



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, all 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 of Honorable Prime Minister of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, and its 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 is shocking but a hard reality that South Asia 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 and sustainably 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 enormous progress in improving food security and nutrition. Food grain production has been tripled with rice production marginally surplus in normal years, although wheat production is still far below

the requirement. Except for pulses and oilseeds, production of vegetables, fruits, meats, milk and fishes has been increased, but the availability still remains below that of nutritionally balanced diets for the population. Trade off remains between crop diversification and production of staples.

3. Access to food has also been improved as the poverty headcount reduced, access to markets eased and targeted safety net programmes enhanced over the years. 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.
4. Between 1975 and 2010, prevalence of malnutrition in Bangladesh decreased markedly. The stunting rate in children has decreased substantially from 71% in 1992 to 45% in 2007. Underweight rates also showed marked decline from 61% in 1992 to 42 % in 2007. Maternal under-nutrition has also decreased from 53% in 1996/97 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. Agricultural development along with interventions from different sectors have contributed to improved maternal and child health outcomes. Though the long term trends in reduction of maternal and child malnutrition have been encouraging, the levels are still higher than the WHO cut-off level. Nonetheless, it is good 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.
5. 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 consumption and food utilization owing to poor sanitation, inadequate awareness towards healthy lifestyles, illness and inadequate health care, 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. Agricultural policies influence the quantity and quality of foods farmers produce, as well as the portfolio of crops they grow and the production methods they use. Agricultural policies have thus a clear impact on human health and nutrition. There is a growing recognition today that agriculture influences health, and health influences agriculture. Both, in turn, have profound implications for poverty reduction, food security and nutrition.
6. We strongly believe that opportunities exist for agriculture to contribute towards better nutrition and health. To take advantage of these opportunities, it is crucial to understand the linkages between the two sectors, how these linkages operate, where the opportunities for joint action lie, what the main obstacles to such actions are, and what the socially accepted solutions are. In the face of global market uncertainties, agricultural systems including livestock and fisheries need to be strengthened to contribute adequately and efficiently towards meeting the nutritional needs of the population. Opportunities for joint action among multiple sectors must be explored and exploited and strategic food-based interventions to address nutrition and health needs to be promoted on a sustainable basis.
7. Investing in nutrition has been a commitment in Bangladesh from the highest level of leadership. Policies have been adopted and interventions have been put in place. The government of Bangladesh has been implementing over 65 food and non-food based safety net programmes targeted to poor and disadvantaged population—women and children and more specifically pregnant women, children below five years and elderly, and distressed women and men. Efforts are also ongoing to realign these programmes considering nutritional needs of the targeted population. Given the cross cutting nature of nutrition problems, multisectoral efforts, such as from agriculture, health, nutrition, education and food and disaster management needs to be pursued.
8. The National Food Policy and the National Food Policy Plan of Action (2008 -2015) is embarked upon the need for comprehensiveness of the policies for food security in the country to achieve: (i) adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food, (ii) increased purchasing power and access to food of the people and (iii) adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially for women and children. Guided by stakeholder's involvement, policy consistency and results orientation, the Plan of Action serves as an instrument to align donors' interventions with Government priorities. It also identifies relevant sectors

for collaboration and provides a set of policy targets and indicators to monitor progress towards meeting the MDG1 of eradicating hunger and malnutrition.

9. The Government has prepared a Country Investment Plan (CIP) which includes a coherent set of 12 priority investment programmes to improve food security and nutrition in an integrated way. In particular, the CIP represents an investment tool in support of poverty reduction strategy of Bangladesh by including agriculture as a major contributor to pro-poor economic growth, food security, social protection and nutrition. The CIP reflects the Government's investment priorities to: (1) plan and invest resources in a coordinated way, (2) increase convergence and alignment of budget and external sources of funding and (3) mobilize additional resources. Of the 12 programmes, 3 programmes are exclusively related to nutrition, with proposals for scaling up national nutrition services and developing sustainable, multi sectoral nutrition programmes. 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.
10. The international community should come forward to support to our prioritized programmes. Especially the investments should be pursued in agricultural livelihoods that support small-holder farmers particularly women, so as to make significant contributions to preventing child malnutrition. Agricultural interventions will need to be prioritized to increase the production of energy and nutrient-dense food throughout the year. Plant breeding and food-to-food enrichment, promotion of healthy rice and grain varieties, horticulture and conserving biodiversity and indigenous foods are other areas of focus of the CIP. GMP and GHP should be pursued in the production and marketing chain in order to ensure safe food for the population.
11. Efforts are also being made to scale up Bangladesh's homestead gardening through nutrition education programme which has been in operation for two decades in collaboration with development partners. Future agricultural intervention programmes will have explicit objectives of improving nutritional status with a focus on child under nutrition. Child stunting will be addressed through building strengthened linkages between complementary feeding requirements/practices and agricultural production. Community perceptions and practices should be supplemented by scientific innovations.
12. In conclusion, the contribution of the agriculture sector to national food security objectives makes it a key player in the achievement of national nutrition objectives. In order to move forward, efforts will now have to be focused on mainstreaming nutrition into the key sectors notably agriculture, food and health. Improved governance, strengthening coordination and collaboration among sectors and strong involvement of local government and private sector are vital. International development partners have to extend support to our programmes. I need to recall here that ODA to agriculture has been reduced to 4% in 2006-07 from 19% in the 1980s. I would appeal to the international community to revive the spree of supporting research and innovation in agriculture. Especially aid and grants to CGIAR front line research is extremely important to face the challenge of feeding people in future. Support is also needed to improve and sustain capacity of research in the regional agricultural institutions.
13. A good number of institutional frameworks have been devised and initiatives taken under the SAARC processes for improving food security in the region. The Colombo Statement on Food Security during the 15th SAARC Summit, the SAFTA, the SAARC poverty alleviation initiatives, the SAARC Development Fund and SDGs, the SAARC Agriculture Perspective/Vision 2020 and the SAARC Food Bank Agreement in 2007 have brought great opportunities to work together for the betterment of the people of 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.
14. 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