



COMPLETION REPORT

Roundtable on 'Achieving Greater Food Security in Asia through Improved Information Network'

SEARCA, Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines
17–18 November 2010

Background of Organisers

About the Food Security Center

The Food Security Center (FSC) of the University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany, is one of five centres of excellence of the Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation (EXCEED), which is supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with funds from the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany. The provision of innovative and effective science-based initiatives to reduce hunger and achieve food security is the mission of FSC. Careful analysis and science-based inputs to effective and efficient policy, technical and institutional responses, including impact assessments are necessary to achieving its mission. The Food Security Center utilises a multidisciplinary approach through teaching, research and policy advice in cooperation with national and international development organisations and institutions of higher learning in the developing world to deal with issues of sustainable food availability, food access, food use, and food utilisation, among others.

About the Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies

The Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies was inaugurated by the ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr Surin Pitsuwan, in May 2008. The Centre maintains research in the fields of Food Security, Climate Change, Energy Security, Health Security as well as Internal and Cross-Border Conflict. It produces policy-relevant analyses aimed at furthering awareness and building capacity to address NTS issues and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. The Centre also provides a platform for scholars and policymakers within and outside Asia to discuss and analyse NTS issues in the region.

In 2009, the Centre was chosen by the MacArthur Foundation as a lead institution for the MacArthur Asia Security Initiative, to develop policy research capacity and recommend policies on the critical security challenges facing the Asia-Pacific. The Centre is also a



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founding member and the Secretariat for the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies in Asia (NTS-Asia).

About the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) is one of the centres of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) that envisions meeting contemporary development challenges and providing leadership in enabling an environment for sustainable agricultural and rural development (ARD) in Southeast Asia. SEARCA builds human, social and institutional capital in Southeast Asia by providing opportunities for high-quality graduate education, research, scholarship, training, knowledge exchange, and project development and management in agriculture and rural development. Its current priority themes are agricultural competitiveness and natural resource management.

Introduction/Rationale

Despite the phenomenal economic growth experienced by most countries in Asia, the region is still home to an estimated 642 million undernourished people or around two-thirds of the developing world's figure of about 1.0 billion. Winning the war on hunger has to take place in this region and certainly not anywhere else.

Food insecurity is caused by numerous factors, most of which are linked to the imbalances of demand and supply. Population growth, rising incomes and the increasing alternative use of some agricultural commodities for non-food processing like biofuels are some of the key factors that lead not only to the rapid rise in demand for food commodities but also to changes in the structure of demand. These trends should not be a cause for concern if the supply of agricultural commodities would rise at the same rate or faster than that of demand. Fears are looming, however, that such rates of production growth will be more difficult to achieve while demand is expected to rise because of the growing population and rising incomes.

But such fears had no basis during the recent food crisis. The world rice market, for example, was very stable, in fact even in the few years before the crisis (David and Timmer, forthcoming). There were ample supplies, stocks-to-use ratio was constant, and trade even expanded during the crisis. The situation indicated that other factors set the stage for the rice crisis. The price increases for petroleum, maize, soybeans and wheat created an atmosphere of concern and thus contributed to the policy decisions by key rice trading countries, both exporters and importers. It was these policy decisions that led to a substantially larger and more rapid price increase on the world rice market than on world maize and wheat markets.



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A question then is posed in relation to the adoption of such policy decisions. Was there still a lack of confidence on the rice market, primarily because of its thinness? Was this lack of confidence brought about by the lack of confidence on the information available related to national rice supply and demand and their stockpiles of grain?

The need for accurate and timely data on the supply and demand of food, particularly of staple grains like rice, cannot be over-emphasised in achieving the goal of greater food security. Having accurate and reliable information on commodity production, demand and trade of countries will help policymakers in formulating policies and strategies to ensure sufficient food supplies. This was the idea behind the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) project. The 10-year project was started in 2003 with two phases. Phase I, which was completed in 2007, focused on data collection, database website development and human capacity-building to ensure the collection of accurate and good quality data and information. Phase II, which is ongoing, continues most of Phase I activity but with the addition of more analytical studies that would help guide policymakers in strategising the more rapid achievement of food security in the region. The evaluation done for Phase I of the project was rated satisfactory in terms of capacity-building and network system development for data and information. It remains to be seen how the whole initiative will fully gain its ultimate objective of guiding policymakers in the policy formulation that would ensure the sustainable achievement of a more food secure situation for the region.

Objectives

The primary objective of this forum was to identify key recommendations and research to help further strengthen the region's food security information system. More specifically, the forum aimed to:

- Discuss and analyse the effectiveness of the existing monitoring and evaluation process of the food security situation in the respective countries;
- Identify gaps in such processes especially with an environment that is faced with new challenges like climate change, the food-fuel nexus, and the globalisation of markets;
- Identify measures to encourage the full participation of countries in strengthening the food security information system; and
- Recommend intervention measures (training, research, etc.) to rectify gaps, both on the monitoring and evaluation processes as well as in encouraging greater country participation in the food security information system/network.

Roundtable Structure

The programme was divided into three Sessions (see Annex 1). Session 1 was a presentation of papers to provide the current situation on the subject under discussion: the region's food security situation, the Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) approaches to the region's food security challenges, the current status of the AFSIS, and an example of a tool to identify farmers who are vulnerable to food insecurity (see Annex 2). Session 2 was a presentation of country reports interspersed with open fora to clarify points (see Annex 3).

All these served as valuable inputs to Session 3, which was the workshop on various issues related to the improvement of a food security information system (see Annex 4). For more productive discussions, the participants were divided into two groups and were tasked with answering the following questions:

- What is your vision of the AFSIS and your expected deliverables to achieve the vision?
- Which of the current activities of the AFSIS do we need to delete/change or strengthen to achieve your vision of an effective food security information system?
- What activities do we need to add to achieve your vision of an effective food security information system?
- How do we improve cooperation and coordination among the various actors to achieve a more effective AFSIS?

Participants

The participants included AFSIS Focal Persons and other senior level officials who have substantial involvement in and knowledge of food security monitoring and information systems development. They were from Cambodia (1), Indonesia (1), Lao PDR (2), Malaysia (1), Myanmar (2), the Philippines (3), Singapore (4), Thailand (2), Vietnam (1), and Germany (1). Annex 4 contains the list of participants and the members of the organising committee.

Highlights of Paper Presentations

Plenary Papers

Dr Teng's SEA Regional Food Security presented a conceptualisation of the inter-relationships between food supply and demand at regional and global levels and the main

threats to food security. Discussed were the dimensions of food security – availability, access, economic access and utility (nutritive value, quality, safety) – and how ASEAN is faring in these areas. Likewise discussed were the factors that impinge on these dimensions and the potential impacts on the region. The state of food security in Asia was presented and the investments necessary for action discussed. Assessments of various organisations on food insecurity were presented as well, together with a number of food security programmes that are in place. The presentation closed with the discussion of a Regional Food Security Framework which has as elements, information and knowledge; assessments, early warnings and predictions; response plans; and amelioration of food insecurity.

Dr Apichart started his presentation with the history of the AFSIS and its major objective, which is to facilitate food security policy development and planning through systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of information. He discussed its major activities as human resources development (fora/trainings and mutual technical cooperation) and information network development, which includes the Database System, Early Warning Information Report and the Agricultural Commodity Outlook Report. Problems encountered include different levels of development of country agricultural statistical systems; inconsistent data; incomplete data in the ACO report; absence of certain data in some countries, e.g., harvested area, damaged area, price, stock and trade; and the difference in crop calendars and there being no monthly data. It was stated that in principle, all concerned parties want to transform the AFSIS into a permanent mechanism. The ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) Plus Three (China, Japan and Republic of Korea) Meeting in Phnom Penh, held on 24 October 2010, endorsed the Concept Note on the sustainability of the AFSIS Project.

Dr Adriano, in her presentation on ADB's approach to Asia's food security challenges, discussed Asia's agriculture landscape, particularly its present and future in a business as usual approach. She mentioned the pivotal role of agriculture in food security and discussed the three pillars to support Asia's future agriculture: productivity, diversification and value addition, and resilience. She likewise presented ADB's multi-sectoral food security engagement with the following as key elements: Strategy 2020 focusing on ADB's five core areas of operation (infrastructure, environment – climate change, finance sector, regional cooperation and education), multi-sector food security investments based on the country's food security strategy; agriculture covering market access and value chain infrastructure; regional cooperation covering ASEAN+3 rice trade, reserve and information; GMS agriculture working group; BIMP EAGA strategy on agriculture and trade; SARC on food security; and agricultural research support. She highlighted ADB's support for the ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework with reserve, trade, information and production enhancement as key elements.

Dr Wiroj Saengbangka then discussed the use of farmers' registration as a tool in identifying farmers who are vulnerable to food insecurity. Farmers needing support from the government

programme are asked to submit their family data/information for registration to the Department of Agricultural Extension towards effective government policy and programme implementation, particularly in areas such as price intervention, compensation in natural disasters, and the like. He mentioned the components of food security as food availability (production: quantity and quality), food accessibility (prices and farmers' incomes), utilisation (safety and nutrition), and stability (floods, droughts and storms). These were in response to Urgent Policies to be implemented in the first year and the Economic Restructuring Policy (Agricultural Sector). These policies are meant to implement measures to efficiently maintain the pricing stability of agricultural produce and expedite the establishment of the agricultural risk insurance system, among others.

Country Papers

The nine country papers presented issues, challenges, and opportunities related to food security and its information system in the respective countries. Depending on the thrusts and strategies of each government, various measures to improve food security and the information system were discussed, including monitoring and evaluation process. The recommendations and conclusions are as follows:

- Food security is an important and achievable challenge. Greater investment in food and agriculture as well as in natural resource management is fundamental to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular, the goals concerning poverty, hunger and health.
- Better understanding of food production, marketing and export/import among the countries in the region.
- Better post-harvest facilities.
- **Government Priority.** Food security should be a development priority: need to enhance country responses to regional challenges (e.g. AIFS, SPP-FS), greater/better articulation of the regional food security strategy into national strategic plans, FDI and domestic investment can play an important role in boosting plantations, bio-fuel industries, mining, hydro-power and others but need coordinated policies, plans, actions and investments
- **Database/Information System.** There is a need for the development of leading indicators, a need to update SUA's Conversion ratios or parameters, bring down the accounting of SUA to regional and provincial levels, conduct regular surveys, and preparation of situation and outlook reports.

- Establishment of an internet-based information system on food security at the country level.
- **Capacity building** in the areas of survey design, forecasting, ICT-based skills, capacity building for statisticians and other human resources responsible for the M & E activities at the central government level and especially at the local government levels, including those from civil society and business.
- **Surveys and research studies.** In-depth household livelihood studies to understand how households are coping with food insecurity (nutritional adaptations) and other problems, area-based studies at district level to understand the processes behind increased population pressure on resources (spontaneous migration, relocation, land use planning issues), policy studies to understand how policymakers might better assist areas to achieve national goals in rural development
- **Partnerships and Cooperation.** Food security can only be achieved if a broad range of stakeholders are partnering and aligning to a common objective. The role of businesses in improving and maintaining food security should be acknowledged, NGOs need to be more present, working efficiently at the community level, and increasing local authorities capacities in agricultural production, ‘importing’ food safety standards, closer cooperation with the same offices across ASEAN countries for which assistance from, and cooperation with, international institutions seems to be helpful.

Output and Recommendations

The workshop reports from the two groups were consolidated (see Annex 5). In response to the questions posed for the workshop, below is a summary of the output and recommendations:

Vision: To be the leading regional entity/centre on ASEAN food and nutrition security information. By 2015, the system will contain systematic and timely data of the same standard on food and nutrition availability, utilisation, stability and access. This system will produce accurate and reliable information in a responsive and comprehensive manner from mutual cooperation/sustainable partnerships. This will allow an analysis of the food and nutrition situation leading to mapping food insecurity, vulnerability and other descriptors. The system will facilitate policymakers to make decisions based on sustainable and reliable information towards national food and nutrition security.

Deliverables: The major deliverables were summed up as follows:

1. An accurate, timely, transparent and standardised food security information system at national and regional levels.
2. An early warning system for normal and abnormal situations.
3. Leading and key indicators for monitoring aggregation of food security situations.
4. Analytical models for projections, scenario building, that are user-friendly and provide both short- and long-term forecasts of food security scenarios.

Activities to Maintain/Strengthen: Among the current activities/strategies of the AFSIS that need to be maintained are training sessions, workshops and other capacity building projects at the regional level, mutual technical cooperation among stakeholders, which could include South-South and North-South trainings, the provision of early warning information (EWI), the provision of the Agriculture Commodity Outlook (ACO), and production and trade data.

The activities to be strengthened have been grouped into three: capacity building, EWI and ACO reporting, and farmers' national and regional profiling system.

Activities to be Added: The activities to be added to ensure the attainment of an effective FSIS are: improvement of the database itself, capacity building, establishment of volunteer informants, development of an early warning system, the online ICT application for database system.

Modalities for Cooperation: In terms of organisation, intra- and inter-agency high-level coordination on food security-related matters at the national level will be an avenue for cooperation. So will the elevation of AFSIS from a project to a network. Advocacy, fund mobilisation, and monitoring and evaluation are likewise deemed useful modalities for cooperation.

Click [here](#) to download the Annex (scroll to the end of the webpage to download).