

Check Against Delivery

INAUGURAL SESSION

**SAARC-FAO CONSULTATION MEETING ON THE SUSTAINABILITY
OF REGIONAL SUPPORT UNIT FOR LIVESTOCK**

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REMARKS

BY

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**Distinguished Chairman of the SAARC Programming Committee,
Esteemed SAARC National Focal Points and their representatives,
Distinguished Delegates and Experts,**

Good Morning.

**It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address the opening session of this
SAARC-FAO Consultation Meeting being held in Kathmandu today.**

**On behalf of the SAARC Secretariat and on my own behalf, I wish to
extend to you all a very warm welcome to Kathmandu and to this
meeting, in particular. I would also like to avail myself of this
opportunity to wish you all very fruitful and meaningful deliberations
during today's session, as well as a pleasant and memorable stay in
Kathmandu.**

Distinguished Delegates,

The importance of livestock as a source of livelihood in South Asia cannot be over emphasized. Livestock accounts for roughly 30% of the region's agricultural GDP, while 60% of those resources are owned by smallholders, who are vulnerable to recurrences of outbreaks. To cite an example, India's annual loss from merely one Transboundary Animal Disease, namely, *Foot and Mouth Disease*, is around five billion US dollars. Another such example is, since 2007, loss suffered by Bangladesh's poultry industry alone nears about one billion US dollars.

It is in this backdrop that SAARC welcomes consultation and collaboration with its international partners such as the European Union and the Japan Fund for Poverty Alleviation in setting the right priorities for the region and implementing back-to-back programmes on combating *Highly Pathogenic and Emerging Diseases* (HPED) and *Transboundary Animal Diseases* (TADs). The Regional Support Unit (RSU) of SAARC created to enhance national and regional capacities in epidemiology and laboratory diagnosis of TADs serves as a true platform for a cross-section of veterinarians in the region. It is also heartening to note that the web-based disease information and alerting system of the RSU paved the way for the region-wide dissemination of information pertaining to diagnosis, reporting, surveillance, investigation and outbreak. Also to the advantage of the Member States, the RSU

disseminates the latest disease management and technology information through multiple training sessions and workshops. Additionally, the RSU's efforts in terms of harmonizing the regional control strategies of the priority TADs such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), *Peste des Petis Ruminants* (PPR) and Avian Influenza (AI) are indeed noteworthy.

As you are aware, apart from the identified priority diseases, there are threats relating to zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance in animal origin food, environmental impact of livestock production and so on. The nature of the challenge, therefore, calls for a concerted regional intervention, backed up by a long-term strategy and work plan.

Distinguished Delegates,

Considering the accomplishments of the HPED project during 2010-15 with funding from the European Union and the project on TADs with support from the Japan Fund for Poverty Alleviation during 2015-2017, a logical expectation from all of us is that the SAARC endeavour on livestock issues, such as the RSU activities, would sustain. The Japan Fund for Poverty Alleviation and ADB-funded project on combating TADs is coming to an end this July and there is a directive from the relevant SAARC bodies to bring the project resources into the SAARC fold on completion of the project. In this regard, the Concept Note circulated by the SAARC Secretariat presents a few plausible options

given the resource constraints. As per the directive of the Standing Committee, even if the RSU merges with the SAARC Agriculture Centre and the Member States contribute by deputing experts in a staggered manner, we would still need to project and allocate the programme cost. I do hope that the Members of the Programming Committee and their Representatives present at this Session today would be able to find a solution that best serves our collective interest. However, I must be frank in admitting that committing any major expenditure from our Member States will be difficult given that there is presently a moratorium in creating new SAARC mechanisms.

Nevertheless, a general consensus among us is that regional cooperation in the livestock sector should sustain and we have an ample scope to learn from and build on the successes of the HPED and TAD projects. We will, therefore, be very happy to welcome more such need-based collaborative regional projects from the FAO and other international specialized bodies.

In concluding my brief remarks, I once again wish you all a great success in your deliberations and the visiting delegates a pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

Thank you!
