

Launching of 'Global Food Policy Report 2011' by IFPRI

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*Remarks of Dr. Muhammad Razzaque, Minister for Food and Disaster
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Excellencies
Director-General, IFPRI
Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning/afternoon to you all

1. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be able to attend the launching ceremony of '**Global Food Policy Report 2011**' by IFPRI. At the very outset, I would like to thank IFPRI for producing yet another excellent report of outstanding facts and figures in relation to policy changes across the globe. I think it a privilege for me to say a few words on this wonderful occasion.

2. The Report, as it appears to me, covers major events related to agriculture and food security across the world and discusses how they helped shape national and regional policies eventually contributed to the emergence of global food policy shifts towards more investment in agriculture leading to more outputs, still leaving uncertainty in supply and prices along the months of the year. And it has essentially reiterated one important fact about price volatility- which 'harm both consumers and producers by increasing uncertainty and making it difficult for households to budget for food consumption and to plan for production.'

3. Thanks to the authors-they have assimilated both good news as well as bad news across the regions, across dimensions of food security. But most important to me are the words- "Emerging economies such as Brazil, China, and India have gained an increasing voice in international decision making, moving from being aid recipients to aid donors and trading partners, with their own global agendas." But I like to put caution on the words 'their own global agendas'. How long the global governance of food security would take to come up with only one common agenda, that is, improve access and nutrition of the world poor and align their activities/programs accordingly. Be it G8 or G20, the ASEAN+3, the UN and the CFS, the SAARC and others. Would geo-political agenda continue to dominate over humanitarian aspect of reducing poverty and food insecurity in the world?

4. The most bad news to me is the recurrence of price volatility due the same factors that led to the food crisis in 2007 and 2008- high oil prices, biofuel policies that promote the expansion of biofuel production, increased weather-related shocks such as droughts and

floods, and growing demand from emerging economies. More importantly to note that the global food security governance has somehow failed to come to a consensus on food security friendly bio-fuel policy for the world. A somewhat pale progress has also been seen in the WTO negotiations. Various forms of export bans and or restrictions by major exporting countries have also prevailed making it inevitable more pragmatic actions by the world community in this regard. It seems humanitarian considerations have yet to attract the attention of the global food security governance.

5. Nevertheless the Report did some fabulous work by bringing cross-cutting issues like climate change, governance and geo-political issues (namely, Arab spring) in the discussions of global developments in food policy. These are indeed useful for national, regional and global think tanks as to how they are instrumental in the way of improving food security in the most vulnerable regions of the world. Although the Report revealed some progress or momentum at the global climate change negotiations in Cancun and Durban, when it says that 'a treaty by 2015' and 'an agreement by 2020' is expected to reach. However, it seems taking longer time to contain the unbridled development paths of the developed world than what the earth is ready to bear.

6. What is more striking is the issue of foreign land acquisitions—especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Report has rightly mentioned that such acquisitions have the potential to inject much-needed investment into agriculture in developing countries, but they can also harm the food security and livelihoods of the local poor, especially by eroding women's customary land rights. But what the Report could tell about is the 'missing institutions' in order for ensuring the fruits of the investment back to the investors' own country- for example, in augmenting food supply in the investors' own country. On the land use issue, the Report could also suggest more on the ethical aspect of loss of agricultural land for food crops due to bio-fuel production. What is of more important to note that plenty of cultivable lands in many countries are being kept fallow. In order to address the increasing global challenges of food security, those unused lands must be brought under cultivation.

7. As said earlier, the Report rightly takes stock of the major events of global food policy actions and events, the supply and price situation, and the efforts at the global, regional and national level in the field of climate change, land management and other cross cutting issues. However, as far as the regional initiatives are concerned, it seems the main focus has been put on Africa, leaving space for further discussions on South Asia and Latin America.

8. Let me mention few regional initiatives under the umbrella of SAARC. The Seventeenth SAARC Summit held in Maldives and the SAARC Agriculture Ministers' have directed to operationalize 'SAARC Food Bank' established in 2007. But for many reasons, the SAARC Food Bank didn't find its way to assist member countries in times of emergencies and shocks. Another milestone of sub-regional cooperation is the holding of Bhutan Climate Summit and its preceding meetings in Bhutan last year which developed a 'Regional Framework' for adapting to climate change impacts in the Eastern Himalayan Countries- India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. What I feel that the FAO, WFP and other UN bodies

have a technical role to play in assisting South Asian Countries to materialize Summit/Ministerial level decisions.

9. The other aspect, of course, is the national level efforts. The Report has rightly mentioned few initiatives by India (enactment of food security bill), China (CHINA no.1 document for water conservation) and Russia (the withdrawal of export ban). To me, what was required to elucidate some of the case studies of efforts made by individual countries that experienced huge stress due to global food price volatility. For example, my country, Bangladesh, implemented a bunch of strategies and actions to address price volatility. On the one hand, it increased investment in agriculture and introduced targeted subsidy of inputs together with general subsidy and expanded the coverage of safety net and price stabilization measures on the other. Not only it enhanced the Open Market Sale, it introduced new price stabilization measures like Fair Price Cards for the poor and subsidized ration for low income government and garments industry employees. It is worthwhile to mention here that, with all our efforts, the purchasing power of the day laborers has increased in Bangladesh due to increase in their income or rice-wage equivalent by manifolds.

10. It resorted to augment supply through government to government contract in the face of non-fulfillment of import target by commercial tenders. All these happened in the wake of dwindling food aid, even actual delivery fell behind commitments. Thus despite global uncertainty in supply and price instability, the government was successful in managing the shock. Especially the shocks on the poor were greatly reduced. As the short and medium term measures for augmenting production, the Government's stimulus packages for the agriculture sector have yielded good results in terms of enhancing **resilience in foodgrain production**. The production of food grain has been increased by 24 percent as compared to 2006-07. What is required is to sustain this growth trend. This necessitates technological innovations and research in agriculture and developing climatic stress tolerant crop varieties. And this is possible through better collaboration between CGIAR institutions and national research system which in turn necessitates increased donor funding to these institutions.

11. In order to prioritize investments in agriculture and food security, the Bangladesh government, with the active support and involvement of donors and other stakeholders, formulated the Country Investment Plan in 2010-2011 with an estimated budget of 8 billion dollars. While the estimated investment gap is about 5 billion dollars, about 3.4 billion dollars need to be mobilized on priority basis. The IFPRI Global Report may shed some light on these aspects too.

12. Good to see in the end, the Report acknowledged few facts on donor's rigidity to move funds. And as a future outlook, the Report urged the G8 summit to work to ensure that the industrial countries meet their financial commitment in support of country-led development processes for achieving food security in developing countries. I like the way the Report asked the Rio+20 Summit to integrate economic, social, and environmental sustainability efforts and commit to concrete action to meet the long-term challenges of development, including poor nutrition, degraded soils, and scarce water.

13. In all, I think the Report would be equally helpful to all- policy makers, the national and international governments, the researchers and the implementation officials. I once again thank IFPRI for producing such an impressive Report.

Thank you all.