

**Working Group on  
Toward Enhancing Food Security in the East Asia**

**Final Report**

**Tokyo  
21<sup>st</sup> June 2023**

# 1. Background

In East Asia, regional integration and cooperation in a wide range of fields, such as economy, finance, international trade, food security, environment, education, disaster prevention, health and medical care, have been promoted through multi-layered regional frameworks centering on ASEAN, which includes ASEAN+3 (APT) and East Asia Summit (EAS).

In particular, the importance of food security is often and strongly reminded because we have faced challenges to a stable food supply even in the 21st century. In 2007-08, crop failures due to unseasonable weather in some countries, rapid growth in feed demand in emerging economies such as the BRICs, biofuel booms in the United States and many other countries, an influx of international speculative funds into the food market all played parts to cause tightening agricultural markets. Part of the result has been threats to food security particularly in low-income countries.

In recent years, the food price index reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have risen to record levels in 2020 under the market turmoil with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was further elevated by the disruption in the supply chains due to the Russia-Ukraine war since February 2022. Food protectionist policies such as export bans, which also emerged broadly during the period of 2007-08, have been spreading again.

In the longer perspective on the other hand, the climate change poses an elusive threat to the food sector. Although scientifically unexplained, there are serious concerns that the global warming will cause negative impacts on agricultural production and food security. At least, it seems that we are looking at extreme weather events causing both unprecedented droughts and floods in different areas.

Looking back over the past 20-30 years, cooperation for food security was discussed intensively among the East Asian countries after the World Food Summit in 1996. Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, project named ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) was launched in 2003, through a Japanese strong initiative, based on the decision made by the APT Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF+3). The efforts were followed by the creation of the pilot project of East Asia Emergency Rice Reserve (EAERR) in 2004. The EAERR has progressed with the establishment of the ASEAN plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) in 2012. The APTERR was then incorporated as an international organization in 2016.

The APTERR aims at the food security and poverty alleviation in the APT countries by means of

the specific rice reserve to cope with disasters and other emergency cases. In 2023 as of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2,926 tons of rice and in-kind payments have already been delivered from APTERR to some recipient countries, i.e., Cambodia, Myanmar, The Philippines and Laos PDR, for flood and landslide relief, COVID-19 pandemic, and poverty alleviation (<https://www.apterr.org/>).

The AFSIS, on the other hand, is a project to contribute to food security through the collection, analysis and publication of statistical information covering five commodities, i.e., rice, maize, sugar, cassava, and soybeans, unlike APTERR, which manages only rice. The tasks of AFSIS have been maintaining a web database on food security information and making public in periodical publications of Agricultural Commodity Outlook (ACO), Emergency Warning Information (EWI), and Rice Growing Outlook (RGO), other than annual reports and additional publications. The RGO, however, covers only rice. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan has been financially and technically supporting AFSIS activities since its establishment. China, Korea and other cooperating partners such as Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), and Remote Sensing Technology Center of Japan (RESTEC), Asian Development Bank, and FAO contribute to staff training and enhancing AFSIS functions.

## **2. Objective of the Working Group**

The working group has been set up for the reviewing the above-mentioned situation of food security and the cooperation mechanisms in the APT, with the special focus on the information systems under the management of the AFSIS. Invited experts to participate the WG meeting were requested to report from the stand point both of their countries and broader perspectives. The problems to be answered could be enumerated as the following questions:

- How to promote food security in the APT?
- How to strengthen the existing framework?
- How to strengthen the organization of AFSIS?
- How to enhance the functions of AFSIS?

## **3. Eight Options for the AFSIS New Framework**

The AFSIS Focal Point Meeting (FPM) in 2022 discussed eight options indicated

below for the AFSIS new framework (cited from *Concept Note of the AFSIS New Framework*):

1. To set up Intergovernmental Organization
2. To be subsidiary body of AMAF+3
3. To merge AFSIS to APTERR
4. To merge AFSIS to ASEANstats
  - 4.2. To have the AFSIS Secretariat transform into ASEANstats' international branch
5. To rotate the Secretariat among the Member Countries
6. To remain the Secretariat in Thailand while Plus Three countries replace in rotation for providing the 3-5 years technical supporting project,
  - 6.2. To remain the Secretariat in Thailand while +3 countries providing technical supporting projects parallelly.

The Focal Point Meeting concluded that Option 6.2 should be adopted as a short-term solution; meanwhile, the possibility of Option 1 and 3 should be considered as long-term solutions.

#### **4. Discussions at the Working Group meeting**

Sixteen experts from twelve of APT countries, the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR) participated in the working group meeting which was held in-person in Tokyo on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023. 13 country reports were orally presented there.

After the presentations, Dr. SAKUYAMA Takumi proceeded with the discussion and prompted the experts to raise some points they considered particularly important, in response to the four questions raised in the previous section.

#### **5. Policy Recommendations provided**

In light of the above presentations and discussion, the WG on “Toward Enhancing Food Security in the East Asia” proposes the following policy recommendations in response to the above four questions consolidated:

**1. (Promoting the awareness and closer communication with the public)**

- We can recognize that food security remains one of the most important issues in the APT region today, nearly a quarter of a century into the 21st century, and that it is not a standalone problem, but an integrated problem to be solved along with other challenges such as poverty, sanitation, logistics, international relationships, climate change, and the economy in general. First, we should make best efforts to raise the public awareness of such nature of this problem and of the APTERR, AFSIS and their role for enhancing food security in the region. Second, APTERR and AFSIS should also take on the responsibility of promoting the awareness of food security to wider stakeholders.

**2. (Enhancing AFSIS's function)**

- We should continue the efforts to achieve our goals, and to that end, it is desirable to further enhance the activities of APTERR and AFSIS. The AFSIS should improve its functions, particularly for early warning by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating more accurate statistical information, utilizing advanced technologies such as remote sensing. Furthermore, developing micro-level information, such as village level data, will bring significant improvement in the data quality. We also recommend the expansion of crop coverage, such as maize, in the RGO report. Similarly, it is also important to use big data and other means to strengthen the macro industry analysis of important food categories, which is conducive to accurately serving the international and domestic agricultural investors.

**3. (Cooperation of Japan, China, and Korea)**

- By leveraging the wide variety of economic development, social condition and resource endowment, APT governments should promote regional cooperation in pursuit of food security. In particular, the three large economies in Northeast Asia, including Japan, China and Korea, may provide experiences and technical assistance for the design and implementation of right measures for achieving food security in the developing countries of Southeast Asia.

**4. (Coordination with other institutions)**

- Taking into consideration of the budget constraint, it is imperative to establish links and cooperation with other institutions, government agencies, international organizations, research institutes, and key enterprises in the industry. Interface evolution in expert network could save the budget of the AFSIS.

**5. (Eight Options for the AFSIS New Framework)**

- On the matter of the eight options for the AFSIS new framework indicated in

Section 3, we did not identify and discuss them as a concrete issue. However, we confirmed the importance of strengthening the framework and cooperation with concerned institutions such as APTERR to enhance the sustainability of AFSIS activities in a self-reliant way.

[END]

## **List of Participants**

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*In Alphabetical Order of Country Name*