

INAUGURAL SESSION
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South-South Cooperation Forum in South Asia:
Promoting Sustainable Family Farming Agriculture to achieve SDG 1 and 2

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Distinguished Secretary of the Ministry of Agricultural Development of Nepal,
Esteemed Representatives from the Member States of SAARC, Food and Agriculture
Organization, International Fund for Agriculture Development and Asian Farmers' Association
for Sustainable Rural Development,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address the South-South Cooperation Forum in South Asia
this morning.

The importance of this Forum to us stems from the fact that it is devoted to sustainable farming,
which is one of the priorities of SAARC.

On this note, I wish to thank the co-organizers for this important initiative.

I am delighted to see the participation of the representatives both from the government and non-
governmental entities as well as from regional and international organizations at this important
Forum. Their presence at this event is a testimony to their commitment to promote sustainable
agriculture.

Distinguished Delegates,

South Asia is home to around a quarter of the global population. Ensuring food and nutrition
security for such a huge population is indeed an enormous challenge. It is so in spite of the fact
that our region is endowed with vast agricultural landmass and features unmatched agricultural
diversity.

Although dependence on agriculture as a major contributor to GDP has declined in a few Member
States, agriculture continues to be the mainstay of the South Asian economies. However, the
agricultural sector in the region encounters massive challenges which include, *inter alia*,
increasing population, shrinking arable lands and farm sizes, rapid urbanization, impact of climate
change and natural disasters.

Distinguished Delegates,

Food security and agriculture constitute a key component of cooperation under the framework of
SAARC. The mechanism of the meeting of SAARC Agriculture Ministers provides policy
directives for regional cooperation in agriculture, while the Technical Committee on Agriculture
and Rural Development pursues these directives. The "SAARC Agriculture Vision 2020" shows

the way forward for enhanced regional engagement in the field of agriculture. Other mechanisms such as the SAARC Food Bank and the SAARC Seed Bank have been created to achieve the objective of ensuring food security; in fact, SAARC Seed Bank is the body which connects SAARC with the farmers. An Inter-Governmental Core-Group on Agricultural Research and Extension is also active. The SAARC Agriculture Centre, which is a centre of excellence, has been successful in addressing the needs of research and development in the field of agriculture.

SAARC is committed to increase investment, promote research and development, facilitate technical cooperation and apply innovative, appropriate and reliable technologies in agriculture for enhancing productivity and promoting sustainable farming in order to ensure food and nutritional security. SAARC has also initiated an inter-governmental process to contextualize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the regional level. In the meanwhile, the Member States of SAARC are already integrating and aligning SDGs into their national plans for implementation. Since SDG 1 and SDG 2 are directly related to ending poverty and hunger, SAARC attaches high priority to these Goals. I must emphasize that ensuring food and nutrition security is impossible without advancement of sustainable agriculture.

SAARC and FAO have been engaged in a number of regional projects on transboundary animal diseases, agriculture, food security and nutrition. SAARC is also exploring possibilities of cooperation in these areas with other regional and international organizations.

Distinguished Delegates,

I am confident that this Forum will provide a welcome opportunity to the participants to share the best practices and experiences and make recommendations for the promotion of sustainable agriculture, with due emphasis on involvement of women and youth, for achieving SDG 1 and 2. I wish the Forum great success and the delegates a pleasant stay in this beautiful historic city of Kathmandu.

I thank you.

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