

Excellences, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure to have the opportunity to address you all in opening this workshop on food security measurement for the SDGs.

I have the special pleasure, in particular, to bring you the salute from Mr. Pietro Gennari, newly appointed chief statistician of FAO, who recommended me to convey a very important and strong message.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marks a very important spent in our quest to promote development and prosperity to all people, present and future, who live and will live on our planet. The enthusiasm with which the international community is embracing the new agenda is a testimony that what is written in the 17 Goals and 169 Targets that form the core of the agenda are not simply words and ambitions but promises and commitments.

To honor such a long and diverse list of objectives, however, creates challenges for the many people who, at different levels, hold the responsibility to make them happen. One important challenge, and the one for which we are gathered here today, is to make sure that we have the evidence that demonstrates whether or not the actions intended to promote the desired shared prosperity are having an impact, and which impact is that.

The responsibility to address these challenges, dear colleagues who are here representing the National Statistical Systems in your countries, has been entrusted on you. The UN General Assembly, that is, the representatives of the governments of the world, not the presidents and directors of the UN specialized systems, have requested that you – as members of the UN Statistical Commission – took the lead and define indicators to track progress on all targets.

We, representative of UN specialized agencies, are here to assist you, responding to the call that the Inter Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators has made, to make sure that all reported indicators be informed by solid evidence, compiled using agreed international standards, and reported in a timely manner to monitor progress at national, regional and global levels.

The challenge, dear friends and colleagues, is particularly great in the area on which we focus today and tomorrow: that is food security measurement. Despite the long interest towards monitoring hunger and food insecurity, there appears to be still some confusion and disagreement on how to do it properly, and in the next two days we shall be discussing exactly that.

But the fundamental message I have been asked and am very happy to present, is that this will be done with the fundamental aim to assist and empower the community of the official statisticians in the countries. Many people and external observers like to talk about "big data" and "the cloud" and other sources of information that could be used to gather information for free. We do not. We believe that the real "data revolution" lies in the minds, knowledge and resources made available to professional statisticians like you and in the institutions that you represent. It is only by empowering you and protecting your autonomy of operation from any form of political pressure, that solid evidence can be collected in the field that truly represent the current situation.

Of course, we also have the duty and the responsibility not to waste whatever resources are given to us and to make sure data collection and computation of indicators is done in the most cost effective and appropriate way. Here, I believe, lies the fundamental role that and Organization like the FAO can play in this area. We are here today and tomorrow to explore together methods to compile food security indicators that are affordable yet valid as founded on solid statistical principles. Thanks to this, I hope, the world will have a clear vision on where we stand, and what still needs to be done in the next 15 years to ensure that everyone on earth has access to the food they need to conduct a healthy, active and happy live they deserve.