

MAIL Statement

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1. Excellences, members of the delegations and assembled high-level experts; it is my great pleasure to lead the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's delegation to this 35th FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC).
2. First of all, on behalf of the government and people of Afghanistan I would like to thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting this 35th FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC) Meeting in Thimphu, Bhutan. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic we couldn't manage to physically attend the meeting.
3. I would expect this Regional Conference will build on the previously agreed regional priorities, lessons learned, experienced gained, and achievements made by the last Conference and set up new priorities for this biennium (2020-2021) with major focus on the priority areas of RAP (Regional Asia Pacific) member countries, the Regional Economic Cooperation, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4. Agriculture is the backbone of Afghanistan's economy and contributes to 25 percent of the national GDP. Approximately 80% of the population is engaged in agriculture-based livelihoods directly or indirectly.
5. Food insecurity however remains alarmingly high in Afghanistan with continuing conflict, widespread unemployment, rising food prices, and recently due to the negative impacts of Covid-19 pandemic. Around 10.9 million people (nearly one-third of the total population) are estimated to be in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or above during the current period. This figure includes around 7.38 million people in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and 3.47 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4).
6. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic is causing tremendous impact disrupting lives and livelihoods of a large number of Afghan population. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) with the technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (UNFAO) conducted a rapid assessment with a view to understand the impact of this pandemic on agriculture and food system. One of the major findings of this rapid impact assessment was that over 20% male and 28% female farmers reported that they will not be able to plant the next crop, mainly due to lack of access to farm inputs. This would not only impact the household level food and nutrition security, but will also hinder their potential ability and access to sell their harvested crops.
7. Due to global climate changes, drought has become a recurring phenomenon, and Afghanistan is facing drought almost every four years. The country faced a severe drought in 2018 that caused displacement of thousands of families

affecting food security and livelihoods of millions of Afghans. Afghanistan Ministry of agriculture worked closely together with FAO supporting thousands of smallholders during this difficult time. Furthermore, in order to get better prepared against such events in future, Afghanistan Ministry of agriculture requested FAO to support the development of GoIRA's long-term (2019-30) Drought Risk Management Strategy, and we are happy to express that the effort resulted in a very comprehensive and concrete strategy with a vision to make drought-free Afghanistan.

8. There are however other recurring shocks the country is facing, in particular flash floods, transboundary plant pest and animal diseases, earthquakes, avalanches, etc., which unfortunately affect lives and livelihoods of thousands of families every year.
9. In the meantime, Excellences and delegates, I would like to also share with you that Afghanistan Ministry of agriculture has embarked on several ambitious and much needed initiatives in the agriculture sector, this include:
 - a. The implementation of various strategies and priority programmes formulated recently, such as the NRM Strategy, Dryland Agriculture Strategy, Policy and its Implementation Plan; National (Agriculture) Extension Policy, National Irrigation Policy and Programme, Wheat Sector Plan (2017); Animal Health Veterinary Law, National Livestock Development Strategy, National Agriculture Research Strategy & Policy, and National Strategy of Women in Agriculture amongst many others.

- b. Recently, we also initiated the Geographical Identification (GI) project in three provinces on three agricultural products through our agricultural value chain strengthening programme, implemented together with FAO.
- c. Through resources mobilized from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), we are improving our natural resource management base, especially on sustainable management of rangeland, forestry and land along with biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration. In this regard, we are developing a 'Centre of Excellence for NRM' in Afghanistan within the Ministry of agriculture as well.
- d. And finally, at policy level together with FAO, we have recently conducted a study on smart food, and largely contributed to National Food Security and Nutrition Agenda-Afghanistan (AFSeN-A).

10. Given Government of Afghanistan's strategic priorities and agriculture Ministry's strategic objectives, I urge FAO RAP to support Afghanistan on the following:

- a. Support Afghanistan to become a food and nutrition secure country in the near future meeting the SDGs goals, in particular SDG 2;
- b. Facilitate strategic collaborations with other ongoing regional initiatives and cooperation that could benefit Afghanistan;
- c. Provide technical knowledge how to enhance Ministry of agriculture work on applying biotechnology for strengthening resilience in agriculture and food nutrition security and safety;

- d. Help benefit from early warning systems and measures for dealing with transboundary pest attacks and animal diseases in crop and livestock sub-sectors;
- e. Support MAIL's capacities to manage risks of climate change, disaster, trade flows, agriculture value chain and markets in agriculture sector, particularly from the perspective of environmental sustainability, strengthening biodiversity, and ecosystems-based adaptation;
- f. Assist MAIL in adapting innovations and good practices on integrated land-water management and integrated livestock and rangeland management to address the changing risks in agriculture, NRM and water sectors;
- g. Strengthen the seed production and value chain system;
- h. Strengthen practical research initiated by MAIL on resilient dryland agriculture practices, integrated livestock-rangeland management, livestock productivity, drought risk management, and water demand-supply management.

10. Finally, I would like to thank FAO RAP for giving me this opportunity to participate in this great Regional Conference. We are hopeful that the current peace talks and the much awaited intra-Afghan dialogue would lead us towards sustaining peace in the country, and agriculture would become the major sector to generate employment, ensure food and nutrition security, boost export and help alleviate poverty in the country.

11.I would like to extend my warm greetings again to all Excellences and delegates once again and look forward to participating in highly enriching discussions and meetings over the coming few days.