

## **Prioritization of country and regional needs -Bhutan**

Excellencies and distinguished delegates!

Yet again, I would like to avail this opportunity to deliver a statement on behalf of the Bhutanese delegation. Given that I had the opportunity to greet distinguished members earlier today, I wish to confined myself this time to delve upon Bhutan and region's needs and priorities as required by the agenda.

The Asia and the Pacific is a diverse region in the world and home to about sixty percent of the global population. The region consists of towering economic nations, island nations as well a small and landlocked countries ranging from lower-middle-income to high-income economies.

With half of the total land under agriculture, the region is the largest agriculture producer in the world. Agriculture sector employs a fifth of its population and contributes more than a quarter to GDP. Thus, besides providing lifeline for the people, the sector also stands critical in realizing global commitments such as SDG goals of eradicating poverty and zeroing hunger among others. The role of the sector is only going to be felt more importantly with rising population and burgeoning middle class brought about by galloping economic growth. Therefore, agricultural development is critical to ensure that the sector is able to meet the increasing food demands.

On the other hand, meeting the increasing food demand will not be without hurdles as the sector is confronted with many barriers. About 76% of Asia's poor living in rural areas depending on agriculture largely characterized by fragmented land holdings, limited arable land, inadequate water and poor resource management, low farm yields, environmental and soil degradation and infrastructure inadequacy. In recent years, COVID pandemic has further exacerbated the food sector. According to a report from the Asian Development Bank, the pandemic has pushed an additional 80 million people in developing Asia into extreme poverty, thereby creating greater food insecurity. Of the total hunger population surged due to the pandemic, about 72% of it occurred in Asia. This is in addition to the estimated 900 million people experiencing food insecurity in the region. While Bhutan has been able to keep the issue of food insecurity at bay under the leadership of our visionary leader, the pandemic has exposed inadequacies in our food distribution system.

These pandemic impacts are being further worsened by the impacts of climate change, which continues to ravage the food sector in particular. The Asia and Pacific region is more vulnerable to climate change risks than other regions of the world because of its dependence on the natural resources and agriculture sectors. About 2.4 billion people living in the coastal areas and down streams in the region faces perennial threat of climate shocks. International Food Policy Research Institute reports that higher temperature reduces yields, proliferates weed and pests, changes precipitation patters thereby declining the production. Moreover, the rice yield in Southeast Asia by 50 percent by the end of this century due to the impacts of climate change.

The impact is even more pressing in mountainous and landlocked countries, where agriculture is largely dependent on seasonal monsoon for water requirement. In Bhutan, rice is the staple food - a water intensive crop which is very sensitive to the impacts of climatic change. Rising fallow land due

to water scarcity is already a mounting issue in the country. Apart from this, the more structural issues include limited agriculture land and topographical terrains, which have limited mechanization and commercial uptake. The productivity has been consistently low, resulting in huge imports. On the other hand, limited standardization and certification as well as inconsistent supply continues to hinder our export potential.

As a minister in charge of the agriculture ministry, I am reminded of what His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan has for the agriculture sector. According to His Majesty

*“Agriculture is not just an industry for Bhutan, but also an important source of culture in Bhutan. If the power of agriculture were to decrease, so would the power of the country.”*

Accordingly, the ultimate aim is to model a resilient agriculture sector to secure a sustainable social and economic well-being of the Bhutanese people through adequate access to food and natural resources. As we see, a robust agriculture sector will not only help secure food and nutrition, but also to preserve the sector as an integral part of Bhutanese culture.

Therefore, at the regional level, there is a need to transform agriculture making it more modern, climate-proof, and inclusive as the region recovers from the coronavirus pandemic. We need to leverage ICT opportunities, agriculture mechanization, subsidy, value addition and processing. Equally critical will be to boost agricultural trade within the region.

As I conclude my statement, I humbly call upon the countries of the Asia and the Pacific region to reaffirm ourselves to a collective responsibility to make successful recovery from the shocks of COVID pandemic, and to foster collective partnerships in addressing the issues and challenges confronting the food sector.

**Thank you and Trashi Delek!**