

CropWatch-ICP Africa and MENA Regional Training Workshop

Port Louis, Mauritius, 7 August 2023

Opening remarks

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(5-6 minutes, Active word count: 728)

Excellencies,

- *The Hon. Mrs. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun G.C.S.K Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology*
- *The Hon. Mr Maneesh Gobin Minister of Agro Industry and Food Security*
- *Mr. Joyker Nayeck, Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade*
- *H.E. Mr. ZHU Liying, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Mauritius*

Dear participants, dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you on behalf of UNCTAD to the opening ceremony of this regional workshop for the CropWatch Innovative Cooperation Programme in wonderful Mauritius. We are grateful for our host's warm welcome and the deep interest the country has taken in this programme, and welcome those of you who are here today representing Mauritius' public, private, and academic institutions.

It gives me great hope to see a higher-than-expected number of participants and countries joining us this week. We are delighted to see how much interest in the programme was raised by the CropWatch side event we hosted in Geneva at the 26th Commission on Science and Technology in March this year. The CSTD once again showed itself to be a powerful incubator, helping develop and promote technology-focused partnerships among member States.

In total, eighteen experts from eleven countries (including Mauritius) will benefit from the training this week, alongside seven more local participants from Mauritius, benefiting from Mauritius' hosting of this regional workshop.

With the pandemic disrupting the early stages of this programme – making only online training possible-, this week marks the first time we have brought participants together for training in person. With this training and the final in person workshop which will take place in Beijing in October this year, we hope to make up for the time we lost in 2021 and 2022.

The CropWatch programme is a model of South-South cooperation. Its focus on long-term sustainable implementation by participating countries and the fact that it represents a true transfer of knowledge and technology make it stand out. CropWatch shows us how frontier technologies, when applied in a thought-through manner with well-focused efforts to develop the necessary skills, can be highly relevant to address development problems. This programme will surely serve as a shining example for future projects for years to come.

Already, we are seeing that Kenya and Zimbabwe have joined Mauritius, Algeria and Syria in conducting the fieldwork for system implementation. On top of this, Cameroon and Nigeria are scheduled to have theirs in the coming months. As more countries undertake this fieldwork and look to fully implement the system, we are increasingly hopeful that this programme will make a meaningful impact on their achievement of SDGs 1, 2 and 17 on poverty, hunger and trade by increasing food security, reducing food poverty, and enabling countries to develop their export crops.

On behalf of UNCTAD, I extend my deepest gratitude to our collaborating partners from ANSO and AIRCAS without whom the CropWatch programme would not be possible.

The training that participants receive this week will provide them with many of the skills and much of the knowledge required to fully adopt the CropWatch system for regular crop monitoring activities in the long-term. Ultimately, this will allow them and their countries to continue to use the technology for crop monitoring autonomously after the project is finished without needing oversight and assistance from AIRCAS.

Alongside this, participant countries' ability to customize the CropWatch technology to cater to and reflect specific local needs is a great advantage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The effective implementation of crop monitoring represents an area of great potential for impact in developing countries. Easy access to real time extensive information about national cropland use intensity, crop conditions, crop yields, and crop production can powerfully guide national and sub-national policymakers in their decisions. With climate change's impacts being felt more as each year goes by, it is increasingly important that we leverage our technological capabilities to create as much resilience as possible in agriculture for everyone, from large commercial operators to smallholders practicing subsistence farming.

Successful implementation of CropWatch will give policymakers a remarkably up-to-date, accurate and detailed picture and understanding of the agricultural context in their country. This will enable them to make data-driven policy decisions to guide long-term and climate-resilient agricultural development. It will also enable better and earlier responses and response mechanisms to cope with unpredictable challenges ranging from drought to floods to disease.

It is thus our hope that this programme will make a real difference to participating countries' efforts to achieve SDG 2, ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Thank you for your attention!