

**Statement of the Honorable Minister, National Food Security and Research  
For the  
“Forty-Fourth Session of the Governing Council of IFAD” on**

**“Rural Development: A prerequisite for global resilience”**

Pakistan is predominantly an agricultural country. Around 64% of our population lives in rural areas, where agriculture sector is the largest employer, accounting for 39 percent of the country’s total labour force. It has direct bearing on the economic growth by having about 20% share in the economy. Agriculture sector can play an important role in overall economic growth, poverty reduction, resource management and over all development in rural areas.

Rural development involves diversification of rural economy, as well as social and human development. It provides the basis for a sustained and equitable economic growth of all sectors of the economy; and aims to reduce unemployment, poverty and inequality in rural masses. The key aspects of rural development include: agricultural diversification, infrastructure development, market reforms, rural industrialization, and raising non-farm employment. To address the challenges for rural development, it is imperative to devise a comprehensive strategy that could cater the needs of rural people, by involving all the stake-holders: including academia, researchers, and rural communities, members of the civil societies, NGOs, donors, planners, policy makers and local institutions.

To enhance the pace of rural development and achieve SDGs, our Government has launched ‘Agriculture Emergency Program’ with a target of boosting crop yield, improved water efficiency, livestock and fisheries development. Also, the purpose of the program is to enable the genesis of agro-markets with an overall aim of Rural Transformation, supporting small farmers, decreasing rural poverty and encouraging entrepreneurship. Besides federal government, reasonable investment is also coming to agriculture sector from provincial governments and development partners working in Pakistan.

In the developing world including Pakistan, youth and agriculture are the twin pillars of progress and prosperity. The principal challenges in retaining our youth in agriculture include: insufficient access to information and education; inadequate access to financial services; lack of training opportunities; and limited involvement in decision-making. To address this issue, our government has launched ‘Kamyab Jawan Program’ under which, various initiatives have been introduced for our younger generation including women; that aim to:

- Promote decent rural employment at country level through strategic partnership between all the relevant stakeholders to support young people in creating professionally managed and formal agricultural businesses across the value chain including value adding SMEs
- Unleash youth’s untapped innovative and creative potential for Agriculture development specifically to empower young agricultural entrepreneurs to provide tech-based solutions to agricultural market inefficiencies and productivity gaps
- Re-engage youth in agriculture and create more and better jobs along agricultural value chains, from production to agro-processing and marketing of agricultural products with a specific focus on poverty alleviation, food security, inclusive development and decent & sustainable livelihood for rural youth.
- Promote policy, organizational and institutional framework conducive to the creation, facilitation and development of youth led agricultural businesses.

- Support the implementation of gender and age sensitive employment-centered agricultural activities
- Support youth in accessing high end markets and modern value chains
- Support youth-led micro, small and medium enterprises in agribusiness and the marketing sector to access markets, training, financial services and other productive assets

Government of Pakistan has also launched the “Ehsaas” program, for the extreme poor, orphans, widows, the homeless, the disabled, the jobless, for poor farmers, for laborers, for the sick and undernourished; for students from low-income backgrounds and for poor women and elderly citizens. This plan is also about lifting lagging areas where poverty is higher. This initiative would help farmers to overcome poverty, improve agricultural productivity and ensure food security.

IFAD is already contributing and supporting projects & programs in remote areas, and have targeted some of the poorest and most deprived segments of the rural population in Pakistan. However, much more efforts/investments are needed to overcome issues confronted to Pakistan’s agricultural research & development. Furthermore, IFAD’s investment focus should be those projects and programs which are small holder oriented, emphasize on high-value crops, development of agriculture supply chain, and agriculture productivity improvement & value addition *etc.* Moreover, while financing projects and programs, there should be a substantial share of IFAD’s grants vis-à-vis IFAD’s loan.