

**Statement delivered by
Her Excellency Reenat Sandhu
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of India to FAO
On the occasion of the
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Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of “Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development” for the 41st FAO Conference has highlighted that migration is a growing and complex global phenomenon caused by multiple drivers. Country contexts vary, because of which migration assumes different forms and presents different challenges and opportunities for migrants and societies.

FAO’s report on the State of Food and Agriculture in 2018 brought out a number of interesting facts about migration and its implications for agriculture and rural development. We hope that our discussions at this Conference, and the various perspectives presented by different countries on the subject, will help in generating a better understanding of migration, in order to develop appropriate policy responses to ensure that we are able to harness the benefits of migration while reducing its negative impacts.

In India, agriculture, with its allied sectors is the largest source of livelihood. Over 65 percent of our rural households depend primarily on agriculture, with 82 percent of farmers being small and marginal. This rural population, dependent on agriculture, contributes to high rates of internal migration, involving movement of millions of people.

As India’s economy undergoes structural transformation, the movement of people in search of better employment opportunities, within and across the country, is inevitable. Due to emerging opportunities in other sectors, a large proportion of youth in rural areas, are moving out of agriculture. This decrease in agricultural population, coupled with aging farmers and increasing proportion of women in agriculture, is bound to impact the way agriculture is organized and its development.

We recognize that migration can contribute to agriculture development and improve food security and rural livelihoods, through remittances and transfer of knowledge. However, poor quality migration is creating problems for urban habitations, while not necessarily reducing the burden on rural areas. Low quality migration to urban areas suggests that rural households would still need to depend on farming to meet a part of their requirements as remittances will not be enough.

In India, temporary migration is very common among rural poor, who move for limited periods of time to seek employment in construction and other sectors in both urban and rural areas. Climate-related risks such as cyclones, heavy rains, floods and droughts increase the vulnerability of agriculture, leading to loss of livelihoods and triggering migration. There is evidence linking decline in crop yields due to climate extremes and increase in internal migration.

Recognizing the impact of migration on agricultural development, the Government of India has introduced a number of policies and programmes to address the root causes of migration and harness the potential of rural migration for agricultural development.

This includes, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households, so that agricultural population stays in rural areas even during the years of rainfall failures, and rebuilds their livelihoods during good agricultural seasons.

The Government of India also runs a number of employment generation schemes like Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme, etc. Several skill development programmes are also being implemented across various sectors to improve the employability of rural youth.

Chair, allow me to conclude by reiterating that migration is a growing global and national phenomenon. When this is a choice, orderly and regular, it can play an important role for sustainable agriculture and rural development. We look forward to benefiting from the diversity of views expressed during this conference to harness the potential of migration.

Thank you.