

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE (APRC)

**Statement by Mr. Sadhan Chandra Majumder, MP, Honourable Minister for Food,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

1- 4 September 2020

[Name, Position, Country], Chairperson

[Name, Position, Country], and [Name, Position, Country], Vice Chairpersons

Mr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General of FAO

Distinguished Ministers, Heads of State representing Member Countries and High-Level Representatives,

Honourable Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and a very Good Afternoon to you all.

On behalf of HE Sheikh Hasina, Honourable Prime Minister of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh and its people, I extend greetings to you!

I wish to acknowledge my appreciation to FAO for having invited me to this Conference.

In line with the mandate of the 35th Session of the APRC, I am pleased to share with you Bangladesh's increasing recognition and perspective of key issues on achieving food security and nutrition as a sustainable means for national development.

Distinguished delegates,

Bangladesh graduated to the status of lower middle-income country in 2015 and aims to become a middle-income country by 2021. The country is witnessing a remarkable economic transformation, including in agriculture, towards a more diversified and high value production, with rising incomes leading to a more dynamic domestic food demand. Our Government is committed to prioritising agriculture as a pro-poor motor of growth and prerequisite for ensuring food and nutrition security. But sustaining production performance remains a challenge given constraints on arable land and irrigation water, as well as the impact of climate change.

Through the implementation of its National Nutrition Policy 2015, the Second National Plan of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) and the Second Country Investment Plan on Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems (2016-2020), the Government has translated its commitments to achieving the SDG 2 "Help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition target". It is my pleasure to share with you that Bangladesh is on track towards meeting many of its SDG targets.

Regrettably, at this moment, it is difficult to predict what the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition security will be. Our Government reacted promptly to ensure availability of food for the vulnerable and to guarantee continuity in the production of food by introducing a sizeable stimulus package for farmers. The situation is being closely monitored to continue minimising any setbacks.

Notwithstanding the ongoing international crisis, a number of interlinked challenges remain to be addressed such as food safety, preservation of biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, and increased agricultural productivity to meet the rising demand.

Child stunting has almost halved from the mid-60s and while this is encouraging, one in three children still suffers from stunting. Over half of the women in the reproductive age group are anaemic, and over 60% of the population suffers from some form of micronutrient deficiency. The reduction in the prevalence of undernourishment thus needs to be accelerated. Diets are evolving with a relative increase in the consumption of vegetables, fruits and animal-products matched by food production diversification and remarkable progress in aquaculture and livestock production. Complementary feeding is showing improvement, but half of the country's women consume inadequate diets.

Policies and measures are also working towards addressing other challenges that affect food and nutrition security such as poor sanitation, illness and inadequate health care, population growth, deteriorating access to increasingly scarce natural resources and vulnerability to price shocks. The status of women –their access to resources and decision-making power - is recognised as a key determinant of food security and nutrition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Bangladesh Country Investment Plan on Nutrition Sensitive Food Systems aims to build a sustainable and resilient food system by emphasising five major areas of investment: diversified and sustainable agriculture, fisheries and livestock for healthy diets; efficient and nutrition-sensitive post-harvest transformation and value addition; improved dietary diversity, consumption and utilisation; enhanced access to social protection and safety nets and increased resilience; and strengthened enabling environment and cross-cutting programmes. This includes, for example, a key programme on food waste and losses. Nutrition is being mainstreamed across food systems with a number of policy interventions to this effect.

Our dream for a Digital Bangladesh by 2021 is progressing well, and this includes the digitisation of agriculture-related knowledge. Data paucity has emerged as a major challenge for monitoring the SDGs. UN agencies and development partners have to come forward to help bridge the capacity gap of different ministries in generating quality, reliable timely data. The digitisation of Bangladesh will also help create a unique platform that can help coordinate the complex interactions between farmers, wholesalers and consumers.

Bangladesh boasts a robust food and nutrition policy framework. It is actively working towards building a sustainable and resilient nutrition sensitive food system. It has been responsive to the immediate crisis and despite the existing challenges, remains ambitious about the future.

Mr. Chairman (or Madam Chair),

To conclude my speech, I would like to reconfirm that the Government of Bangladesh walks hand in hand with FAO, its Asia-Pacific Regional Office and Country Office in Dhaka as we overcome the unprecedented challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic together and to achieve common development goals, including SDGs.

Bangladesh is fully committed to building a country without poverty, malnutrition, and hunger, leaving no one behind in an inclusive manner, while the country continues to strive to enter into the upper middle income group in the near future.

Thank you.

Khoda Hafez

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu, Long live FAO Bangladesh partnership!

