

OPENING SPEECH¹

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Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Regional Workshop on Strategic Assessment for Climate Change Adaptation in Natural Resource Management. I would like to specifically thank the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Post Graduate Institute of Agriculture (PGIA), the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and German Technical Cooperation partnership for this event.

As we all are aware, global warming is becoming a major challenge to economic development. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global temperatures, widespread melting of glaciers, and rising sea level". Rising temperature could lead to lower crop yields, melting glaciers will increase flood risks and reduce water supply, while hundreds of million of people may be facing permanent displacement due to rising sea level.

In the Asia Pacific region, global warming could reduce crop yields in Central and South Asia by a half while more than 1 billion people in Central, South, East, and Southeast Asia (especially large river basins) will face decreasing fresh water supply by 2050. Rising temperature will irreversibly damage fragile eco-systems from the Himalayas to the tropical forests of South East Asia and threaten the livelihood of vast majority in the Pacific islands. Populations in the coastal zones are becoming vulnerable to more severe natural disasters, rising sea levels, less fresh water availability, health risks, and declining crop production. According to the Stern Review, it is possible that by the end of the century, sea level may rise upto 1 meter putting more than one-fifth of Bangladesh under water.

The agriculture sector in most developing countries are most at risk from the impact of climate change. A recent report by FAO states that in some poor developing countries, with a combined population of 2 billion and 450 million undernourished people, production loss due to climate change may drastically increase poverty and worsen food security.

While mitigation efforts are being made to reduce GHG (Green House Gas) emissions which are the main cause of global warming, these efforts are expected to have limited impact on the climate with a long lead time of half a century. In the mean time, as highlighted in the Stern Review and IPCC report, "adaptation is the only response available for the impacts that will occur over the next several decades before mitigation measures can have an effect". They also emphasize the cost of action is much less than cost of inaction.

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Adaptation is the process of coping with the potential impacts of climate change and encompasses both planned and reactive strategies. Although the adaptive capacity is strengthened through greater resources and socio-economic development, it also comes with such factors as experience and knowledge. The majority of current climate policies adhere to a management approach to which planned adaptation is central. Such top-down climate change policy is necessary for all countries. However for developing countries which have limited financial and technological resources, a stakeholder negotiated approach that builds on existing knowledge systems, local coping strategies and international support is crucial.

As a multilateral development institution that fosters inclusive and sustainable growth of the Asia-Pacific region, the ADB has been actively engaging in capacity building of developing member countries through policy dialogues, loans and technical assistance programs. In the context of climate change adaptation, the ADB conducted a study on Climate Proofing: A Risk-based Approach to Adaptation in 2005 to help Pacific island member states cope with the impacts of climate change. Last year we completed the study on the Economics of Climate Change in Southeast Asia which is now being expanded to cover the entire Asia-Pacific region.

The ADB also provides technical assistance to its member countries to strengthen the resilience of their agriculture sector to climate change. Our recent report called for vigorous adaptation measures to be put in place over the next few decades to improve the resilience of vulnerable rural communities. The report also highlighted the need for shared understanding of long-term goals, effective leadership, and an ability to build and facilitate concerted action among all players, at every level.

In Sri Lanka, through a technical assistance grant, ADB is supporting the Government to develop an adaptation strategy and help identify a pipeline of priority investments. While the development of the strategy is the major objective of this assistance, the TA will also assist in building capacity of national and district level staff, as well as formulate a public information and awareness strategy.

This workshop is part of the ADB's overall effort and contribution to address climate change by exploring one critical dimension — that is the Assessment methods for climate change adaptation in natural resource management. In addition, the workshop will also identify the strategies for mainstreaming adaptation measures that are applicable to the region and share country experiences and good practices in their implementation.

For it to be effective, natural resource management and adaptation planning, need to be considered in tandem. Otherwise development will result in maladaptation — an unintended increase in vulnerability. Strategically assessing the impacts and implementing the mainstreaming options will ensure long term sustainability of investments and reduce the sensitivity of development activities to climate change.

Thank you and I look forward to your fruitful deliberations.