

**Statement delivered by  
His Excellency Shershah Amiri  
Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan  
on the occasion of the  
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*Honourable Director-General of FAO,  
Mr Secretary,  
Respected Chairpersons,  
Excellency,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

This is another great opportunity to highlight our shared goals for food provision and the fight against hunger.

As we discuss agriculture food systems' transformation, our common goals are the same but our needs and priorities might be different. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, like any other country in the globe, Afghanistan has been hit hard, not only in the health sector but also in food systems and farmers' livelihoods.

Afghanistan is an agricultural country and approximately 70 percent of its population is engaged in agriculture – where 70 percent earn their livelihood. At present, agriculture's contribution to National GDP is about 22 percent, however during the pre-war era, the contribution of agriculture to GDP was 50 percent. The total agricultural land in Afghanistan is about 7.8 million hectares, and only 12 percent is used for agriculture.

Based on the food security and nutrition strategy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, like many other developing countries in the world, Afghanistan is also coping with severe and widespread food and nutrition insecurity. Around 33 percent of Afghans suffer from food insecurity, and 40 percent of Afghan children, who are less than five years old, experience chronic under-nourishment. 55 percent of Afghans are living under the poverty line.

There are several impediments that are responsible for food and nutrition insecurity in Afghanistan. Climate change is one of the most important constraints, because of which Afghanistan occasionally experiences drought, making living conditions more difficult for the vast majority of Afghan people. In recent years, the amount of rainfall has decreased from 400 mm to 250 to 300 mm per year. Natural dry land farming depends on annual rainfall, whereas the majority of irrigated crops depend on water from snow melting.

If there is not sufficient snowfall during the winter season, there will be drought in the subsequent growing season, meaning that the reduced annual rainfall and insufficient annual snowfall will adversely

affect crop productivity, the livestock sector and also rent land. It will also increase water stress on permanent crops and natural vegetation in the coming season. The low rainfall and insufficient snowfall in 2020 will most likely cause drought countrywide, and the Government of Afghanistan, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, is taking necessary measures to address food and nutrition shortfalls in case of emergency.

To mitigate and reduce the negative impact of drought, Afghanistan needs urgent improvements in its irrigation systems by constructing watersheds, irrigation canals on concrete water channels, along with developing appropriate crop production packages, such as improved seeds, fertilizer, drought-tolerant, disease-resistant and high-yielding varieties for the major crops.

In addition, the Minister of Agriculture has been taking drastic steps for redressing other problems, such as pests and disease, natural disasters, loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction and ongoing conflict, which directly affects our current agri-systems. Therefore, one of our greatest challenges of the 21st century is to meet society's growing food needs, while concurrently mitigating the impact of the environment on agriculture.

For the great contribution made by FAO and other international donor organizations in the rebuilding of Afghanistan and boosting its economic growth in the past, the Government and the people of Afghanistan have been very grateful. Now, in order to tackle the possible food insecurity and malnutrition problems, because of COVID-19 and drought, the country urgently needs the general assistance of FAO and other international donors in the following high priority areas: in the improvement of irrigation systems, by building more watershed and irrigation canals to access more water and improve productivity; and also in increased reed and other cereal crop production, by assisting poor farmers with improved seed, fertilizer, pesticide and agricultural inputs [inaudible].