

Statement delivered by
His Excellency Syed Fakhar Imam
Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
on the occasion of the
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16 June 2021

*The Honourable Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,
Mr Qu Dongyu,*

Distinguished Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be invited to speak at the 42nd session of the FAO Conference on the agriculture food system transformation actions being made in Pakistan.

Agriculture is central to the economy and social fabric of Pakistan. The agriculture sector contributes 19.3 percent to the GDP, employs 35 percent of the country's labour force and contributes to the growth of other sectors of the economy. The healthy expansion of the agriculture sector stimulates domestic demand for improved food products, industrial goods and supplies raw materials to agro-based industries.

A more vibrant rural economy and increased food security will depend on the county's effort to stimulate the agricultural sector. Agricultural transformation will not only raise incomes for smallholder farmers, but it will also and more importantly promote expansion of the rural non-agricultural sector - with beneficial effects on rural poverty and social stability.

In the Pakistani context, most of the rural population is linked with the agriculture sector either as farmers, daily wage labourers or rural micro entrepreneurs. The link between agriculture productivity and rural poverty has an important relationship in the context of poverty alleviation in Pakistan.

Today, the world confronts a looming agricultural crisis. The global population will soon reach eight billion people. Six hundred million approximately suffer from hunger. Over 100 million children are stunted due to under nourishment. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to worsen the situation and push more people into extreme poverty.

In Pakistan, the Prevalence of Undernourishment in the total population is estimated at around 21 percent on the national level with important disparities at provincial level.

This high prevalence of undernourishment is more than a public health issue and is a serious barrier to Pakistan's economic development. It is estimated that undernutrition reduces Pakistan GDP by approximately three percent every year, approximately reducing GDP by USD 3.7 billion. Addressing malnutrition in a holistic manner is therefore essential for the economic and social development of the people of Pakistan.

In response to the recession triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan, proposed a "Global Initiative on Debt Relief" last April. Also at the Special Session of the UN

General Assembly, the Prime Minister proposed several measures for generation of early financing to enable developing countries' recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, including;

- Comprehensive debt relief and restructuring;
- The creation of 500 billion dollars in SDRs;
- Larger concessional financing; and
- Measures to halt and recover illicit financial flows from developing countries to haven destinations and to richer countries.

Pakistan plans to go even further in trying to end poverty and hunger. Some key initiatives in this regard are;

Investing in Green and Sustainable Agriculture Infrastructure – to shorten agriculture value chains. Financing infrastructure including roads, food storage, localized energy grids and markets, which will greatly improve food systems and will assist with increasing food and nutrition security in Pakistan.

Shifting from Low Value crops to High Value Crops – this will help improve the livelihoods of small farmers across the country. Our government plans to work on areas of credit, capacity building of farmers and improving the access and availability of high-value crops and fruits and vegetables ...clubbed with agriculture value chain investment, which will help increase farmer's incomes and empower the women in agricultural communities.

Use of Innovative Agricultural Technologies and Techniques – technology has the potential to offer a wide range of solutions to Pakistan's agricultural and food challenges. This calls for efficient utilization of production resources by adopting modern technologies, ensuring internet and broadband access in rural areas and improving digital literacy which will be vital for Pakistan to build more efficient domestic and international supply chains.

Competitive and Comparative Price Regimes – The current government plans to ensure fairer market prices for agricultural and food products in Pakistan. For a long time, the people of Pakistan have suffered from market manipulation techniques employed by middlemen, monopolists and hoarders. Smallholder farmers cannot be left to the mercy of the corporations, but at the same time, international agricultural trade must be rationalized. The huge agricultural subsidies provided by certain richer economies distort global markets and make it impossible for farmers in the developing countries to compete.

Improved Food Patterns – In Pakistan we must re-think our food consumption patterns and the food systems that support these patterns. We can eat better, and many of us would do well to eat less. We can produce food with greater respect for nature. We can stop the pollution of our lakes, rivers and oceans. We can produce more with less water, more respect for soil and without dangerous chemicals.

Knowledge Intensive Agriculture – In order to bring about agricultural transformation in Pakistan, the farmers need new knowledge about how to use improved methods and techniques for increasing yield and value. Knowledge based agriculture is an even bigger requirement in the era of climate change where a harsher environment and extreme weather phenomena are changing our productive landscape, varieties and techniques.

Excellencies,

In Pakistan, we have integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into our national development plan. The current government has accorded the highest priority to achieve SDG-1 – “No Poverty”; and SDG-2 – “Zero Hunger”.

Despite our financial difficulties, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have provided a relief package of around USD eight billion dollars to the neediest members of our society. It included emergency cash assistance to the poorest families and other vulnerable groups, including women and children. We achieved this through our *Ehsaas* programme, which means compassion, fully utilizing digital technologies and databases. This was the largest poverty alleviation programme in Pakistan's history.

Excellencies,

Looking forward, the Government of Pakistan sees FAO as a key resource and technical advisory partner for the transformation of Pakistan's agriculture sector and food systems. We look forward to continuing to partner with FAO on strategic policy and legislation reform, the strengthening of our food control and agriculture production systems and the restoration of Pakistan's landscapes.

I wish you all success in the important deliberations of the current session.

Thank you very much indeed.