DIRECTORATE FOR FINANCIAL, FISCAL AND ENTERPRISE AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL MARKETS

THIRD EXPERT MEETING ON AGRICULTURAL FINANCE AND CREDIT INFRASTRUCTURE IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES

Portoroz, Slovenia, 29-30 May 2001

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Summary Record of the Meeting

I. Overview

The third expert meeting in this series sponsored by the Japanese authorities and the OECD was hosted by Slovenia and targeted to Southeast European countries, Russia and Ukraine. Over 90 participants attended, with active participation by the World Bank, FAO and the European Commission. In addition to transmitting the policy lessons and techniques from the previous meetings, this workshop targeted new areas of particular relevance to the fast evolving situation in the region, i.e. co-operative structures and credit, viable forms of non-bank lending including trade and micro-credit, and equity financing for women. Such alternatives to bank lending are particularly relevant during periods of macroeconomic instability and poorly functioning financial markets. They meet the needs that are characteristic of small-scale farms and related businesses in the rural areas concerned. The heterogeneity among countries and their different stages of transition pose complex issues of policy mix and policy sequencing. Increasingly, lending to agriculture needs to be dealt with in the context of the rural sector as a whole. The main issues and conclusions and suggestions for follow-up are highlighted below.

The meeting was opened by the Slovenian Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, followed by the State Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, both of whom emphasised first and foremost Slovenia’s goal of OECD membership as a high priority of Slovenia’s foreign policy. Co-operation with the Slovenians and the organisation of the conference were excellent. Evaluations by participants were high in all respects.

II. Key issues and conclusions

There were three sessions; Overview of agricultural finance and credit in transition economies; Private and co-operative banking for the agricultural sector and rural areas and Informal credit for the agricultural sector and rural areas. The scarcity of finance for rural areas and for agriculture in particular is a widespread phenomenon. The heterogeneity among target countries and the differences in their stages of transition complicate the problem. Stocktaking of current practices by the presentation of individual country cases and a reminder of certain proven policy rules provide a helpful input to the reflections on the main issues and challenges. In this respect, a set of principles based on the longstanding experience of Rabobank, one of the highly successful agricultural lenders, was considered particularly useful.

− “Informal” V formal financing systems: Overall, participants concluded that policies for developing sustainable credit and finance systems need to be dynamic and flexible. Some financing sources, like micro-credit, may not be sustainable over the long-run, but often they
are the only available source for rural and agricultural needs in the short-term. “Informal credit” of various types is a means to get finance moving during transition periods. Then, as the macroeconomic and financial sector environment improves, the role of formal finance regains its pre-eminence with the requisite regulatory underpinning. Gradually lending techniques become more sophisticated, with less reliance on traditional collateral and more on credit evaluation, assisted by rating agencies.

- **Portfolio diversification**: Commercial banks with healthy, diversified portfolios generally fare better than sectoral banks with highly concentrated risks. Governments tend to protect the latter from shocks with the consequences of moral hazard and budgetary burdens experienced in many countries. Innovation in both bank and non-bank lending is an important objective to reduce transaction costs, which are high for small-scale operations.

- **Co-operatives**: Revival of co-operative structures is a positive development in that these institutions are close to farmers and thus in a position to meet their needs effectively. They also serve other parts of the rural populations. Regular interaction with these populations and the co-operative network help strengthen repayment performance. In addition to servicing credit demand, co-operatives mobilise savings and provide other important services, especially in facilitating access to markets. Governments’ role is to ensure an adequate legislative framework and sound financial basis for credit co-operatives, with reliable controls and auditing systems.

- **Trade and supplier credit**: In parallel, developments in the agro-food sector increasingly forge closer relationships between farmers, input manufacturers, processors and retailers, including foreign companies, which offer sources of funding as well as contractual arrangements that may reduce risk for farmers. These evolving processes contribute to enhancing the quality of production and to driving out low-quality, inefficient producers. These processes, therefore, lead to improvements in farm profitability and add to the sustainability of rural finance systems. Like all forms of credit, trade and manufacturer credit must be based on trust and transparency. Competition policy is an increasingly important component of the policy mix as the entire food chain becomes involved in the delivery of finance.

- **Policy mix and sequencing**: The papers and discussions clearly demonstrated that the complex field of rural and agricultural finance and credit has multiple objectives, which require multiple policy instruments. Farmers and processors have different timing needs that need to be filled by appropriately matched funding. In some countries market orientation is impeded by intervention in the sector for social reasons. This poses the problem of implementing an appropriate policy mix. The situation is further complicated by the heterogeneity of the countries, which are in different phases of transition. Some policy sequencing is inevitable.

- **Farm restructuring**: Finance and credit will not flow to an un-restructured agricultural sector. Farm consolidation or downsizing, better management and the adoption of modern accounting practices need continuous policy attention. In many transition economies large farm debt resolution is a crucial issue, which is closely connected with the farm restructuring process and requires combined policy actions at the national, sub-national and local levels. Furthermore, lending to agriculture increasingly needs to be dealt with in the context of the rural sector as a whole.
− **Institutional framework**: Much remains to be done to improve the institutional framework, ranging from the rule of law to effective bankruptcy and financial dispute procedures. Governments need to follow consistent policies and rules and avoid discretionary action.

− **Land reform**: Governments must not weaken their resolve to follow-through with land reform and establishment of clear property rights, which continue to be of the highest priority. The process of ensuring full-fledged ownership needs to be completed, not only to provide collateral, but also incentives to invest, as well as to ensure social and political stability and prevent abuse by creditors.

− **Credit subsidies**: The debate continues to revolve around the use of credit subsidies. All countries have resorted to subsidies under certain circumstances, but participants agreed that they were unsustainable and economically distorting. Those benefiting from subsidies tend to regard them as permanent entitlements, making it politically difficult to end them. It is essential for governments to monitor, review and evaluate all policies on an ongoing basis and to adjust and, if necessary, discontinue them. Some kind of start up capital, which is of a different nature, could be useful as an investment in institution building.

### III. Follow-up

Several topics for follow-up policy-dialogue workshops were suggested, notably risk assessment and management, supervision for agri-financial institutions and the development of rural finance paying special attention to the small and medium-scale enterprises. These topics lend themselves to a continuation of the horizontal partnership between DAFFE and AGR and possibly other Directorates. It was stressed that more empirical evidence with concrete examples would be needed as a next step for use in implementing the practical policy mix. Much more information is needed on market and policy successes and failures, with a better understanding of effects at the household level. A proposal for an electronic discussion group will be made to the World Bank Institute to create an interactive network of participants, through which experiences could be rapidly shared and evaluated. The main conclusions and suggestions for follow-up have been transmitted to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The publication of 26 expert papers together with the key issues and conclusions discussed in the final session will provide an important reference source, as has been demonstrated by the significant interest in the Proceedings from the previous meeting.
EXPERT MEETING ON AGRICULTURAL FINANCE AND CREDIT INFRASTRUCTURE IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES

29-30 May 2001, Portorož

PROGRAMME

Target countries: South Eastern Europe (SEE) region – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, – and also Russia and Ukraine.

Objective: to continue dialogue on major problems of rural finance and credit in transition economies; discuss new issues having particular relevance for the countries of the target region, especially how to develop viable credit systems for small-scale farming and rural households in general.

Tuesday, 29 May 2001

08:30 Registration

10:00 Opening of the seminar: Mr. Shigeki Moriyama, Counsellor, Japanese Embassy to Austria; Mr. Franc But, Minister of Agriculture, Slovenia; Mr. Mitja Drobnič, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia; Mr. Ken Ash, OECD

SESSION I: Overview of agricultural finance and credit in transition economies

Issues for discussion: what are the latest developments and main problems of rural finance and credit in SEE countries; what has been achieved in rural finance and institutional reform during more than a decade of transition and what challenges remain; what should be the role of the governments to facilitate the development of sustainable finance and credit systems. The session is conceived to provide a general background for further discussions.

10:30 Introduction by Chairperson: Mr. Iztok Jarc, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Slovenia

10:45 Results of the Second Expert Meeting on Agricultural Finance and Credit Infrastructure in Transition Countries Mr. Fujiki Hayashi, OECD

11:00 An overview of agricultural credit instruments, institutions and challenges in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia Mr. Michael Ryan, OECD

11:15 Public policy and preconditions for sustainable rural finance systems Mr. J.D. Von Pischke, Frontier Finance International, USA
11:30 Agricultural finance and institutional reforms in transition economies: the 1990s and challenges ahead (focus on SEE region) Mr. Ulrich Koester, Kiel University, Germany

11:45 Agricultural finance and institutional reforms in Bulgaria Ms. Lena Roussenova, European Institute and University of National and World Economy

12:00 Farm debt in the CIS: multi-country study of major causes and proposed solutions Mr. Csaba Csaki, World Bank

12:15 Coffee break (hosted by Slovenia)

12:40 Large farm debt in Ukraine Mr. David Sedik, FAO

13:00 Welcome lunch for all participants (hosted by OECD)

Discussion

14:30 Discussants: Mr. Jo Swinnen (Belgium), Mr. Tamotsu Kawamura (Japan)

14:40 Discussion

SESSION II: Private and co-operative banking for the agricultural sector and rural areas

Issues for discussion: how to develop sound rural banking in the difficult conditions of transition; how the banking sector should change and innovate to respond to significant changes in farm ownership and production structures; what should be done to facilitate banking for small-scale borrowers; what is the current role of credit co-operatives and what could be their future strategies.

15:30 Introduction by Chairperson: Mr. Ulrich Koester (Kiel University, Germany)

15:40 Agricultural and rural co-operative banking: EU experience and lessons for emerging markets Mr. Gerard van Empel, Rabobank, The Netherlands

15:55 Multi-service co-operative financing and other facilities of agri-financing: Japan’s experience Mr. Tamotsu Kawamura, Iwate University, Japan

16:10 Romanian Banca Agricola: Agony and Ecstasy Mr. Eugen Radulescu, Banca Agricola, Romania

16:30 Coffee break (hosted by Slovenia)
16:50 The role of co-operative financial institutions in rural and agricultural development

Mr. Paul Armbruster, German Co-operative Confederation, Germany

17:10 Agricultural credit co-operation in Slovenia: lessons from the past and strategy for the future

Mr. Tomaž Sila, Association of Savings and Loans Services of Slovenia, Slovenia

Discussion

17:30 Discussants: Mr. David Sedik (FAO), Ms. Lena Roussenova (Bulgaria)

17:50 Discussion

19:00 End of day 1

19:30 Cocktail for all participants (hosted by Japanese Embassy)

Wednesday, 30 May 2001

SESSION III: Informal credit for the agricultural sector and rural areas

Issues for discussion: what are the benefits and limitations of non-bank lending; what role is it currently playing and can potentially play in improving the financing situation in the agricultural sectors of transition economies; how important are own capital resources of rural areas; what are the ways to mobilise these resources; can micro-credit be successful in transition economies; in what ways and to what extent can it help overcome constraints of traditional lending.

09:00 Introduction by Chairperson: Mr. Csaba Csaki (World Bank)

09:10 The role of trade credit and foreign direct investment in improving the agricultural finance situation in transition countries

Mr. Jo Swinnen, Leuven University, Belgium

09:25 Equity financing for women

Ms. Astra Michels, ISIS Management Group, USA

09:40 Financing agriculture through vertical integration: the case of Hungary

Mr. Tamás Székelyhidi, House of Hungarian Tastes Ltd., Hungary

09:55 The role and development of informal and co-operative financial channels in Albanian agriculture

Mr. Hamish Gow, University of Illinois at Urbana, USA
10:10 The experience of rural micro-credit in north-west Russia
Ms. Renata Yanbykh, Government of the Russian Federation, Russia

Discussion

10:30 Discussants: Mr. J.D. von Pischke (USA), Mr. Tomaž Sila (Slovenia)

11:00 Coffee break (hosted by Slovenia)

11:20 Discussion (continued)

13:00 Lunch break (hosted by OECD)

CONCLUSIONS OF THE SEMINAR:
Developing sustainable finance and credit systems: challenges for policy making

Issues for discussion: this session will present the results of the three sessions in the form of policy conclusions

14:00 Introduction by Chairperson, Mrs. Alexandra Trzeciak-Duval (OECD)

14:10 Summaries and policy conclusions for the 3 sessions presented by the discussants

14:40 Discussion

15:50 Closing of the seminar

16:00 Close of day 2
EXPERT MEETING ON AGRICULTURAL FINANCE AND CREDIT INFRASTRUCTURE IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES

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