**WSIS+10 Policy Statement (version 10.06.2014)**

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Talking points

*Duration: 3 minutes (including initial formal addresses)*

Mr Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Dr Jose Graziano da Silva, I wish to join my colleagues in extending congratulations to ITU, UNCTAD, UNECSO and UNDP for organising this important event.

FAO has been actively involved in the World Summit on the Information Society since its beginning. Even prior to WSIS 2003, FAO actively engaged in promoting ITC use for agriculture and food security, with a focus on rural communities and vulnerable populations.

Since WSIS, substantial progress has been made in making ICTs available and accessible to rural communities. ICT innovations continue to play a key role in improving agricultural production and value chains. While Internet access remains a challenge in many rural areas, the penetration and spread of mobile telephony has enabled rural stakeholders to leverage these technologies to their advantage and to improve their livelihoods. For example, community animal health workers in Bangladesh transmit daily SMS reports on potential animal disease outbreaks; Egypt has established a network connecting farmers, experts and mentors providing advisory services on health and nutrition; and in Sri Lanka the eDiary mobile app has helped increase milk production 30%.

Information delivery via mobile devices holds great promise for agricultural advisory and financial services, and in providing farmers with access to market information.

As some of you know, at WSIS 2005, FAO undertook the responsibility for the action line on e-agriculture. Following extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders involved in the application of ICT for sustainable agriculture and rural development, FAO and 13 international partner organizations launched the e-agriculture community of practice in 2007. Today, this community counts over 12.000 members from 170 countries. It has generated rich discussions and outputs for a wide range of topics including rural financial services, gender and ICTs or innovation systems for smallholders.

FAO wishes to thank ITU, and WSIS stakeholders, for the acknowledgment of our work in e-agriculture by awarding FAO the 2012 WSIS Project Prize for Action Line C7: e-agriculture.

Ladies and gentlemen, our work is however not done. Whilst statistics show that there are almost 7 billion mobile-cellular subscriptions world-wide, digital divides still persist. In most countries an urban-rural digital divide exists where rural areas are less or not well connected. In addition, as Dr Davies already pointed out, the costs associated with access to ICTs such as broadband or mobile services are often unaffordable for rural populations.

Important gaps remain and I will name a few. Bridging the digital divide for women and youth are urgent priorities for sustainable agriculture. ICTs have an important role to address the increasing knowledge intensity of agriculture, especially in the face of uncertainties such as climate change and food price volatility. The use of local languages and context-specific information, from trusted sources, is a must.

National e-agriculture strategies are needed to ensure reliable, affordable connectivity in rural areas, a goal in which public-private partnerships are playing and will continue to play an important role.

FAO recognizes the power of effective use of ICTs for agriculture resilience and sustainable development ensuring increasing level of participation and inclusiveness.

Let me conclude by reaffirming FAO’s commitment to continue promoting the use of ICTs to reinforce the resilience capacity of states, communities and individuals. Together with our partners, we will continue to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, including through the e-Agriculture Community.

I thank you.