

36th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC 36)

Ministerial Session, 2 pm, 10 March 2022

Bangladesh response to Item 10: Special Event on “Innovation, Science and Digitalization: Transforming agrifood systems in Asia and the Pacific region”

5 minutes

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished Delegates,

We see the subject of deliberation in this session as being the engine for agri-food system transformation in this region. In this context, FAO’s Science and Innovation Strategy is very timely and highly relevant.

With around 40 per cent of our workforce engaged in agriculture and allied sectors, we see development of this sector as being at the core for Bangladesh’s transformation to a high- income knowledge-based economy by 2041 and science, innovation and digital technology as the vehicles to realize this goal. The E-Government Master Plan for Digital Bangladesh 2019 has a dedicated section on the digitization of agriculture services and Digital Commerce Policy 2018 paves the path for creating e-commerce around agriculture produce with objectives related to digital transformation and digitization for agriculture sector. From use of robots and GIS in agriculture to weather forecasting and crop-based advisories, we are in the process of harnessing the immense potential of science digital technology to take Bangladesh agriculture to the next level as part of Industrial Revolution 4.0. Digital technology is being used for improving the performance and realizing the potential of the livestock and fisheries sector also.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges, it has also accelerated the use of digital technology and innovations to ensure minimal disruption of supply chains during the period of crisis. Online marketing of both agriculture and livestock products including online cattle market have developed fast and are here to stay. Virtual Call Centres managed by Farmer Producer Organisations formed under the Missing Middle Initiative supported by FAO, managed to link suppliers with buyers, for both inputs and sale of produce and ensured the operation of rural food supply chains. This is set to expand further.

Our ambitious Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 is built on harnessing the potential of modelling techniques, forecasting and digital technology to realize the vision

of a “safe, climate resilient and prosperous Delta”. Technology is also at the heart of realizing the potential of the Blue Economy, using spatial planning and other techniques to promote synergies and foster framework conditions that support specific maritime economic activities and their value chains.

To ensure that the approach is inclusive and the vulnerable are integrated into the process, financial innovations have been put in place and we are actively mainstreaming the G2P payment system for transfer of social protection benefits. We believe agricultural as a profession can become extremely appealing thanks to digital transformation; this can attract more youth to agriculture. Fostering digital entrepreneurship is of utmost importance for the Government of Bangladesh and strengthening of innovative financing and improved operational modalities and institutional capacities will be critical going forward.

We are optimistic and look forward to FAO’s support in putting in place policies to address challenges that come with the 4 IR, relating to digital economy, data protection, AI and IP protection. We also see FAO’s Digital Village Initiative as complementary to and critical for transforming our agriculture sector. At the regional level, FAO can create a regional digitalization centre or hub for sharing of data and best practices and latest developments in this area. Bangladesh is willing to host such institution (with support of development partners) if agreed in principle. Science, Innovation and Digital Technology are crucial for fulfilling the pathway commitments we have made for transformation of food systems to realize the SDGs under the UN Food Systems Summit. We see FAO’s support as critical in this process.

I Thank You all

Written Response from Bangladesh to Complementary Question by Moderator

"Bangladesh has called for establishment of a Regional Digitization Hub and offered to host it. We shall prepare a Concept Note with details of how its objectives including active engagement of the private sector and state of the art infrastructure can be accomplished, with funding cooperation from Development Partners; activities to be undertaken in the short, medium and long term will be elaborated. We would like to present this at the next Regional Expert meeting to discuss FAO Science and Innovation Strategy that the respected ADG, the moderator of this Ministerial roundtable, mentioned in his introductory remarks."