

Honourable State Minister for Finance and Planning and Chief Guest of today's workshop Mr M.A Mannan, MP,

My colleague Mr Abul Basher Md. Zahurul Islam, Additional Secretary of ERD and Chair of the session

Mr Brian Baldwin, Senior Operations Advisor Programme Management Department

Ms Hoonae Kim, Director Asia and the Pacific Region Division

Mr Oscar Garcia, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation

Mr Miguel Torralba, Senior Evaluation Officer

Distinguished participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Very good morning to you all, and thank you for inviting me as your Chief Guest to this National Round-Table Workshop.

On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, it is my great pleasure to be here at the inaugural session of IFAD-IOE National Round-Table Workshop. I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to our colleagues in IOE and the ERD, for jointly organizing this important workshop.

The agriculture sector including crop, livestock and fisheries is **one of the most important sectors of the Bangladesh economy**. It comprises about 18 per cent of the country's GDP and plays a key role in food security, employment (the sector employs nearly half (47.5 per cent) of the total manpower) and provides a direct livelihood to over 28 million households.

Performance of **rural economy** is critical. With over three-quarter of the population and close to 85% of the poor living in rural areas, the performance of the rural economy is a critical determinant of the overall trends in growth and poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

Performance of the rural economy is, in turn, intimately linked to developments in the agriculture sector , both directly, because it accounts for over a fifth of the GDP, and indirectly, because of its strong linkages with the rural non-farm economy, and because of its role in assuring food security for the country.

The Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, and the Ministry of Agriculture recognizes the **critical role of the agricultural sector in reducing poverty** and ensuring food security.

Government targets in this regard include: achieve self-sufficiency in rice production, diversify agricultural crops, planned crop intensification in the coastal zone, support the creation of production and marketing cooperatives, and encourage R&D for increasing productivity.

The government also intends to promote small enterprises in rural areas, and to help farmers in marketing agricultural products and accessing rural credit by pursuing policies establishing powerful autonomous local government bodies for coordinating public and private development initiatives.

Nonetheless, Agriculture and rural development in Bangladesh faces several key challenges and opportunities:

- crops production faces considerable challenges posed by population pressure, decline of land availability, increasing natural hazards, and climate change.
- agriculture is mostly rain-fed, with irrigation covering only around 42 per cent of the potentially irrigated area. Given the limited availability of water resource during the dry season, improved water use efficiency remains essential for expansion of irrigated agriculture

- taking into account the high percentage of landless farmers, the shrinking of the land base and the small urban employment, the rural non-farm sector presents a good chance to provide productive employment for the growing labor pool in the rural areas.
- while agriculture is growing, still a large part of mostly the predominant smallholder sector remains outside the ambit of the market economy.
- rural infrastructure is more developed now than before, with increased access to markets, but there are still huge scopes for improving the infrastructure further, improve accessibility and make them resilient to climate change

In this context, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been working with rural men and women in Bangladesh over the last 30 years in order to (i) eliminate poverty, hunger and malnutrition (ii) raise their productivity and incomes; and (iii) improve the quality of their lives.

Today, the Ministry of Agriculture is assisting IFAD in the implementation of a number of agriculture related activities. Each IFAD supported project seeks the expertise of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in order to ensure our farmers receive the best support possible. In fact, the SAAOs and other extension officers are in constant contact IFAD projects and are dedicated to making this partnership work.

More specifically, the MoA plays a crucial role in the implementation of the NATP and will continue to be a central player in the implementation of NATP phase II, both co-financed by IFAD. The DAE also implements

an agriculture support component of the Charland Development and Settlement Project (CDSPIV)

But the partnership does not end with on-farm extension services. In fact the MoA is a pioneer in and fervent supporter of the use of innovative communication tools to convey timely and relevant information to farmers. In this context, the Ministry's Agriculture Information Service (AIS) has partnered with the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and the IFAD funded Coastal Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project (CCRIP) in order to strengthen and revive the networks of Rural Community Radios across the southern districts of the country.

In October-November 2014, the IOE undertook a Country Programme Evaluation of the IFAD Bangladesh portfolio over the last 10 years, culminating in today's workshop.

I believe this workshop will provide an opportunity for all, Government Institutions, Private Sectors, Development Partners and Financial Institutions to share experiences and lessons learnt, improve skills in knowledge management, communication and strengthening the network within and between strategic partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in closing, let me reiterate our Government's commitment to working with IFAD as a partner. Our people have witnessed and benefited from the technologies introduced, and the infrastructure and value-chain support activities introduced by IFAD have had a great impact on the ground.

Thank you !