

**STATEMENT OF MR Oscar A. Garcia,
DIRECTOR OF THE INDEPENDENT OFFICE OF EVALUATION
OF IFAD**

- 1. Honourable State Minister, Mr. M.A Mannan**
- 2. Ms Begum Vikarum Nessa Additional Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture**
- 3. Mr Abul Basher Md. Zahurul Islam, Additional
Secretary, Economic Relation Division**
- 4. Authorities and Officials of the Government of
Bangladesh and other Development Agencies; IFAD
Colleagues**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honoured and pleased to be here with you and to have the opportunity to address the participants of this Round Table Workshop, co-organized by the Independent Office of Evaluation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development –IFAD. at the conclusion of the independent evaluation of the IFAD Country Programme 2004-2014 in the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

I would like to express a heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh, in particular to the Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance and to the Ministry of Agriculture, for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout this country

programme evaluation process, and especially in the organization of today's workshop. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Programme Management Department. I am grateful to Ms Hoonae Kim, the Director of IFAD's Asia and Pacific Region who honours us with her presence and the IFAD Bangladesh Country Team for their valuable inputs, openness and constructive attitude towards this country programme evaluation in general.

I would like to thank Mr. Miguel Torralba, Lead Evaluation Officer and Mr. Mohammed Nurul Alam, senior consultant who ably conducted this comprehensive evaluation.

As a part of the events related to this workshop, I and my team have had the opportunity to visit selected field activities of interventions co-funded by IFAD in Sunamganj District. This has given the delegation an opportunity to directly hold discussions with beneficiaries and their groups, project staff, district-level government authorities, and to see project activities on the ground. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the authorities of the Local Government, in particular the Local Engineering Department, and the relevant partners for their warm hospitality and constructive engagement.

As some of you may know, this is the third country programme evaluation (CPE) done by the Independent Office of Evaluation in

Bangladesh. The first one was completed in 1999 and the second in 2006. Given that our office conducts only around 5 to 7 country programme evaluations every year in all regions of the world, having conducted three country programme evaluations in this country may be considered as an indicator of the importance IFAD attributes to its partnership and overall collaboration with Bangladesh.

The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD is an integral division in the organizational architecture of the Fund. However, our independence is primarily derived from the fact that we report directly to the Executive Board of IFAD. The mandate of our office is to undertake evaluations of projects, country programmes and corporate policies, with the aim of assessing results achieved, and generating lessons for further strengthening the performance of IFAD-financed operations on the ground. In particular, the purpose of the Bangladesh country programme evaluation has been, therefore, to provide an impartial and rigorous assessment of performance that can assist the Government, IFAD and other concerned partners in developing the next country strategy - COSOP - and new projects financed by IFAD in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will be discussing the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Programme Evaluation.

In particular, the workshop will provide valuable inputs for the preparation of the evaluation's Agreement at Completion Point. For those of you who are not familiar with this, the Agreement at Completion Point is a short document summarizing the main recommendations, which the Government of Bangladesh and IFAD Management will agree to adopt and implement within a specific timeframe.

The evaluation has been conducted in a context of continuous growth and evolution in the country supported by strong government commitment.

Bangladesh's food production has increased by 3.5 times since independence, and the credit rating at the moment is among the top in the Asia Region. One key element of the country's success can be linked with the commitment to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In Bangladesh, the MDGs have been integrated into several key planning and strategy documents, including the Sixth Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) and the Perspective Plan (2010-2021), and are widely used as a benchmark for progress.

The national development priorities captured in "Bangladesh Vision 2021" aim at transforming Bangladesh into a middle-

income country by 2021, the year which marks the Golden Jubilee Year of independence. Moreover, the associated Perspective Plan 2010-2021 outlines the strategy for achieving food security, making adequate infrastructure available and pursuing environmentally sustainable development.

As you all know, the performance of the rural economy is a critical determinant of the overall trends in growth and poverty reduction in Bangladesh. The country faces widespread rural poverty combined with high vulnerability to climate change.

The Government recognizes the critical role of the agricultural sector in reducing poverty and ensuring food security. Recently, the Government approved the 'National Agriculture Policy 2013' with the focus on agriculture production, poverty reduction through the generation of jobs for better food security.

IFAD maintains a long-standing partnership with Bangladesh in agriculture and rural development. The IFAD-supported programme in the country is seminal and includes investments in rural infrastructure, agriculture, inland fisheries, markets, microfinance and gender. The current Country Strategy (2012-2018) focuses on the adaptation of rural livelihoods to climate change and on scaling up of successful approaches. Bangladesh is the third largest recipient of IFAD funds. Total portfolio cost over the last ten years covered by the CPE amounted to US\$755.99 million.

The CPE has used internationally-recognized evaluation criteria to assess the performance of three mutually reinforcing pillars in the IFAD-Government partnership in Bangladesh: (i) project portfolio; (ii) non-lending activities (knowledge management, policy dialogue and partnership building); and (iii) the COSOP, in terms of its relevance and effectiveness.

Later this morning, my colleague, Mr Miguel Torralba, and Mr Nurul Alam, will present you the main findings and recommendations of this evaluation.

Hence, at this stage, I will limit myself to highlighting only a few findings from the evaluation, as a more comprehensive presentation will shortly be made.

The CPE considers that the IFAD-supported programme during the CPE period produced significant results in rural poverty reduction and brought substantial value to the country. The programme made important contributions in a number of areas such as microfinance, rural infrastructure and enterprise development, and the empowerment of women, it promoted some successful innovations , for instance, in community based resource management and generated some results and lessons which serve as excellent examples for upscaling and mainstreaming within the country.

Notwithstanding the significant achievements noted above, there are still an few issues that deserve further attention: firstly, the

long term sustainability of benefits, and secondly, further scaling up of results which require policy level dialogue, strategic initiatives and decisive action for carrying the successes forward and sustaining benefits for the future generations.

Areas of priority attention and future investment in programmes include: agricultural diversification and productivity, strengthening rural microfinance, mitigation of environmental risks and further efforts on climate change adaptation. IFAD's role and level of involvement in agriculture sector need to be reassessed in Bangladesh, as the role of agriculture remains critical in reducing rural poverty, employment and in ensuring food security in the country.

To quote the national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam from his poem Bishshash o Asha 'If hopes are lofty and so are the efforts to achieve them, then victory awaits at your doorstep'. In light of the impressive achievements so far and the challenges that confront us in the future, IFAD-Bangladesh partnership holds immense promise towards reduction of rural poverty.

I invite you to absorb the inputs provided by this independent evaluation and engage frankly and constructively in a dialogue to explore ways to enhance the collaboration between IFAD and the government of Bangladesh for rural poverty reduction.

I thank you for your attention.