I bring warm greetings from Jamaica, and extend sincere congratulations to the organisers of this very important event. Food, is a high priority concern worldwide and it is good that we in the region are declaring our intention of influencing supply and availability.

The theme of my presentation is participation. This I place at the core of efforts to involve the Diaspora in issues of importance in the region. And by Diaspora I am speaking of persons living abroad and those who have returned to the Caribbean in recent times. They have returned home but their attachment to persons living abroad play a significant role in the economic and social development of the region.

In focusing on the issues, I want to emphasise four levels of concern regarding development of the agriculture and, by extension, the food sector.

The first level of concern is Finance. I need not dilate on this, because many speakers a have highlighted the magnitude of this issue. I merely want to add that this is not just about the availability of money, but the management and use of money is a significant factor in the development of agriculture in the Caribbean countries.

The second level of concern is incentives. Agriculture is a field with many professional aspects. Yet, it is viewed as being unattractive to those who aspire towards educational and technological careers. It is absolutely necessary to provide incentives for persons to specialize in agricultural and bring a new level of inventiveness and to field. These should aim at expanding production and economic progress.

My third observation is related to the lack of a strategic mindset among those who are involved in the sector. In Jamaica for instance, the majority of persons who are involved in agriculture are ‘small farmers’. These are persons with small plots of land and very little access to technology. Their main concerns are for the welfare and survival of family and they display little interest in strategic viewpoints associated with agricultural production. Much needs to be done to change these
mindsets and to encourage new attitudes and behavior towards agricultural production.

The fourth concern is the fact of misrepresentation of the nature of agricultural activities. For instance, agriculture among certain sections of the population is that agriculture is ‘dirty work’. Secondly, agriculture is considered to be low status and viewed as providing limited potential for social progress.

Jamaica, over time has made great efforts providing infrastructure, public information and financial investments with varying degrees of success. Nonetheless there still is urgent need for improvement both in the areas of production of primary agricultural goods and secondary products.

Having looked at some of the issues, the major concern is that effort to enhance progress in agricultural development is that new efforts must ensure success of whatever intervention is made. This brings me to the necessity for participation. Celestin Monga a noted African writer states the following. “An equal rights self-development can only be achieved in a participatory society; a society which fosters a sense of political efficacy, nurtures a concern for problems and contributes to the formation of a knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking sustained interest in the governing process”.

This tells me that efforts to achieve success in agriculture and food production requires the fulsome participation of citizens in a creative endeavor. I suggest that this is possible through greater involvement of Community Based Organisations (CBO). This must be accompanied by interventions to enhance commitment, knowledge and skill that drive initiatives and efficacy. The process of handing down directives, and talking down to ‘small-farmers’ will not stir enthusiasm, nor will it infuse creativity. A new spirit of commitment will emerge only from a new understanding of the ultimate goal and belief that the goal is achievable.