



Speaker Summary Note

Keynote Speaker: **Mohammad Abdur Razzaque**
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Title: **Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health**

H.E. Manmohan Singh Ji, Prime Minister, Republic of India; Madam Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, USA; Professor M.S Swaminathan, UNESCO Chair in Ecotechnology and Chairman M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Republic of India; Shri Sharad Pawar, Union Agriculture Minister, Government of India; Dr Shenggen Fan, Director General, International Food Policy Research Institute, USA; Eminent experts; Distinguished guests, Fellow delegates from the world over, Development partners, Ladies and gentlemen:

I feel honoured to be in the midst of such an illustrious group of policy makers and practitioners, working towards the common goal of eradicating hunger, achieving food security and nutrition by promoting agriculture, as the long term and sustainable means of improving health.

I am also pleased to be in India—our close neighbor—with whom we share a close culture and friendship. On behalf our Honorable Prime Minister Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, and the people, I extend greetings to all of you. I consider it a great conference for helping stakeholders to better design and implement strategies that tap into agricultural development for improved nutrition and health. I also wish to acknowledge my appreciation to IFPRI and USAID for having invited me to this Conference.

1. South Asia accounts for 23 percent of the world population, but generates about 2 percent of global income. Housing about 40 percent of the world's poor (living on less than a dollar a day) and 35% of the world's under-nourished, the Region has the highest concentration of poverty and food insecurity in the world. It has the 2nd highest percentage of malnourished population after Sub-Saharan Africa, but in terms of number, it houses the highest magnitude. As a supplier of food, a source of income, and an engine of growth, South Asian agriculture has the potential to significantly improve poor people's nutrition and health. Therefore, *this conference, 'Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition,' is a timely initiative of IFPRI given the challenges of food security and nutrition of the countries of the region.*
2. Let me share with you Bangladesh's increasing recognition and perspective of key issues on promoting agriculture, for improving nutrition and health. Since Independence in 1971, Bangladesh has made impressive progress in improving food security and nutrition. Food grain production has been tripled with rice production marginally surplus in normal years, however, production of wheat and other crops and non-crops are still below from that of nutritionally balanced diets for the population. Access to food has also been improved, however, the hardcore poverty incidence is still about 25 % leaving the

fact that around one quarter of the population is facing hard times getting adequate nutritious food during normal times as well as in emergencies.

3. Between 1975 and 2010, prevalence of malnutrition in Bangladesh decreased markedly, but still higher than the WHO cut-off level. The stunting and underweight rates are still around 45% and 42% respectively. Maternal under-nutrition has also decreased to 32% in 2005. This is a good indication of nutritional improvement in view of the fact that malnutrition in a child's life begins with the mother. It is to note that Bangladesh and a few other countries in the region are progressing better in terms of school enrollment, sanitation and drinking water, immunization of children, vitamin A supplementation, infant and maternal mortality etc. Agricultural development along with interventions from different sectors have contributed to improved maternal and child health outcomes.
4. The challenges for improving food security and nutrition thus lie in a combination of factors including slow pace of diversification owing to scarcity of land, faulty food utilization, inadequate awareness and sanitation, low income resulting in low-grade food intake etc. Other emerging factors, such as rapid population growth, climate change and increasing disasters, lessening access to natural resources and vulnerability to price shocks, exacerbate the situation. Sustaining agricultural growth has a paramount role here because agriculture is the primary source of all nutrients for human being. The need is to understand the linkages between the agriculture and health sectors, how the linkages operate, where the portfolio of crops and opportunities for joint action lie, what the main obstacles to such actions are, and what the socially accepted solutions are.
5. Investing in nutrition has been a commitment in Bangladesh from the highest level of leadership. Comprehensive policies have been adopted and interventions have been put in place. The National Food Policy and its Plan of Action have specific objectives on availability, access, stability and nutrition. The recently prepared Country Investment Plan (CIP) articulates 12 prioritized programmes to help achieve the objectives in the medium term. Our government is implementing over 60 food and non-food based targeted safety net programmes focusing on poor and the disadvantaged including women and children. The international community have in recent months 'showcased' Bangladesh for its success stories in food security initiatives and country-led food security policies and plans. What is needed is extensive and complementary support from development partners to our prioritized programmes.
6. Especially the investments should be pursued in agricultural livelihoods that support small-holder farmers, promotion of horticulture production, homestead gardening and adopting GMP and GHP in the food chain. Support is also needed in agricultural research for developing climate stress tolerant food crops, promotion of food-to-food enrichment and conserving biodiversity. Building linkages between complementary feeding practices and agricultural production considering community perceptions.
7. Government of Bangladesh's Vision 2021 has set, among others, the target of achieving self sufficiency in food by 2012, ensure by 2021 a minimum of 2,122 k. cal/person/day of food to all and bring down poverty incidence to 15%. For these to happen, contribution of agriculture is going to play an important role. In the face of global market uncertainties, agricultural systems including livestock and fisheries need to be strengthened. I need to recall here that ODA to agriculture has been reduced to 4% in 2007 from 19% in the 1980s, which needs to revamp. I would appeal to the international community to revive the spree of supporting research and innovation in agriculture through CGIAR front line research, and research of regional and national institutions.
8. A good number of institutional frameworks have been devised and initiatives taken under the SAARC processes for improving food security in the region. SAARC should also work on regional initiatives to leveraging agriculture for improving nutrition. I would hope that SAARC processes attain further momentum in complementing national as well as global initiatives for food security and nutrition.
9. I strongly believe that this important conference carries an opportunity to share and learn through cross country experiences and evolve mechanism for addressing policy and implementation challenges confronting agriculture, food security and nutrition and explore sustainable political, financial and technical support for the countries in need.

Thank you all