

Statement delivered by
The Honourable Muhammad Abdur Razzaque
Minister for Agriculture of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

on the occasion of the
42nd Session of the FAO Conference (14-18 June 2021)

15 June 2021

Mr Chairperson,

His Excellency the Director-General of FAO,

Distinguished Delegates,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to you all,

It is my pleasure to represent the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh at this 42nd Session of the FAO Conference, which is being convened on the zoom platform for the first time. I would like to convey the warm greetings from my delegation, the Government and the people of Bangladesh to Dr. Qu Dongyu, FAO Director-General, for his dynamic leadership and fortitude amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Chairperson,

Bangladesh has made substantial improvements in the food security and nutritional status of its population over the last two decades. Self-sufficiency, especially in rice production of Bangladesh – achieved over 20 years ago –and so far, has been sustained. Per capita income has been rising steadily and poverty has declined by three quarters, resulting in better access to food for all. Rates of chronic malnutrition have also declined, especially over the past decade, by two thirds. The prevalence of undernourishment or 'hunger' declined to 13 percent in 2020 while the prevalence of severe food insecurity based on FAO's Food Insecurity Experience Scale also improved substantially.

I would like to point out that, at the onset of the pandemic, under the guidance of His Excellency the Prime Minister, the Government of Bangladesh responded promptly to maintain the pace of growth of agricultural production and supply and ensure access to food for the vulnerable population by distributing rice and other nutritious foods. The Government guaranteed continuity in the production of food by unveiling a stimulus package for farmers of US\$ 590 million apart from stimulus package to micro, small, and medium enterprises. The Government has put in place its immediate socio-economic response plans together with a COVID-19 response plan for agriculture to mitigate impacts.

Excellencies,

Bangladesh is working to accelerate innovation and improve technology, data, governance, human resources and institutions to transform agri-food systems so that no one is left behind. These ‘accelerators’ which FAO advocates for in the State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) Report are the cornerstones of our policies and strategies. Technology and innovation are key to developing climate-smart technologies that will help to promote sustainability, diversification and food safety and reduced food losses and waste across the food chain.

In addition to harnessing technical innovations such as genetics, improved biosecurity and disease control alongside boosting trade and investment, we also look forward to the vertical extension through front-line research for high yielding varieties, climate stress tolerant varieties, and farming system development for reducing yield gaps. Recognizing the importance of nutrition sensitive agriculture, Bangladesh is promoting ‘family nutrition gardens’ across the country in the light of H.E Prime Minister’s directives of ‘not to keep an inch of fallow land’. Doubling rice yield initiative will also help free up space for diversified agriculture, an agenda aimed at impacting dietary diversity and nutrition.

Bangladesh is a proud participant of many programs of FAO at the global and country level. We are taking a food systems approach as advocated by the 2021 FAO SOFA on ‘Agriculture Food Systems Transformation’. Last year the government approved the New Agricultural Extension Policy, the Agricultural Mechanisation Policy, the Good Agricultural Practice Policy and the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2020.

Mr Chair,

In addition to threats and challenges posed by the advent of climate change and natural disasters, we have been hosting 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (Rohingyas), a man-made disaster which is impacting our society, economy and environment severely. I call upon to our development partners to come forward with targeted investments to complement to our development agenda – poverty eradication, agricultural transformation, employment of youth and women, etc.

We wish the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference a great success and look forward to seeing a more vibrant FAO under the dynamic leadership of the Director-General Dr Qu Dongyu. Bangladesh is reiterating its support and commitments to this end. Lastly, the Government of Bangladesh is privileged to be the host of the Thirty-Sixth Session of the Asia and the Pacific FAO Regional Conference in Dhaka from 8 to 11 March 2022. I would like to call upon the FAO and the member countries to support the successful holding of the conference. See you all again in Dhaka in 2022.

Thank you all.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu

Long live FAO Bangladesh partnership!

Thank you Mr Chair.