

INAUGURAL SESSION
(28 AUGUST 2018)

**First SAARC Agriculture Cooperative Business Forum:
Organizing and Strengthening Family Farmers' Cooperatives to attain SDG-1 and SDG-2 in South
Asia**
Kathmandu, 28-30 August 2018

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Honourable Minister for Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation of Nepal,
Distinguished Delegates from the Member States of SAARC,
Esteemed Representatives from FAO, IFAD, AFA and LVC,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to extend very warm welcome to all participants and representatives of our development partners. The participation from all Member States reflects the importance SAARC attaches to the theme of the Forum.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address the First SAARC Agriculture Cooperative Business Forum.

We are greatly honoured by the distinguished presence in our midst of the Hon'ble Minister for Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation of Nepal as the Chief Guest.

I wish to thank FAO and AFA for co-organizing this Forum with support from IFAD. The arrangements made for this event are excellent.

The theme chosen for this Forum, namely, *Organizing and Strengthening Family Farmers' Cooperatives to attain SDG-1 and SDG-2 in South Asia*, is highly relevant to SAARC.

I am delighted to see the participation of representatives both from the government and non-governmental entities as well as from regional and international organizations in this important Forum. With the expertise and experience that the participants and experts bring to this Forum, I am confident of a successful outcome of this Forum.

Distinguished Delegates,

As you are aware, South Asia is home to around a quarter of the global population, majority of whom live in the rural areas and depend on natural resources like land, freshwater, coastal fisheries, and forests. Much of the agricultural production in the region is undertaken by smallholders with very small landholdings, while women play a significant role in agriculture. In the context of diminishing farm sizes, sustainable Family Farmers' Cooperatives can play an instrumental role in achieving food security, improving nutrition and developing value chain, eventually contributing to poverty alleviation and ending hunger.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will be happy to know that Cooperatives, which have been internationally recognized as an effective and sustainable mechanism for poverty alleviation and livelihood improvement, is also a part of the SAARC process. The SAARC Agriculture Vision 2020, which was adopted by the SAARC Agriculture Ministers in 2008, recognized that “Small-sized farms in South Asia face serious constraints in adopting modern technology and in marketing their produce. To some extent, the size disadvantage can be obviated through contract and cooperative farming.”

Moreover, at the Eighteenth SAARC Summit, our leaders recognized the potential of Cooperatives in “achieving inclusive, broad-based and sustainable economic growth and development,” and called for “sharing of experiences, expertise and best practices in this sector.” In the context of the Eighteenth Summit directive, the convening of this Forum is a step forward in the right direction. I am also pleased to state that following the inclusion of Cooperatives as an agreed area of cooperation, an intergovernmental process is underway for finalizing the SAARC Plan of Action for cooperation in matters relating to Cooperatives.

Distinguished Participants,

As you are well aware, Cooperatives have proved to be life-changing means for the poor and the vulnerable communities and means for empowerment of women and youth. Cooperatives help ensure people's ownership and leadership in the development process in a judicious and fair manner. In addition, Cooperatives can be a powerful tool to promote social harmony and understanding by developing the culture of collaboration, cooperation and partnership.

In the context of South Asia, Cooperatives sector has already established itself as an important economic actor. Moreover, the Member States of SAARC have been supporting Cooperatives as instruments for promoting inclusive and sustainable development. Similarly, Agriculture Cooperatives have long been playing an important role in the region, contributing to the development of agricultural production-based economy through facilitating market as well as developing leadership. Milk/dairy Cooperatives, Farmers' Cooperatives, Fisheries Cooperatives are some of the successful examples of Agricultural Cooperatives in South Asia.

Agricultural Cooperatives can be an effective instrument in tackling the formidable challenge of poverty in the SAARC region. Reaching out to the marginalized segments of the society, Cooperatives can help in employment generation by encouraging small and medium enterprises in communities. Women and the vibrant youth population, with proper awareness and education on agriculture cooperatives, could also be utilized in the poverty eradication programmes in the region.

This Forum provides a welcome opportunity to the participants to exchange views on further promoting Family Farmers' Cooperatives in the attainment of SDG-1 and SDG-2 in South Asia.

I wish the Forum great success and the delegates pleasant stay in this beautiful city of Kathmandu.

I thank you.
