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Data: The next revolution for agriculture in ACP countries

**OPENING REMARKS BY
H. E. Alhaji Muhammad MUMUNI
ACP Secretary-General**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the CTA for inviting me to present opening remarks at this 40th edition of the Brussels Policy Briefing which will examine the relevance of data to agricultural revolution in ACP countries.

Secondly, I commend the efforts of the CTA on the consistent organization of the series of *Policy Briefings* on issues of agriculture, fisheries and rural development, targeting ACP countries; and I am convinced that those who have consistently participated in these briefings can attest to its usefulness and benefits to our member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In most ACP countries, up to 80% of the population live in rural areas and depend mainly on small-scale farming. The importance of agriculture in most of our countries and regions in terms of contribution to poverty alleviation, employment generation, food and nutrition security, economic growth, food price stability and market access at national, regional and international level cannot be overemphasised.

However, it is a known fact that lack of accurate data hinders agricultural development in our countries and that food security cannot be achieved in the absence of essential agricultural data. Agricultural data is vital to change this productive sector of the economy positively.

Policy makers, researchers, producers and the public are increasingly requesting for more accurate, detailed and timely agricultural statistics not only on output but also on the quality of the output based on the improved monitoring of the inputs and production processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In ACP countries, the potential of precision agriculture is limited by the lack of appropriate measurement and analysis techniques for agronomically important factors. While the concept of precision farming is sound, our understanding of the physical and biological aspects of the cropping system is incomplete due to limitations in the current sensing and data processing technologies.

Obtaining and analysing data are the bottlenecks in the traditional system. The cost of obtaining information through traditional means, such as sampling for soil fertility or pest presence is expensive and time consuming, and data collection is usually conducted in a sparse manner.

The limitation in data quality and availability has therefore become a major obstacle in the demonstration and adoption of the precision technologies in agriculture.

Gathering data through traditional means can be difficult in ACP countries. Remote populations, lack of infrastructure, paucity of landlines and insecurity add up to an extremely challenging environment for traditional information gathering. The constraints for ACP countries also range from limited capacity, insufficient resources of Government and statistical agencies, which affect the quality and frequency of household surveys to reliance on donor support.

The establishment of a reliable and timely database is particularly necessary for policy formulation, planning, programming and identification in order to develop the agricultural sector. A formal data collection process will ensure that data gathered is both defined and accurate, and that subsequent decisions based on these findings are valid.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many aspects of agricultural research, especially plant breeding, require working with large amounts of data. Frequently, these data must be linked over multiple years of research and involve diverse locations. Information technology (IT) including databases, geographic information systems (GIS), and the Internet, offer agricultural researchers promising tools to enhance data management and analysis and to facilitate collaboration with partners and stakeholders around the globe. Benefits from the use of IT are expected to increase with greater integration of data sets and linking of data to software tools. Consequently, high accuracy sensing tools must of necessity be developed and validated to support both research and production.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all perhaps aware of the fact that data generation and processing are now going high tech, now referred to as data farming or precision farming. The agricultural sector in ACP countries should take advantage of this revolution to assist farmers to make better decisions about when to plant, what to plant and how much.

As many believed that imputed data is the next revolution in agriculture, and with nine billion people expected to be on the planet by 2050, it is necessarily important to produce as much food as possible out of every acre.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust that the eminent members of the two panels who will address the issues of “*the data revolution: from data collection to real-time digital data*” and “*new opportunities for agriculture in the data revolution*” will adequately address these issues.

I wish you a fruitful deliberation.

I thank you.
