

**Opening Remarks by Dr. Ravi Ratnayake
at the Policymakers' Roundtable on the Asian and Pacific Network
for Testing of Agricultural Machinery**

18 November 2013, Bangkok

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, I would like to thank you for your active participation in this important event of CSAM. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the designated national focal points of the Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery, known as ANTAM, of member countries for their guidance and invaluable input throughout the preparatory process of the establishment of the Network. It is your unremitting efforts in promoting sustainable development and your firm belief in a more resilient, integrated and inclusive Asia-Pacific region that eventually make this regional Network happen!

In the Asia-Pacific region, agriculture is the backbone of national economies, providing employment to approximately 60% of the total working population. While we are striving to achieve the dual goals of increasing food production and preserving the environment, sustainable agricultural mechanization looms large in sustainable intensification of agricultural production. It plays an increasingly important role in raising agricultural productivity by improving efficiency in the agricultural systems, filling the rural labour gaps and enhancing farmers' income through rural business/enterprise development.

In recent years, countries in the region have paid increasing attention to agricultural mechanization, particularly the mechanization needs of smallholder farmers, and realized the importance of developing and upgrading domestic testing capacity of agricultural machinery for safe and environmentally sound machinery.

According to the World Bank, sales of agricultural machinery in the Asia-Pacific region was around \$35 billion in 2010, and the Asian market is forecast to grow at an annual rate of 6-10 percent between 2010-2015. However, in light of rapid agricultural mechanization in our region and the shift of centre of gravity of global production and marketing, there exists a stark contradiction between demand for increasing food productivity through mechanization and inadequate testing facilities, training and proper maintenance of machinery.

At present, there is a varying level of agricultural mechanization across the Asia-Pacific region. Most developing and the least developed countries lack appropriate

technologies, knowledge, infrastructure and trained technicians to conduct standard testing. Financial constraint and absence of systematic and coherent institutional and legal framework to promote sustainable agricultural mechanization have either left the existing testing stations severely underdeveloped or with limited capacity. This has given rise to the manufacture of and trade in substandard machinery in some markets of the Asia-Pacific region.

The most direct impact is on the economic and social wellbeing of farmers with potential loss of farmer's precious investment in their agricultural production activities and their reluctance to adopt mechanization. Meanwhile, huge social costs associated with alarming number of injuries and fatal farm accidents involving farm machinery and implements have drained limited financial resources of the government and incapacitate human capital. Damage to the environment as a result of use of substandard and inefficient machinery not only aggravates pollution of agricultural production, but also increases the food safety risk.

To date, the Asia-Pacific region does not have a focused, regional mechanism for testing of agricultural machinery. Sustainable intensification of agricultural production in the region requires immediate actions both at the national and regional levels to promote the development and adoption of standard test codes and procedures.

At CSAM's meetings over the past few years, countries expressed strong desire for coordinated regional efforts to develop and adopt standard testing procedures and codes of agricultural machinery to ensure production of and trade in quality and environmentally friendly agricultural machinery.

The Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery will provide a regional platform, assisting countries in the region to build capacities, upgrade the existing facilities, share knowledge and technology, and develop standard procedures and codes for a more sustainable and inclusive development.

However, to fulfil the objectives of ANTAM, there are challenges and difficulties. ANTAM will not succeed without broad partnerships with various stakeholders, including the focal points of member countries, relevant international and regional organizations, research institutes, the private sector, NGOs and associations. Close consultations with member countries to reflect the Network's relevance and to increase the ownership of member countries is essential. A phased approach with outcomes at different stages to prioritize areas of work will enable the Network to have clear orientation with tangible results. Last but not the least, ANTAM will not be viable and sustainable without commitment and participation of member countries through technical inputs, in-kind or voluntary contribution.

I believe ANTAM is the first step in the right direction, and member countries and all stakeholders shall walk hand in hand every step of the way towards the promising finish line, where ANTAM will be a full-fledged regional network for the benefit of our entire region! And by that time, we will be all proud of our efforts!

Before I conclude, I wish to thank my colleagues at the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM), and its back-stopping division of ESCAP, Trade and Investment Division, for their hard work over the past two years, which is so indispensable in the fruition of the Network. Congratulations!

Finally, I wish fruitful discussion of this Roundtable and successful launch of ANTAM.

Thank you.