should be considered. Take for instance the National Tea Development Board and the Nepal Food Corporation; both institutions were involved in marketing information – not only in terms of the number of items but also in terms of volume. Ditto for the Nepal Dairy Corporation and other large companies. The volumes being handled were important, as shown by the daily arrivals at the Kalimati fruit and vegetable market. Similarly, information from other areas also should be incorporated in the marketing information. The second point was the changed situation. Marketing information started some 25 years ago, new partners had joined the scene in the intervening period, and the situation today was different compared to the past, so methods had to be changed accordingly. The third concern was about the use of electronic media and establishing a centre at one institution like CBS. The fourth, related issue was the need to co-ordinate the data collected by different agencies like CBS, the Nepal Rastra Bank and the Marketing Development Division of the agriculture ministry.

42. Indeed, more generally, in an open-market economy, information became very complex and covered an ever-widening range. In this context, one should distinguish between marketing and market information: “Market information is concerned with the transacted volume; marketing is concerned with market information and other information related to marketing activities.”

43. The cost and margin information was important, the seminar was told, as marketing costs must be known to decide on one's production. Besides, there was a need to explore export markets, especially in the present situation, where supply and demand of agricultural commodities deserve special consideration. There was also a need for a reliable information system for producers and entrepreneurs.

44. The price information system of the Marketing Development Division largely covered commodities especially related to policy analysis, it was observed. Did the division also recommend market prices? The answer was that recommendation was beyond the scope of the ministry.

Statistical information on agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture (Session 4)

45. Mr Tek B Shrestha and Mr Saroj P Aryal, respectively Joint Secretary and Senior Statistical Officer of the Agriculture Statistics Division (ASD) of the Department of Agriculture,

MoA, presented a paper entitled “Methodological review of statistical information on agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture”. Their study outlines the system of collecting agricultural statistics inherited from the erstwhile Department of Food and Agricultural Marketing Services. It describes in detail the existing methodology the Agriculture Statistics Division of the ministry has been following in crop forecasting since 1993. ASD is able to make quick assessment of crop conditions or forecast of harvest thanks to the large number of its field workers spread throughout the country. The ministry has district agricultural and district livestock development offices in all 75 districts. Each of these district offices has its own village-level official units called service centres with three to 19 village development committees under them. It is through this network that ASD collects field-level agricultural information.

46. The information collected covers cereal crops, cash crops, fruit, vegetables, livestock and fishery on a regular basis for all 75 districts. The crop forecasting made by ASD is primarily based on the crop condition reports sent by these field workers through the development offices.

47. The Ministry of Agriculture publishes forecasts for both summer and winter crops whose data are used by all concerned agencies. However, ASD strongly feels the need for a sound system for early warning and crop forecasting. The ministry is planning to establish a scientific agricultural information system for data acquisition, storage, project and programme planning, monitoring and evaluation. Agricultural Geographical Information System units will be intended to maintain data and information at district and local levels and to analyse and interpret them for meaningful use in the planning process.

48. The seminar was told that some format containing provision for area, production and crop situation were used for the monthly reports on crop situation in MoA Nepal. And the ASD collected the information as soon as the crop was harvested but published it only twice a year. I.e., separately for summer and winter crops. The seminar discussed that it would be more useful to report the crop information as soon as it was collected rather than twice a year only.

49. Concern was expressed about the estimation methodology and questions raised about the persons responsible for estimation at district level, the method of sampling used and criteria for the selection of crop-cutting sites. The seminar was explained that the crop estimation was based on eye estimations made by junior technicians and junior technical assistants.

50. The seminar was told. that estimates of vegetable and fruit production were obtained from district offices on an eye-estimation basis and later checked with the Vegetable Development section at the centre. It was noted, however, that three techniques were combined to get better estimates for main crops: visual and crop cuts, meetings with local people, and cross checks with the previous year data.

51. The suggestion was made for the co-ordination of work among relevant organization, of which Geographic Information System of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Soil section of the National Agricultural Research Council.

52. The seminar stressed on the need of a uniform national data recording system, while both CBS and the Agricultural Statistics Division of MoA would publish data for summer and winter crops.

53. The seminar discussed the desire of short term forecast for crops, at least for paddy and maize, since technology was changing very fast.

Use of agricultural statistics in support of food security

(Session 5)

54. A substantial monograph entitled “Use of agricultural statistics in support of food security issues” was presented by Mr Dibakar Paudyal, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture. Apart from highlighting the importance of agricultural statistics in planning and implementing programmes that contribute to food security, the study pointed out that the analysis and use of agricultural statistics is one of the most important tools to address food security issues. It also discussed in detail what would constitute needful, workable and reliable statistics from a food-security standpoint.

55. The paper reviewed the concerns of users of agricultural statistics and explores the relevance and quality of existing data. It also focuses on some of the most important policy areas, which primarily include production-centred policies that enhance availability of food from crops and livestock. It also listed a set of policies affecting food security issues and the type of agricultural statistics needed to address them properly. The paper further pointed out that the production sources are the crop, livestock and fishery sub-sectors. Policies falling within this range were regrouped by focus area – production, resources, marketing, credit, investment, agribusiness, trade, etc – for discussion.

56. Various issues such as source and type of available agricultural data, their level, frequency, adequacy and coverage, as well as their reliability, quality and timeliness were discussed from the user’s perspective. The paper also listed data gaps by subject and the areas where wider coverage was needed.

57. The seminar was told that food security was one of the main concerns of FAO. Targeting the vulnerable and food insecure people was the main outcome of the 20th World Food Conference. For this reason, the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Management System or FIVIMS was formed in the participating countries and the National Planning Commission Secretariat was the focal point for Nepal. The other agencies concerned with food security were the World Food Programme. This was a very important area for FAO as well as for CBS and the National Planning Commission of Nepal, since the information system was linked with the Geographic Information System on the mapping side.

58. A suggestion was made to look at the food security problem by starting with the “use and supply” table, including a review of the past situation, until all the things mentioned in the paper were accomplished.

59. An objection was made to the statement repeated in the paper about the ineffectiveness of research, as in various cases research on agricultural growth had been effective. This led to the suggestion that the resources for research should be allocated according to the coverage of crops.

60. Finally, the seminar was made aware that in food security matters the Ministry of Supplies was more involved than the Ministry of Agriculture. The latter was a member of the food security committee, quite apart from the consumer welfare committee, which existed as well. The seminar was left in no doubt that the food situation in the country was often discussed in the dialogue committee of the National Planning commission.

61. Mr Ryuki Ikeda presented the seminar output report. He went through the list of national and international participants to the seminar and expressed satisfaction over the smooth progress of the deliberations. Summarizing the proceedings, Mr Ikeda focused on the organizational aspects of the Central Bureau of Statistics and of the Agricultural Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as on their responsibilities and activities. Listing the activities of the bureau, he discussed the past agricultural censuses and the forthcoming 2001/02 census. He stressed the importance of the Crop and Livestock Survey carried out with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank, as its implementation, in his view, did improve the current agricultural statistics.

62. Mr Ikeda also summarized the types of agricultural information collected by the Agricultural Statistics Division and the methodology applied in collecting them. He emphasized that the Agricultural Geographic Information System to be set up by the agriculture ministry would be very helpful in creating an integrated database system on agriculture at the lowest geographic level.

Recommendations of the seminar

- His Majesty's Government should review the existing statistical system and programmes and identify the responsibilities of the different agencies to avoid duplication of efforts and activities and improve accuracy and objectivity.
- Data needs should be assessed and prioritized.
- A framework should be prepared within which the agricultural statistics system can be developed in an integrated and consistent manner.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture should meet periodically to exchange data and discuss the reliability of agricultural statistics. Both organizations should strengthen their co-operation.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics should strengthen the implementation of the sample survey of crop and livestock to provide the national statistics that are needed for the national accounts, supply-and-demand policies, assessment of the efficiency of development plans and policies, etc, at the national or district level or both.
- On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture should strengthen the information it receives from its offices at grassroots level on the growing condition of crops, yield forecasting, status

of livestock, etc. Such information is indispensable for the extension and promotion of agriculture.

- The ADB-assisted Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development project is expected to improve the accuracy and reliability of statistics of the Central Bureau of Statistics through the use of the sample survey method. The inclusion of actual measurement methods such as crop cutting and area measurement is recommended.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics should implement the National Sample Census of Agriculture 2001/02 in accordance with the schedule to provide up-to-date information on the structure of Nepalese agriculture.
- An information system should be put in place to identify and monitor the food security situation in the country.
- His Majesty's Government should provide the necessary facilities and financial support to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the relevant departments and divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture and their local offices to improve agricultural statistics and information.
- Human resource development is a priority concern. His Majesty's Government should consider setting up adequate training to improve the statistical skills of the government personnel at every relevant level.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Agriculture and all the relevant institutions and agencies should evaluate a programme for the timely and regular dissemination of statistics and information to users. The dissemination programme should have a strong user-producer feedback system. The use of the Internet as the most cost-effective dissemination mechanism should be explored.

Closing statement

63. The closing statement was made by Mr David Marshall, Senior Officer, FAO Statistics Division. Mr Marshall highlighted the importance of reliable agricultural statistics through a sound statistical system. He noted that using rigorous statistical procedures was very costly and tended to fail to meet the requirement of timeliness. He suggested that the activities of the Central Bureau of Statistics and of the Agricultural Statistics Division should be looked upon as complementary activities in the process of providing better information.

64. Mr Marshall made a number of suggestions relevant to the strengthening of the National System of Food and Agriculture Statistics. He also cautioned about the need for better co-ordination among the concerned agencies to make the best use of the available resources for an efficient and reliable statistical system.

Remarks from the Chair

66. At the end of the seminar Ms Savitri Singh made concluding remarks from the Chair. She observed that, before the seminar, a workshop had been held under the joint auspices of the Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal and the Asian Development Bank. The workshop had mainly focused on the various aspects of the Crop and Livestock Survey carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics with the technical assistance of the bank. As for the National Seminar on Food and Agriculture Statistics in Nepal, it had been organized jointly by the Central Bureau of Statistics and FAO and attended by representatives of various national and international agencies and organizations.

67. In a brief summary, Ms Singh said that during the two-day seminar five papers had been presented. Most were concerned with common issues such as inadequacy of data, inconsistency of data, lack of co-ordination, lack of timeliness and poor quality of data, lack of standardization in measurements, lack of proper design and lack of manpower and budgetary resources. The various suggestions made by the paper writers, she said, were mainly concerned with the need for a high-level co-ordinating body or steering committee, the need to close data gaps in various areas, the need for sufficient resources and the need to upgrade technical capacity.

68. She added that prominent issues like under-coverage, inferior quality and irregular flow of data were raised during the discussions and these issues needed a sound system of standardization. In this connection she reminded the gathering that the vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission had already entrusted the Central Bureau of Statistics with the preparation of a consolidated national statistical plan in co-operation with other related agencies.

69. Ms Singh assured the participants that all valid comments, suggestions and recommendations would be incorporated in future programmes and activities. She hoped that this would lead to a sound, integrated statistical system in Nepal. Lastly she thanked FAO and the Asian Development Bank, as well as the participants and the resource persons.

**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE SYSTEM OF FOOD
AND AGRICULTURE STATISTICS IN NEPAL**

Kathmandu, 15-16 December 1999

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

A National Seminar on the System of Food and Agriculture Statistics was held at the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Kathmandu, on 15 and 16 December 1999. The seminar was organized jointly by CBS and FAO under the FAO Regional Project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries (GCP/RAS1171/JPN).

The seminar was held after the Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development Workshop, which was a joint project between CBS and ADB (TA 2861-NEP). The workshop mainly focused on the Crop and Livestock Survey, which was a new survey system at CBS.

The participants to the seminar comprised 35 Nepalese officers from the following institutions:

- National Planning Commission
- Central Bureau of Statistics
- Agricultural Statistics Division, Ministry of Agriculture
- Planning Division, Ministry of Agriculture
- Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture
- National Agricultural Research Council
- Tribhuwan University

The following international experts also attended:

- Mr Winston Rudder, FAO Representative in Nepal
- Mr David Marshall, Senior Officer, Statistical Development Service, FAO, Rome
- Mr Ryuki Ikeda, Agricultural Statistics Expert, FAO Regional Project GCP/RAS/171/JPN, Bangkok
- Dr Dalisay S Maligalig, Project Manager, Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development (TA 2861-NEP), Asian Development Bank, Manila
- Mr Romeo Recide, Consultant, ADB project TA 2861-NEP.

The seminar opened on the welcome speech delivered by Ms Savitri Singh, Acting Director-General of CBS, and the opening address read by Mr Winston Rudder, FAO Representative in Nepal. These were followed by initial remarks by Mr Yadab L Baidya, Secretary of the National Planning Commission Secretariat of Nepal, and the keynote address was delivered by Dr Shankar P Sharma, Member of the National Planning Commission of Nepal. All four orators emphasized the importance of agriculture and of agricultural statistics in Nepal.

* The text was adopted at the end of the seminar as Recommendations.

I PURPOSE OF THE SEMINAR

The purpose of the seminar was to assess the current system of the agricultural statistics and identify demands of, and expectations from, data users. In addition, the seminar also discussed problems and issues faced in the collection, analysis, use and dissemination of the food and agriculture statistics, and formulated recommendations for future improvement of the national food and agriculture statistical programme.

II ACTUAL SITUATION OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN NEPAL

Over the last two days, the seminar proceeded smoothly along the lines established in the agenda. The main points clarifying the current state of agricultural statistics in Nepal are as follows:

1. The organization of agricultural statistics

For a developing country like Nepal, since agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economy, the need for accurate, relevant and timely agricultural data is very great. Effective planning and policymaking depends to a large extent on the availability of timely and accurate agricultural statistics.

CBS under the National Planning Commission of Nepal is the main statistical agency in the country and its responsibility extends to all sectors. In practice, however, the statistical system in Nepal is somewhat decentralized. Broadly speaking, three public agencies are involved in statistical work – the Central Bureau of Statistics, the statistics division of the Department of Agriculture, and the Nepal Rastra Bank – as are some semi-public agencies.

In the field of agriculture, the government in 1993 gave CBS sole responsibility over the collection and publication of current agricultural statistics to avoid duplication of statistical activities among agencies. Before 1993 the responsibility was with the Ministry of Agriculture. In 1993, thirty-three district statistical offices under the Ministry of Agriculture came under CBS.

Although the mandate for agricultural statistics was transferred to CBS, the Agricultural Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture still gathers many kinds of agricultural statistical data for the ministry's own purpose, such as basic data for extension and promotion of agriculture, and measurement method of policies. CBS and the Ministry of Agriculture are the two main agencies involved in agricultural statistics.

2. Agricultural statistics at CBS

2.1 Organization of CBS

The Nepal Statistical Act 2015 (1959 AD) established CBS and gave it the responsibility of collecting, analysing and publishing statistics at the national level. The bureau collects, processes and disseminates data from primary and secondary sources. National accounts, population censuses, agricultural censuses and surveys, censuses of manufacturing establishments and household surveys are among the main activities of the bureau.

CBS has grown much bigger than it was in 1993. Its 33 branch statistical offices cover all 75 districts of the country. Each office covers either two or three districts.

2.2 Agricultural statistics at CBS

2.2.1 Agricultural census

So far, Nepal has conducted four decennial agricultural censuses, beginning in 1961/62. The last one, the National Sample Census of Agriculture 1991/92 (NSCA-92), covered all the districts of the country. The concepts, questionnaires and procedures developed for this census were based on the guidelines provided by FAO (Programme for the 1990 World Census of Agriculture). The enumeration areas and samples were generated from the 1991 Census of Population. NSCA-92 was developed to form the baseline upon which an integrated programme of annual surveys would be evolved and executed for about 10 years, i.e. before the next census was undertaken. The next NSCA, to be carried out in 2001/02, is under preparation by CBS. Its design and scale will be the same as NSCA-92.

2.2.2 Crop and livestock survey

Since the transfer of responsibility from the Ministry of Agriculture, CBS has been working to strengthen the system and design of current agricultural surveys to improve the quality of data. Keeping this in view, CBS initiated a sample survey system for agricultural statistics in 1995.

Then in order to improve the range and quality of agricultural statistics progressively, the government sought the assistance of the Asian Development Bank, which was forthcoming under the TA-2861 NEP, Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development project carried out by CBS.

With the methodology developed through the assistance of ADB, CBS has conducted an integrated Crop and Livestock Survey since 1998. The objective of the survey is to provide estimates of crop and livestock production in each district at least twice a year. Two survey rounds were undertaken, one in November/December and another in April/May, to collect data on temporary and permanent crops, livestock and poultry within the specified periods.

The sampling design of the crop and livestock survey is applied to a probability-proportionate, two-stage sampling procedure with enumeration areas as primary sampling units and agricultural holdings as secondary sampling units. The primary sampling units are selected from the list of enumeration areas generated by the 1991 Census of Population, showing the number of agricultural holdings for each area. The sample enumeration area is fixed at an average of three enumeration areas per district. Within each selected area, a listing of all agricultural households is done. The listing results in a compilation of agricultural holdings in a given area. A sample of 15 holdings is selected using the current method of systematic selection of holdings after stratifying them. Enumerators gather data from households by interview.

The result of the crop and livestock survey has not been officially announced due to delays in establishing the system. However, in December 1999, the first phase of the joint project with CBS and ADB came to an end. A workshop to evaluate the system and introduce its statistical value and precision to data users was held days before this seminar took place.

3. Statistical information on agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture

3.1 Organization of the ministry

Despite the transfer of mandate on agricultural statistics to CBS, the Ministry of Agriculture still collects agricultural data for its own purpose, such as extension and promotion of agriculture or fight against pests and blights. The main statistical data that the ministry collects are on crops and livestock. Data collection at local level is divided between crops and livestock. Crop data are collected by 75 agricultural development offices under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture, and these development offices supervise about 1 000 agricultural service centres, which cover some 4 000 villages. Crop data are gathered by the service centres and forwarded to the development offices and on to the Agricultural Statistics Division of the ministry. A similar structure deals with livestock through the same administrative process. Besides, the Marketing Development Division of the Department of Agriculture collects agricultural marketing information and compiles the trade data on agricultural commodities, the consumer price indices, the food balance sheet, and others.

3.2 Agriculture statistics activities at the ministry

The ministry handles two categories of statistical information on agriculture, i.e. on crops (area, production and yield of cereal crops, cash crops, pulses and horticulture) and on livestock (livestock and poultry numbers and products), and also produces monthly crop situation reports on the growing conditions of crops. Efforts are also made to incorporate available statistical information on irrigation, input, credit, price, etc. The Agricultural Statistics Division of the ministry estimates and compiles the figures received from the district offices.

Primary information is gathered by the village-level agricultural service centres and livestock centres. Their respective staffs gather the data by doing the rounds of the village heads in their areas of operation. The agricultural service centres also implement crop cutting for estimation of yield for the

main crops. The fields and points of cross cutting are chosen by purposive selection. The data are then sent to the ministry through the relevant development offices at district level.

In 1998, the Agricultural Statistics Division mooted plans for a network of Agricultural Geographic Information System units in order to create an integrated database system on agriculture at district and local levels. Concrete activities are expected in the future.

The Marketing Development Division of the Department of Agriculture, for its part, provides retail and wholesale prices of selected agricultural commodities in various districts, retail prices at Indian border markets, export and import flows of agricultural commodities and related information, and wholesale prices and market arrival quantities of fruit and vegetables at the Kalimati wholesale market in Kathmandu. The division also produces the food balance sheet, which provides a comprehensive picture of food supply and use in the country, taking into account different statistical series.

III RECOMMENDATIONS

- His Majesty's Government of Nepal should review the existing statistical system and programmes and identify the responsibilities of the different agencies to avoid duplication of efforts and activities and improve accuracy and objectivity.
- Data needs should be assessed and prioritized.
- A framework should be prepared within which the agricultural statistics system can be developed in an integrated and consistent manner.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture should meet periodically to exchange data and discuss the reliability of agricultural statistics. Both organizations should strengthen their co-operation.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics should strengthen the implementation of the sample survey of crop and livestock to provide the national statistics that are needed for the national accounts, supply-and-demand policies, assessment of the efficiency of development plans and policies, etc, at the national or district level or both.
- On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture should strengthen the information it receives from its offices at grassroots level on the growing condition of crops, yield forecasting, status of livestock, etc. Such information is indispensable for the extension and promotion of agriculture.
- The ADB-assisted Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development project is expected to improve the accuracy and reliability of statistics of the Central Bureau of Statistics through the use of the sample survey method. The inclusion of actual measurement methods such as crop cutting and area measurement is recommended.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics should implement the National Sample Census of Agriculture 2001/02 in accordance with the schedule to provide up-to-date information on the structure of Nepalese agriculture.

- An information system should be put in place to identify and monitor the food security situation in the country.
- His Majesty's Government should provide the necessary facilities and financial support to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the relevant departments and divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture and their local offices to improve agricultural statistics and information.
- Human resource development is a priority concern. His Majesty's Government should consider setting up adequate training to improve statistical skill for the government personnel at every relevant level.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Agriculture and all the relevant institutions and agencies should evaluate a programme for the timely and regular dissemination of statistics and information to users. The dissemination programme should have a strong user-producer feedback system. The use of the Internet as the most cost-effective dissemination mechanism should be explored.

All the participants of the seminar indicated that they fully agreed over the recommendations contained in this report on agricultural statistics in Nepal.

16 December 1999

AGENDA OF THE SEMINAR**15 December 1999**

10:00-10:15	Registration Chair	Dr Shankar P Sharma, Member, NPC
10:15	Welcome speech	Ms Savitri Singh, DG (Acting), CBS
	Opening address	Mr Winston Rudder, FAO Representative in Nepal
	Introductory remarks on the Project for the Im- provement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and the Pacific	Mr Ryuki Ikeda, Agricultural Statistics Expert, FAO
	Remarks	Mr Yadav Lal Baidya, Secretary, NPC Secretariat
	Remarks from the Chair	
	Vote of thanks	Dr S M N Subhani, DDG, CBS
11:00-11:30	Tea/coffee break	
Paper presentation		
	Chair	Ms Savitri Singh, CBS
11:30-12:00	Methodological review of data collection, analysis, use and dissemination of an agricultural census in Nepal	Dr S M N Subhani, CBS
12:00-12:30	Discussion	
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-14:00	Compilation and use of the food balance sheet	Dr Hari Babu Tiwari, DoA and Mr Tri Ratna Manandhar, DoA
14:00-14:30	Discussion	
14:30-15:00	Data collection, analysis and use of agricultural marketing information	Mr Tulsi Gautam, DoA
15:00-15:30	Discussion	

16 December 1999
Paper presentation

	Chair	Ms Savitri Singh, CBS
10:00-10:30	Methodological review of statistical information on agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture	Mr Tek B Shrestha, ASD, MoA and Mr Saroj Aryal, ASD, MoA
10:30-11:00	Discussion	
11:00-11:30	Tea/coffee break	
10:30-12:00	Use of agricultural statistics in support of food security issues	Mr Diwakar Paudyal, APD, MoA
12:00-12:30	Discussion	
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-14:30	Chair Presentation of the seminar output	Ms Savitri Singh, CBS Mr Ryuki Ikeda, FAO
14:30-15:30	Closing statement	Mr David Marshall, FAO

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Position, Organization
Ms Savitri Singh	D-G (Acting), Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)
Dr S M N Subhani	Deputy Director-General, CBS
Mr Winston R. Rudder	Representative in Nepal, FAO
Mr David Marshall	Senior Officer, FAO
Mr Ryuki Ikeda	Agricultural Statistics Officer, FAO
Mr Laxman Gautam	Senior Programme Officer in Nepal, FAO
Representative	JICA/Nepal
Representative	JICA/Nepal
Dr Dalisay S Maligalig	Project Manager, ADB
Mr Romeo S Recede	Consultant, ADB
Mr Bhola Man Singh Basnet	Chief, CDPP, NARC
Mr Tek Bahadur Shrestha	Joint Secretary (T), ASD, MoA
Mr Diwakar Paudyal	Chief Economist, APD, MoA
Mr Saroj Aryal	Senior Statistical Officer, ASD, MoA
Mr Tulsi Gautam	Marketing Officer, DoA, MoA
Dr Hari Babu Tiwari	Marketing Officer, DoA, MoA
Mr Tri Ratna Manandhar	Assistant Marketing Officer, DoA, MoA
Mr Jawahar Lal Amatya	Agricultural Project Services Centre (APROSC)
Representative	Rashtriya Samachar Samiti (RSS)
Mr Rabi Singh	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Ramesh Chandra Das	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Keshab Bahadur Karmacharya	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Haribol Shrestha	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Radha Krishna G C	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Badri Prasad Niraula	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Krishna Prasad Shrestha	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Dinesh Prasad Dahal	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Shyam Prasad Baskota	Under Secretary, CBS
Mr Tunga S Bastola	Deputy Director, CBS
Mr Damodar Phuyal	Account Officer, CBS
Mr Shankar Lal Shrestha	Statistical Officer, CBS
Mr Keshab Gautam	Statistical Officer, CBS
Mr Dilli Raj Joshi	Statistical Officer, CBS
Mr Ambika Bashyal	Statistical Officer, CBS
Mr Arun Pokhrel	Statistical Officer, CBS
Mr Pramod Raj Regmi	Statistical Officer, CBS

STATEMENT

- **Welcome Speech**
Ms. Savitri Singh
Acting Director General
Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal

- **Introduction to the project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and the Pacific Countries (GCP/RAS/JPN) and Objectives of the National Seminar**
Mr. Ryuki Ikeda
Agricultural Statistics Expert
FAO RAP

- **Closing Remarks**
Mr. A. David Marshall
Senior Officer
FAO Statistics Division
FAO Rome

WELCOME SPEECH

Ms Savitri Singh
Acting Director-General,
Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal

Nepal is one of the 18 participant countries of the region in the Project for the Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries. His Majesty's Government of Nepal has designated the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) as the "national focal point" for the project. The main objectives of the project include the capacity development of the participating countries in providing statistics for planning and policymaking in the food and agriculture sector and the exchange of data among countries for their supporting food security programmes and policies.

Holding national seminars on the System of Food and Agricultural Statistics in participating countries is one of the activities included in the project. This national seminar is organized jointly by CBS and FAO as a part of the project activities. The seminar intends to cover a range of topics such as agricultural census, market information, crops and livestock, the food balance sheet and food security. The two-day workshop jointly organized by CBS and ADB preceding this seminar has already covered some important aspects of crop and livestock statistics in the country.

The Ninth Plan of Nepal (1997/98-2001/02) has identified agriculture as the lead sector for the development of, and alleviation of poverty in, the country. Statistical information is an indispensable element for the success of any development plan. It is indispensable for monitoring and evaluating development projects as well.

The statistical system in Nepal is, by and large, a decentralized one. Statistical information relating to food, agriculture (including livestock and fishery) and forestry of Nepal comes from different sources. The main producers and users of agricultural statistics have been invited to the seminar to deliberate at length on the present system of food and agriculture statistics in Nepal. It is hoped that the eminent persons gathered here will be able to identify the critical data gaps of the sector and will come up with effective suggestions.

We are very close to the next millennium now; the millennium countdown has already begun. The deliberations made in the seminar by eminent persons of diverse experience will be successful in assessing the present system of food and agriculture statistics in the country and in identifying the critical data gaps in this sector. This will immensely help for CBS and other agencies concerned in removing the gaps at the beginning of the next millennium.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN ASIA AND PACIFIC COUNTRIES (GCP/RAS/171/JPN) AND OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL SEMINAR

Ryuki IKEDA
Agricultural Statistics Expert,
FAO RAP

1 Introduction

This project was formulated following the recommendation of the sixteenth session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (16th APCAS), held in Tokyo, Japan, in October and November 1996. The commission discussed the importance of strengthening co-operation and the establishment of a system for the collection and dissemination of statistics among member countries. Japan expressed willingness to contribute in this matter and offered a budget for a trust-fund project to be executed by FAO. This project was approved and it started in September 1998.

The two objectives of the project are:

1. to study the national systems of food and agricultural statistics and organize national and regional seminars on the production and use of agricultural statistics, and national and regional workshops on specific topics; and
2. to formulate a plan for the establishment of a database and provision of equipment and facilities offering the capability to transfer data in electronic format both to and from countries in the region, including FAO, using common concepts, standards and classifications.

Over the last several years, FAO and other international organizations have implemented a number of projects at national level. This regional project is the first to include most countries in this region in the field of agricultural statistics. The project covers 16 countries, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Currently there are many issues on agriculture concerning international matters, such as trade, environment, freedom from hunger, and so on. Accurate statistics can greatly contribute to finding solutions on these matters. Demand for accurate and comparable statistics among countries will keep growing. The project is expected to contribute to meet this need.

2. Background of agricultural statistics in Nepal

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) under the National Planning Commission is the main statistical agency in the country and its area of responsibility covers all sectors. However, the statistical system in Nepal is to some extent decentralized. Broadly speaking there are three main public agencies – CBS, the Agricultural Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Nepal Rastra Bank – as well as some semi-public agencies.

In the field of agriculture, the government in 1993 gave CBS sole responsibility over the collection and publication of current agricultural statistics to avoid duplication of statistical activities among agencies. Before 1993 the responsibility was with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Although the mandate for agricultural statistics was transferred to CBS, the Agricultural Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture still gathers many kinds of agricultural statistical data for its own purpose, such as basic data for extension and promotion of agriculture. CBS and the Ministry of Agriculture are the two main agencies involved in agricultural statistics.

So far, CBS has conducted four decennial agricultural censuses, beginning in 1961/62. The last one, the National Sample Census of Agriculture 1991/92 (NSCA-92), covered all the districts of the country. NSCA-92 was developed so as to form the baseline upon which an integrated programme of annual surveys would be evolved and executed for about 10 years. CBS is preparing the next NSCA, which will be implemented in 2001/02. Its design and scale will be the same as NSCA-92.

Since the transfer of responsibility from the Ministry of Agriculture, CBS has been working to strengthen the system and design of current agricultural surveys to improve the quality of data. Keeping this in view, CBS initiated a sample survey system for agricultural statistics in 1995.

Then, in order to improve the range and quality of agricultural statistics, the government sought the assistance of the Asian Development Bank. ADB complied by extending assistance to CBS under the TA-2861 NEP project Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development. With the methodology developed with the assistance of ADB, CBS began an integrated Crop and Livestock Survey in 1998.

As for the Ministry of Agriculture, it gathers three categories of statistical information on agriculture and livestock. Efforts are also being made to incorporate available statistical information on irrigation, input, credit, price, etc. Primary information is gathered by village-level offices, whose personnel gather the data by making the rounds of their domain interviewing village heads. They also implement crop cutting for estimation of yield of the main crops.

The Marketing Development Division of the Department of Agriculture, for its part, provides data on retail and wholesale prices and on export and import of agricultural commodities.

3. Purpose of the seminar

Statistics can indicate quantitatively the actual condition of the society and the economy. This means that statistics are like soft infrastructure indispensable in contemporary society. Today, it is difficult to think of not using statistics in all kinds of areas related to administration and economic activities.

In the agricultural area, statistics also play the role of a compass in promoting food supply-and-demand policies, price policies and structure policies. Furthermore, for quality planning, formulation and evaluation of projects, basic data reflecting the actual situation are strongly needed.

Currently, CBS and the Ministry of Agriculture are the two main organizations dealing in agricultural statistics and both intend to strengthen their statistical activities. Therefore, it is significant to hold the national seminar at this time.

The seminar aims to

- assess the state of national food and agriculture statistics service in Nepal;
- review existing food and agriculture statistical activities;
- identify the demands and expectations of data users;
- discuss problems, issues faced in the collection, analysis, use and dissemination of food and agriculture statistics; and
- formulate recommendations for future improvement of the national food and agriculture statistical programme.

The seminar will serve as a forum for identifying data gaps, deficiencies in methodologies, duplication of activities, and measures for improving and streamlining agricultural statistics.

CLOSING REMARKS

A David Marshall
Senior Officer,
FAO Statistics Division
FAO Rome

Madame Chair and Acting Director-General of CBS
Distinguished resource persons and participants
Colleagues from FAO and ADB

I would like to start by saying how enlightening and rewarding I have found these last few days in terms of appreciating the extent of the agricultural statistics system in Nepal. The quality of the papers, and the depth of discussion they have generated, provide a clear indication of the country's determination to have a stronger agricultural statistical system set in place.

As Dr Sharma stated in his keynote address, agriculture contributes some 40 percent to GDP. But perhaps more important, it provides a means of livelihood for over 90 percent of the population through subsistence farming. Agriculture is, therefore, a very important, if not the most important sector of the Nepalese economy.

From a global perspective, the important role that agriculture plays in ensuring national food security was put in focus at the World Food Summit held in Rome in 1996. The need to have a strong national food security programme is further emphasized by the ever-increasing world population, which exerts extreme pressure on land use and other resources. The world's total population is now over six billion and it continues to increase every day. In the meantime, total world's arable land is not growing as fast. On the contrary, there is an ever-growing pressure for the conversion of agricultural land to give way to housing requirements, commercial and industrial expansion, and even tourism developments. In recognition of this situation, FAO is taking the lead in developing a Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System or FIVIMS to identify and monitor the food insecure, and I am pleased to note that Nepal is participating actively in this development.

More and more countries in the world are eager to join the emerging globalization and free market economy. The globalization of socio-economic activities is intensifying inter-dependence, every country is strengthening relationships with its neighbours and its trade partners in the world. As evidenced by the recent currency crisis in Asia that affected the world economy, today no single economy can exist on its own. In the field of agriculture, trade in agricultural products has been expanding rapidly during recent years.

This matter requires establishing a national capacity to evolve policies and development plans. However, policies and plans that can anticipate future trends cannot be formulated out of thin air. The establishment of a strong national statistical service is a necessary prerequisite.

In the discussions, I noted a number of interventions about the methodologies used by the Ministry of Agriculture and the observation that they lacked any scientific statistical basis, thus negating the

value of the data and deeming it as unreliable. I beg to differ. The Ministry of Agriculture fills a crucial information gap, which we cannot realistically fill using rigorous statistical procedures. Furthermore, such a system would be very costly and would not be able to meet the requirement for timeliness our politicians and administrators insist on. Therefore, rather than compare the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture with those of CBS, let us look at them as complementary activities and as important components of the information system.

In this context, this seminar is a timely one and the country's leadership clearly recognizes the need to develop an integrated system of food and agriculture statistics within the overall national statistics system. The support of the Asian Development Bank in strengthening agricultural statistics in Nepal, through the recently concluded project called Supporting Agriculture Statistics Development, is also a most timely and relevant intervention and the holding of this seminar back-to-back with the ADB project's concluding workshop has served to reinforce both initiatives.

Getting better data on food and agriculture issues is not an end in itself. Rather, it is an essential means to the end of better understanding the problems of poverty, food security and malnutrition and being able to more effectively design and monitor policies, programmes and projects which seek to address these problems.

A good information base is a valuable asset and has many uses: national accounts, policy analysis and advice, sector performance analysis, food security and poverty monitoring, and impact analysis for policies and programmes. However, its value will only be appreciated if the data is timely, reliable and used.

I would, therefore, like to suggest that we should consider the following criteria as relevant to the strengthening of the national system of food and agriculture statistics in Nepal:

- (a) It is the task of the national system of food and agriculture statistics to make available to the government, the public and the private sector relevant, reliable and timely statistical information related to the agricultural sector and to associated issues.
- (b) The importance of the national system of food and agriculture statistics needs to be recognized by national authorities, such as by
 1. being aware of the fundamental principles of official statistics;
 2. supporting a workable legal and institutional setting and commitment to good management practices;
 3. providing adequate resources (financial, motivated staff, accommodation, equipment, etc);
 4. supporting the processing, storage, analysis and dissemination of the data; and
 5. agreeing to put the data and all relevant documentation in the public domain.
- (c) An integrated framework approach, including agriculture surveys, household surveys and subjective, qualitative data, should be adopted based on a thorough assessment of data needs and priorities.
- (d) Both producers and users of statistical information should play an active role in the formulation of the work programme.
- (e) The development process should be structured with clearly identified long-term goals, intermediate targets and performance indicators.

- (f) The government, all national partners and the international institutions need to be committed to the programmes and processes being developed, and this commitment should show in policy dialogue and resource allocation.

As resources for statistical activities are scarce, better co-ordination is needed in order to make the best use of what is available, to avoid conflicts in data production, to seek synergy and to create optimal conditions for various institutions working together in partnership. Also, we need to consider the principle of multiple accountability (to the National Planning Commission, the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Agriculture, professional colleagues, users of data and the public at large).

This co-ordination is best achieved by:

- the Central Bureau of Statistics playing the key role in the overall co-ordination process;
- appropriate institutional structures being established or strengthened within a formal framework, and linkages and responsibilities for production of food and agriculture statistics being defined;
- committees of users and producers being established or strengthened to enable them to work together and share responsibility regarding the food and agriculture statistics programme; and
- co-ordination between donors and between different players in the national statistical system in a proactive way to avoid duplication of effort and encourage complementarity and synergy.

Turning now to international co-operation. This should be demand-led and should:

- be well co-ordinated among the international institutions;
- be aware of policy environments in areas of human and resource development strategies and institutional development needs;
- ensure that both government and donor commitments complement national resources, while empowering the national food and agriculture statistical systems and the government to take the lead;
- promote full participation and address the concerns of all main stakeholders;
- be well designed and implemented according to professional statistical standards using the most appropriate and practical approach;
- ensure good co-ordination within the international community to maintain integrated and cost-efficient programmes;
- use appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to facilitate effective programme implementation, exchange of experience and lesson learning; and
- recognize that developing a statistical system takes a long time and that intermediate targets are an essential element of a structured framework approach.

The way forward is the formulation of a national programme to develop food and agriculture statistics including data collection, data processing, dissemination, analysis and use, in a reasonable timeframe and within an integrated framework. As a first task, this programme should include making all existing food and agriculture data available to the public through the establishment of an agricultural statistics information centre which would also include details of the methods used, many of which have been described in this seminar.

The regional project GCP/RAS/171/JPN will seek to have a region-wide system of information exchange among the member countries of the Asia-Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics. This system will generate the synergy that will lead to a co-operative effort to strengthen the

agricultural statistics and information services of all member countries. At the end of the project we hope to see a regional plan for the establishment of a regional statistics and information exchange system that responds to the needs of each member country. The output of this seminar will provide a valuable contribution to the formulation of this plan.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, Madame Chairperson, for your efforts in summarizing the discussion and keeping us focussed on the agenda. I would also like to thank the resource persons who have put considerable effort into preparing high-quality papers and then presenting them. I would also like to thank CBS for jointly organizing this seminar with FAO and looking after all the local arrangements. Lastly, I would like to thank all the participants who have contributed so actively to the success of the seminar.

Thank you all very much indeed.