



Speaker Summary Note

Keynote Speaker: **Ursula Schaefer-Preuss**
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Title: **Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health**

Compelling need

This conference is timely as it will explore the pathways for agriculture of developing economies in improving nutrition and health. The present context and landscape by which we explore these pathways is extraordinarily complex. This means that there may be no-one-size-fits-all pathway.

Constructive and evidenced-based dialogues, such as this event, are essential especially for Asian and Pacific constituents. Asia and the Pacific are home to about two thirds of the world's hungry people. About 98 million are malnourished children under 5 years old.

Since the second half of 2010, prices of wheat, corn, sugar, and oil seeds are again on the rise. Prices of essential spices, like onions, garlic, and chilly, have also sharply increased. These prompted talks of another impending food crisis.

These trends are worrying, especially since many of the Asian and Pacific economies are still adjusting from the 2007–08 food and energy price hikes and the global financial crisis. Recent studies on the impact of transmission of high global food price in 2007-08 on low economies showed that the higher food prices most adversely affected the rural and urban poor who are generally net food buyers. Vulnerable households employed harmful coping strategies.

The agriculture renaissance phase

One good thing that came out of the 2007–08 food price surge experience was the reawakening among the international community, public and private sector and the NGOs, that agriculture is not a sunset industry but it needs huge investments. This period is like an “Agriculture Renaissance” phase and the conference is one of the renaissance activities for cross-learning.

Despite the complexity of the food and nutrition security challenges, Asia has much to offer in terms of emerging innovative solutions and countryside experimentation that have potentials for up scaling to sustainable pathways:

In the ADB-IFPRI study which overwhelmingly showed the transmission of the global food price increases on the poor, it noted that in Vietnam for example, the farmers gained from the food price increase, reduced their poverty and improved their malnutrition status. The reason was that Vietnamese farmers were mainly net sellers.

There are also ongoing experiments of regional measures to address food price volatility, instead of ad hoc national government responses of restricting exports. There are emerging public-private partnerships for production and marketing of fortified food, and country strategies that tackle food sector development, and improved health and nutrition holistically.

The conference is an opportunity to discuss and share freely and concertedly the pathways for agriculture to improve health and nutrition of the almost billion poor. At the end of the conference, it is hoped that a few pragmatic steps will be identified for ensuring that this renaissance phase results to sustained solutions for reducing poverty and malnutrition worldwide.