

41st Session of the IFAD's Governing Council

Key Note Presentation

(Session Theme – From fragility to long-term resilience:
Investing in sustainable rural economics)

Statement

by

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Rome, Italy

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr. Chairperson- President of IFAD Mr. Gilbert Foussoun Houngbo (wMjevU©
dvDmb †nvDs†ev),
Governors,
Representatives of different international organizations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and a very good morning to you all.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here at the 41st Session of IFAD Governing Council. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks for inviting me as keynote speaker.

Bangladesh from its early history has been known as a fertile land where all agricultural products grow easily. But that reputation was marred time and again for a long period till the late 1990s. At the time of its emergence as an independent country in 1971, Bangladesh faced serious food shortage as the production of food grains for a population of 75 million was only 11 million tons.

Soon after the independence, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had laid utmost importance on increasing agricultural production and he called for 'Green Revolution' in the country. To boost production, he took some pragmatic measures, including land reform, land tax waiver, establishment of research bodies, installation of irrigation pumps and distribution of agri-inputs at free of cost.

But after his assassination in 1975, the agricultural sector has been a subject of negligence by the subsequent governments resulting in acute food shortage.

Every year for a decade and a half it had to assemble development partners for at least four times a year to meet its food needs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its inception IFAD has invested in 31 Projects in Bangladesh and another five projects are in the pipeline. The total loan and grant for all 31 projects amounts to US Dollar about 680 million. Currently IFAD is focusing on the adaptation of rural livelihoods to climate change and the scaling up of successful approaches.

According to World Economic Forum report, the world's population is projected to surpass 9 billion by 2050 and half of it will belong to the middle class. There will be a huge strain on declining global arable land, forests and water.

Rise in sea level will heavily reduce arable land in many countries and we will be its victim again without contributing to sea level rise at all. Global food demand in 2050 would increase by at least 60 percent over 2006 levels and food prices are likely to increase by at least 84 percent.

How do we respond to such a combination of adverse developments?

I shall tell you the story of agricultural growth of my country pointing out the lessons which can be adopted or more appropriately adapted in other countries for human development on a global scale. We do not want to face another 1981 when we discovered that neglect of agricultural growth was most unfortunate for mankind.

First of all, let me tell you that the natural resilience of Bangladeshi people to any crisis did not allow the build-up of a food crisis in a year of climatic vagaries and reduced food production in the country.

The resolve of Bangladeshis to tighten the belt, encounter difficulties with confidence and seek alternative ways of meeting the crisis enabled us to overcome and succeed.

Bangladesh had about a decade of self-sufficiency in food and then this year there was an unexpected shortfall due to untimely and recurrent flooding. Some adjustment in import policy immediately made food readily available to the consumers.

In my country, you may please note that we have increased our food production from 11 million tons in 1971 to 39 million tons in 2017 although one third of arable land has been lost in the meantime.

From 2008 it has been an increase of 9 million tons. This was possible as we reached agri-inputs to the farmers with heavily subsidized prices, and soft and collateral-free loans were made available to the landless farmers.

We used all options that ICT could offer us to overcome the crisis. At present ICT is helping us to accelerate the efficiency and precision of research, particularly on issues related to climate change. New mapping techniques using remotely-sensed data and GIS have helped us to assess vulnerability to climate change, devise more efficient water capturing methods, locate areas with water-harvesting potential and develop suitability maps for newly developed crop varieties. As a result we are now self-sufficient in food and agriculture with some additional capacity for export as well.

Mr. Chair,

After the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, we aligned our march for development with our Seventh Five Year Plan based on the spirit of 'leaving no one behind'. Our targets for the future remain the same and they will be incorporated in the subsequent Five Year Plans.

The first target is to eliminate poverty. The second one is to eliminate hunger. And the third one is to make nutritious food available to all.

The challenge of leaving no one behind is most significant in rural areas. About 72 percent of our population live in rural areas and 43 percent are engaged as labour in agriculture sector that contributes 15 percent to the country's GDP.

The rural non-farm sector accounts for 40 per cent of rural employment but earns more than 50 per cent of rural income. Hence, inclusive and sustainable rural transformation is key to reaching the goals of poverty elimination, hunger elimination and leaving no one behind.

Sustainability cannot be achieved without creating long-term resilience. A comprehensive sustainable rural economy requires investment in the development of the rural social fabric and climate resilience.

Bangladesh, a country of over 160 million people, is the most densely populated country in the world. It is poised to achieve the SDG goals well ahead of 2030. It estimates that poverty will be eradicated altogether by 2024 and that of hunger by 2041.

But it also faces other formidable challenges. It is likely to lose 40 percent of its productive land by 2080 if sea levels rise 65 centimetres only. In addition, changes in crop production due to the impact of climate change will increase the number of people living in poverty. Therefore, significant resources must be tapped in order to ensure better adapted and resilient agricultural practices.

The government's Seventh Five Year Plan, therefore, places emphasis on the sustainable use of resources and investment in agricultural research to develop high yield crop varieties resistant to salinity, flooding and cold.

The Seventh Five Year Plan also focuses on issues related to development of rural areas of Bangladesh and identification of priority areas, such as increasing local production, solving energy problems, reducing poverty through undertaking programmes on agriculture, employment generation and rural infrastructure.

The rural institutions will be strengthened to support the ongoing rural transformation including support for non-farm job creation, rural mobility, and rural finance.

Due to policies friendly to fisheries, the total fish production reached up to 41.34 lakh MT in Fiscal Year 2016-17. This has contributed to self-sufficiency in fish production. Our national fish, Hilsa has received geographical identification certificate. We are fourth largest producer of sweet water fish in the world.

We also have a food feeding programme for the poor and vulnerable population. In 2017, five million families received 30 kg rice for 5 months at a

highly reduced price. Under the food based social security safety-net programme, about US Dollar 750 million has been allocated. We have also allocated US Dollar 76.5 million for rice sale in open market for low-income families.

Our government launched One House One Farm project in 2010-11 financial year to alleviate poverty through agro-livelihood and family farming.

Under the project 17,300 Village Development Organisations have been formed incorporating over one million beneficiaries. They have set up nearly 7 hundred thousand small farms with an investment of US Dollar 115.3 million.

We have also successfully tried to tackle the problem of nutrition. The undernourished portion of Bangladesh's population declined from 33.2 percent in 1992 to 16.4 percent in 2016. Poverty has been reduced to about 22 percent now from about 41.5 percent during 2005-06. Various government initiatives have played a role in this improvement.

Mr. Chair,

We believe that in order to ensure resilience, investment in rural economy is a key factor. This, we believe, cannot be achieved without global partnership and cooperation.

The development partners have to be a little more generous in order to eliminate poverty and hunger. The world appears to me to be ready now for it. I would like to urge you for investing in sustainable rural economies.

By way of telling the story of my country, I have tried to plead for 'From fragility to long term resilience by investing in sustainable rural economies'.

My country Bangladesh has been very lucky with stable governance for almost a decade. We formulated our strategy of socio-economic growth very carefully over a period of about four years. And then we tried to implement it in the last nine years. We made adjustments as needed and as demanded by circumstances very carefully.

Fortunately, the development partners came forward with eager and generous hands and jointly we made proud progress. We hope and pray that in continuing such a partnership, IFAD will play an important role. IFAD's model of mutual help and partnership is very different from that of other UN agencies and organizations.

And we sincerely believe that this ideal model will work in the promising future that is before mankind now.

Thank you all again. Khoda Hafez.

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