

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## **OPENING REMARKS OF USAID ADMINISTRATOR RAJIV SHAH BANGLADESH FOOD SECURITY INVESTMENT FORUM 2010**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2010**

Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina,

Minister of Agriculture, Begum Matia Chowdhury,

Minister of Food and Disaster Management, Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque

Members of Cabinet and Advisors to the Prime Minister,

Distinguished Officials,

Guest speakers, delegates and members of the media, civil society, and private sector organizations;

Assalam-u-Alaikum, and Good Morning.

Madame Prime Minister, my government is deeply impressed by your determination to ensure a future free of hunger for Bangladesh. At the World Summit on Food Security in Rome last November you delivered an important message and asked the global community to do more to help. Today we are gathered in Dhaka to heed your call.

In his inaugural address, President Barack Obama pledged that the United States would work alongside people in developing nations to help their farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds.

We know food security facilitates stable communities and resilient nations. We know agricultural development growth is more effective at reducing poverty than general economic growth. And we know children need nutrition to learn and grow. President Obama followed up his inaugural address with a promise to commit at least \$3.5 billion to food security assistance.

Last July, donor countries committed more than \$20 billion towards this problem and just as importantly we committed to a new way of doing business.

We committed to:

1. Supporting country owned plans, instead of dictating priorities from afar,

2. Working in a comprehensive way – from research to marketing to food access for vulnerable populations, instead of simply funding free standing projects,
3. Prioritizing women, as opposed to traditional programs that benefit men,
4. Coordinating bilateral/multilateral mechanisms to achieve more together,
5. And focusing on results.

I congratulate the government of Bangladesh for its efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy that the rest of the world can align behind. And I congratulate Bangladesh's development partners for living up to these principles.

These are extraordinary times. And Bangladesh faces an extraordinary challenge. Given its current population of 160 million that continues to increase, Bangladesh will need to feed 180 million people in 2020, and 220 million by 2050.

Despite Bangladesh's large gains in agriculture, under-nutrition in children, adolescents and women remains a major concern. Too many Bangladeshis live below the food poverty line. Lack of dietary diversity in early childhood, poor infant feeding practices, and inadequate maternal nutrition contribute to a persistently high prevalence of stunting in children (>40%).

Given that, this forum's goal – to develop and support a resilient agriculture, nutrition and food security plan – is absolutely critical.

We support Bangladesh and all its partners in developing its food security investment program, and believe your planning process demonstrates two key indicators of success: a strong commitment from the highest levels of government to creating a vibrant market-oriented, agricultural economy and the involvement of all stakeholders, including civil society and private sector partners. These two attributes are critical to sustaining success over the long term.

The tremendous leadership of my esteemed government colleagues cannot be understated. Under the direction of Honorable Minister Razzaque, the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management has provided coordination and oversight of multi-sectoral and inter-ministerial work. In particular, I would like to recognize the work of the thematic teams which include twelve ministries, other government agencies and development partners. We look forward to continued leadership from the government in coordinating this diverse set of development actors around the investment plan.

A plan is only as good as the energy behind it. The government has already demonstrated commitment to this issue through its presence at this investment forum at the highest possible levels. As we continue this process, we recognize that you will have some tough decisions to make.

Your National Food Policy Plan of Action already presents an impressive series of interventions, such as irrigation projects and the development of micro-finance associations. We urge you to clarify the

links between these interventions and your food security goals (e.g. irrigation, seed production, fisheries) and clearly designate a coordinating mechanism within the GOB for ongoing oversight.

Your plan of action admirably specifies indicators to measure progress for many of the programs you outline. For instance, it sets targets for numbers of new road kilometers. We believe that a next step is to quantify your goals in other areas - such as food storage capacity and private market development or measures of success for livestock value chains.

Your plan clearly recognizes that agricultural issues are intricately related to gender, climate and nutritional issues. We believe that embedding these concerns in your core agricultural programs – and taking bold decisions such as professionally hiring female extension workers – will strengthen the plan.

Most importantly, we believe you could enhance the plan by focusing on the highest-impact interventions among the many projects outlined and linking these priorities to outcome metrics.

To assist Bangladesh in this process, the United States will enhance our agriculture and nutrition teams in country and will commit \$15 million this year alone towards advancing the agricultural components in your plan. In addition, we will commit \$4 million to nutrition interventions such as infant and young child feeding. This will supplement \$200 million over five years to support our ongoing food assistance program.

In total, these commitments represent a 20-fold increase for agriculture and nutrition over our 2009 spending. But our commitment does not end there. We will support Bangladesh's application to the World Bank's Trust Fund, and July Investment Forum of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). We will commit to maintaining or increasing our bilateral investments in future years, if Bangladesh maintains its commitment to this plan. We know success will take many years, and we want to stand together with you for the long haul.

Our assistance in advancing your plan will build on a long history of USAID support for food security in Bangladesh.

USAID supported the development of the Bangladesh Agricultural University, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, and the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute. We also invested in efforts to reform input markets, improve cereal crops' stress tolerance, and make new fertilizer technology available to more farmers. And many of these efforts worked – as highlighted in IFPRI's new study: Millions Fed.

In the 1980s, Government of Bangladesh moved to liberalize agricultural input markets that included fertilizers and farm equipment. This led to an easing of restrictions on the importation and sale of irrigation equipment, such as low-lift power pumps for use with shallow tube wells. These seemingly minor reforms stimulated the rapid growth of irrigated dry-season boro rice farming. Fertilizer input

reforms led to a ninety percent increase in rice production in Bangladesh between 1988 and 2007. With more rice production, rice prices started to decline. This helped food-insecure households, and ultimately led to significant reductions in poverty across the country.

More recently, during the past five years, our joint food assistance program has improved the health, economic well-being and, ultimately, food security of over 4.6 million people, increasing monthly income of beneficiaries by 128% while reducing stunting among children under five years by 28%.

Going forward, under our Feed the Future initiative, USAID will follow the lead of the Government of Bangladesh. And we will expand the tools at our disposal to help you implement your strategy.

We are developing a range of philanthropic and corporate partnerships to boost private sector investment in Bangladesh, especially in livestock, fisheries, and high value agricultural crops. We will expand Bangladesh's access to bank lending through our Development Credit Authority. And we are finalizing grant mechanisms to provide small-and medium-sized Bangladeshi firms with equity finance.

In recent years we have learned that women are the backbone of our partners' agricultural systems. Women have a central role in farming. And when women control gains in income, they are more likely to spend their gains on family needs. So we will encourage partners to hire women as extension workers, and we've asked each of our country teams to expand investments in women's producer networks and fellowship programs to develop female agricultural leaders, who could follow in the footsteps of leaders like Matia Chowdhury.

In collaboration with our Global Health Initiative, we also are targeting women and young children with high impact nutrition interventions. Some of these interventions – like micronutrient supplementation programs – have been very successful.

We look forward to working with Bangladesh to expand interventions that improve diet quality, young child feeding practices, and maternal nutrition to prevent undernutrition in the critical 1,000 day window of opportunity.

We also plan to support research into promising approaches like biofortification and community management of acute undernutrition, both of which could be tremendously valuable tools for Bangladesh.

Finally, we will continue to support your efforts to use science and technology to best serve the food security needs of Bangladesh. For example, we will continue to support efforts to develop and disseminate high yielding, stress tolerant cereal varieties as we do through the Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA).

These interventions will help farmers grow more food in the face of increased soil salinity while using energy, water and fertilizer more efficiently – farmers like Ahsan Habib and Abdul Mannan in the

village of Momipur in Rangpur. Through CSISA they have received quality, high yielding seeds and instruction in techniques to practice conservation agriculture.

The National Food Policy Plan of Action is evolving at an impressive pace. This food security forum marks a major milestone toward what we all recognize as the most critical step, which is the implementation of this technically sound plan.

Thanks to the determination of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the dedication of you who have worked so tirelessly to craft this plan, the people of Bangladesh can look forward to a brighter future, free from extreme hunger and filled with greater economic opportunity.

The government of Bangladesh is fulfilling its commitment to lead the process. My government will fulfill our commitment to support your progress in any way possible.

The fight to end hunger starts here in Bangladesh.

Now we must show the world we can succeed.

By working together, I am confident we will.

Thank you.

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*\*As prepared for delivery*

**GR/ 2010**