



BANGLADESH FOOD SECURITY INVESTMENT FORUM 2010

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Achieving and Sustaining Food Security in Bangladesh

Statement by

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Respected Chief Guest, Your Excellency, Sheikh Hasina, People's Republic of Bangladesh; Honourable Chairman, Dr. Abdur Razzaque, Minister for Food and Disaster Management; Your Excellency, Ms. Begum Matia Chowdhury, Minister for Agriculture; Your Excellency, Mr. Abdul Latif Biswas, Minister for Fisheries and Livestock; Excellencies, Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, USAID; Dr. Hiroyaki Konuma, Assistant Secretary-General, FAO; Dr. Shenggen Fan, IFPRI; Dr. Mujeri, Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies; Distinguished Guests and Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me start by saluting the hundreds of people who worked together to prepare this event. I am honoured to be invited to join you today. We have come together here because millions of the Bangladeshi people who depend on crop production, fish and livestock for their livelihoods are food insecure. We want to see an end to this state of this state of affairs—once and for all.

I bring you greetings and a message of support from BAN Ki-Moon UN Secretary-General. I thank you, Madam Prime Minister, for joining us in September 2009 at the event on Food Security for All co-hosted by the Secretary General and US Secretary of State Clinton, and for your participation in the Summit on World Food Security in mid November.

Pursuing a Long-Term Vision

Through VISION 2021 the Government of Bangladesh has adopted some ambitious political goals and envisages Bangladesh as a middle income country, free from poverty and with healthy growth. This starts by making sure that it is self-sufficient on staple food crops, then ensuring that people are food secure, while increasing employment and seeking to ensure sustained pro-poor economic growth. It also means tripling GDP per capita with agricultural production as the core area of growth, serving as a base for industrial development.

Indeed, investment in agriculture, food and nutrition security is at the centre of government policy. This results from the recognition that: (i) agriculture is the main engine for the nation's economic growth; (ii) access to sufficient food security from ones' own means or through safety nets is a vital component of poverty reduction, and; (iii) nutrition security is essential for each individual's growth and development.

The effort to ensure food security in Bangladesh has so far focused on achieving rice self sufficiency. Rice production has tripled in 30 years and rice imports are no longer necessary in normal years. This is a remarkable achievement by the people of Bangladesh. The government and people are now focusing on ways to sustain this achievement in the face of continually growing population, changing climate, uneven availability of water availability and deteriorating productivity of the land. The sharp rise in food prices in 2008 and 2009 served as a reminder that food systems are fragile and no country is immune.

Rice self-sufficiency is one of the goals for food security in Bangladesh. While there is almost enough to go round, Bangladesh remains a malnourished nation. Poorest people in Bangladesh do not have access to the food they need consistently nor can they use this food because of frequent illness. Out of 160m people, 60m are food insecure. Micronutrient malnutrition affects nearly 30 million women and 12 million children under 5 years old. 3 million children under 5 years old are acutely malnourished. The Government is particularly concerned by the South due to its vulnerability and food insecurity levels.

Strategic Approach

Tough questions have to be answered. How to boost agricultural productivity and promote rural livelihoods while addressing the nutritional needs of the most vulnerable? How to invest in productive assets, while ensuring that they are not lost as a result of disasters or climate change? How to ensure that existing resources for poverty reduction and social protection are being used as efficiently as possible, especially for critical safety net programs? A strategic approach is vital.

What are the elements of the strategic approach being pursued by Bangladesh? Agriculture is the predominant sector in terms of labor absorption with high elasticity of poverty reduction and is crucial for the country's food security. Increases in Agricultural Productivity will result in higher rural real wage which is likely to lower incidence and prevalence of poverty. Diversification of food production – including production of animal products - is important, as a source of income for the poor and of nutrition for all.

Population pressure is reducing: the effort to ensure that families have children by choice has been successful with Total Fertility Rate falling over 40 years from 6.5 to 2.7. This is a powerful sign of the changing status of women and the quality of reproductive health services. At the same time, Bangladesh needs to plan for continued population growth, especially in towns, with 2.5 million new mouths to feed each year until population eventually stabilizes at over 200 million.

Stewardship of natural resources needs continuous attention: intensive resource use has resulted in erosion and soil degradation. Reducing availability of agricultural land means that productivity must rise in ways that are sustainable in the long run. This must be accompanied by the better stewardship of water – particularly surface water.

Land management is also vital with a view to poor people having access access to lands such as Khas land, Char and water bodies. Coastal areas are specifically at risk with rising sea levels and intrusion of salinity causing hardships to those who are most vulnerable in these areas.

There is an ongoing need to create employment opportunities for young people especially in rural areas, hence the importance of value chain development, agro-processing and storage facilities.

Safety nets are the central pillar in an impressive Government response to widespread hunger in Bangladesh. Reaching between 30 and 50 million people per year, safety nets save the lives and livelihoods of those affected by disasters, help keep children in school and help the poorest take their first steps on a path of graduation from poverty. At the same time significant efficiency gains could be made through improvements in the targeting and design of safety nets in Bangladesh.

Scaling up efforts to tackle under-nutrition, especially in pregnant women and young children, will have a major social and economic impact – for example, through reducing the economic costs associated with Iron Deficiency anaemia in Bangladeshi Children. The scale up involves a combination of nutrition-sensitive development actions and nutrition-specific interventions. We need a Renewed Effort Against Child Hunger – to REACH out to children and communities at risk of under-nutrition.

Long Term Comprehensive Framework

Such strategic approaches have to the development of a long term Comprehensive Framework led by the Government on behalf of the peoples: the national food policy of 2006 with its Plan of Action in 2008, supported by 11 Ministries and involving civil society, private sector, NGOs and development partners. We are gathered here to day to discuss the transformation of this framework into a country investment plan or CIP.

The CIP is a set of programmes for investment that reflects the current priorities of the Government, is aligned with the sixth five year plan (2011 – 15) under development. It is comprehensive and integrated, linking the three dimensions of food security – food availability, access to food and utilization of nutrients. The CIP focuses on agriculture, water management, fisheries and livestock, the value chain, public food distribution system, safety nets, nutrition and food safety. It seeks to harmonize a broad range of interventions designed to benefit those who are most in need. It aims to mobilize public and private investment in infrastructure, institutional capacities and information. It seeks to enable smallholders, the private sector and civil society to

play their key roles in ensuring food and nutritional security for all. It brings together different elements of food security programmes—such as safety nets and environmental protection through cash transfer programmes.

For the CIP to be effectively implemented, the set up must be right. That means strong Government leadership, but not exclusive control; a favorable environment for the private sector to increase its investments and a space within which civil society and NGOs can play their full part – particularly reflecting the needs and interests of women as farmers, processors, purchasers and caregivers.

The CIP is also a tool that enables all of us to align around it following the five Rome principles, that is: ensure a comprehensive approach to food and nutrition security; ensure a collective commitment to support country led actions and plans; alignment of efforts – within country and amongst those who offer support; movements of stakeholders – coming together, working in synergy, and; securing resources and results and being accountable, together.

This alignment within Government, among development partners and between all the stakeholders has been good to date. But the preliminary inventory of ongoing investment actions by government and development partners in the CIP shows how the tool can be used and indicates that more work is needed to further align actions around agreed outcomes. That is why we, from within the UN system, stand ready to respond to Government requests for supporting continuation of the process.

Ingredients for success

The key ingredients for the success of this work include enlightened and consistent government leadership, partnerships between farmers organizations and business, patience and a will to take reasonable risks, the information systems that enables farmers, markets and consumers to be linked in a meaningful way, and the long-term commitment that spurs us all towards making a lasting difference.

The UN system agencies forming the High Level Task Force on global food security – including FAO, IFAD, WFP, UNFPA, World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP and the office of the UNRC - are committed to responding to requests from the Government and people of Bangladesh to help

improve food and nutrition security. They are ready to provide technical and financial support for developing, financing and implementing the CIP. We in the international community need to shape up to these new challenges and serve the people of Bangladesh. We are being watched and judged. We understand that the task will take years – even decades.

Conclusion

I repeat my main themes: Bangladesh has moved from being dependent on food aid to being rice sufficient. Now she is set to evolve to a situation where all her people enjoy food and nutrition security, are even more resilient in the face of threats, have a promising agriculture-based future and benefit from realizing Millennium Development Goal #1. The prioritized CIP will be a major tool for achieving this transformation and securing its benefits: it is now up to us to work together and make it real.

Thank you - Joy Bangla: Joy Bangabandhu