

Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

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Official Statement presented by Ms. Xiangjun Yao, Sub-regional Representative for the Pacific Islands and Head of Delegation for APMCDRR 2022

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is grateful for the opportunity to make this statement for the 2022 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Asia-Pacific countries are at the forefront of the climate crisis while being highly exposed to multiple other hazards. In the region, we have witnessed some of the most devastating disasters on record. In 2022 alone we have grappled with one of the largest volcanic eruptions in Tonga, drought in Afghanistan and the North Pacific, while Pakistan is now facing one of the most destructive floods. One common thread of these disasters is their impact on agriculture and food systems and millions of livelihoods, many who poor and vulnerable farmers.

Alarmingly, food insecurity levels in the region have started to steadily rise after falling for decades. A primary driver of this trend is the multiple burden of climate shocks, socio-economic pressures, pests and diseases, in areas that are already food insecure. The recent COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine war induced food, fertilizer, feed, fuel and finance (5F) crisis further exacerbated this trajectory.

FAO studies have revealed that agriculture including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture absorbed 26 percent of the overall impact of medium- and large-scale natural hazard induced disasters in least developed countries (LDCs) and the lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), between 2008-2018. This figure goes up to 63 percent if infrastructure is excluded and 83 percent when it comes to drought. The frequency with which these disasters occur often taxes the ability of the countries to rebound quickly, increasing risk of hunger and malnutrition - a chronic issue for the region.

Food security is fundamental for resilience. Yet, this field is often significantly underfunded. From 2004 to 2016, out of the USD 1.63 trillion official development assistance (ODA), only 3 percent was directed to agriculture-related disaster risk reduction and management. Humanitarian assistance to food sectors recorded the lowest allocation in the past five years, despite record levels of acute food insecurity. In particular allocations to agriculture and livelihoods represented only 8 percent of the total (USD 671 million) – more than 50 percent decrease since 2016. Scaling up and investing in innovative solutions to tackle this growing food security crisis, is needed more than ever. Such solutions can include:

1. **Investing in transforming agriculture and food systems is key to reducing risks and building resilience.** Bending the curve of rising food insecurity while achieving global resilience and sustainability targets such as those under the Sendai Framework for DRR requires a fundamental transformation of the regional food system, as highlighted by the UN Food System Summit and recommended five Action Tracks. The Asia-Pacific

region is home to areas which face high levels of deforestation, ecosystem degradation, socio-economic and political turbulence as well as malnutrition. These increase vulnerability and exposure to risk of disasters, which in turn disrupt local and regional food systems, with negative impacts on food security. The effects have no sectoral or geographic boundaries given the interconnectivity of the food system. On the other hand, changes in food consumption drive food loss and waste, which contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, investing in reducing these underlying vulnerabilities and risks, increasing the resilience of food landscapes and seascapes is key to ensuring local and regional food security, especially in times of crisis.

2. **Curb the spread of plant and animal pests and diseases in a reinforced multi-hazard approach.** FAO estimates that annually between 20 to 40 percent of global crop production is lost to pests. Climate change is altering the distribution, incidence and intensity of animal and plant pests and diseases including invasive alien and aquatic organisms. Increased resources are needed more than ever to limit the spread and control of transboundary pests and diseases, such as avian influenza, foot-and-mouth disease and locust infestations.
3. **Strengthening early warning systems and scaling up anticipatory action.** While early warning systems are continually improving thanks to technological gains, there is a great need for long term weather and seasonal forecasts; and importantly to act on them. Anticipatory action meets this call and translates warnings into action to protect people and assets before a hazard develops into a disaster. The approach is being widely accepted and applied in the region, with the ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management becoming a cornerstone piece to achieve this and the Pacific Island Forum highlighting the importance of the approach within their Disaster Risk Financing planning. FAO studies further show that for every USD 1 FAO invested in anticipatory action, families can gain up to USD 7 in benefits and avoided losses. These studies have also found that these interventions can curb food insecurity, support resilience efforts and provide a more dignified approach to aid. Now is the time to change the way we manage disasters.
4. **Social protection systems are critical tools to build resilience and respond to shocks.** The COVID-19 pandemic once again proved the critical role of social protection in responding to shocks and building resilience. Various countries rolled out and scaled up social protection mechanisms to protect people against the pandemic induced economic downturn and social fallout. Both vertical or horizontal expansion initiatives (e.g., alignment to the existing social insurance, wage subsidies, and social cash transfer schemes) have shown that with strong political commitments and innovative tools (such as to register new beneficiaries on demand), countries could mobilize resources at scale and effectively deliver assistance to those in need. It is important to build on these gains and see how they can be institutionalized, for social protection systems to be risk-informed and shock-responsive and effectively protect livelihoods ahead of hazards.
5. **Predictable, flexible and pre-arranged finance is crucial to allow timely implementation.** While anticipatory action ahead of forecasted shocks is a non-debatable concept, only a small fraction – some studies highlighted as little as 3 percent – of humanitarian financing is pre-arranged to be available when warnings materialize. We all need more innovative funding models to be able to adapt to the ever-changing Disaster Risk Management (DRM) environment which demands speed and timeliness. Stronger synergies must also be explored between humanitarian, development and climate finance for multi-risk resilience building.
6. **Boosting inclusive DRM investments, leaving no one behind.** An inclusive approach to DRM must have a nuanced and context-specific understanding of the ways inequality impacts vulnerability and resilience. Working in this way means understanding how intersecting social categories, such as gender, sex, age, nationality, socio-economic status,

sexual orientation, gender identity and physical abilities, impact the extent to which vulnerable individuals or communities can access and benefit from DRM. An example of this can be drawn from the Philippines where in early 2019, ahead of a drought warning, FAO implemented a range of anticipatory actions which put women's voices and concerns at the centre of its efforts. As a result, activities, such as up-scaling vegetable gardening and water management, to protect their food security are still being utilized today and generating income for rural families.

- 7. Explore digital platforms and technology to bolster resilience building efforts.** New technology can provide new and exciting opportunities to change the way we do business. In the Pacific, FAO is exploring with partners the appropriateness of blockchain technology to enable quick and timely support to rural farmers ahead of climate hazards. On the same note, in August 2022 FAO in collaboration with the Government of Fiji and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), organized the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Solutions Forum; with the theme: *“COVID-19 impacts on the economy and the potential of digitalization and innovation to accelerate progress on resilient agri-food systems; improved nutrition and health; and strengthened climate resilience adaptation within the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”*. Many SIDS have accelerated the development and adoption of digital technology, such as online business, digital payment and contactless delivery systems, allowing increased interactions between people over huge distances. The establishment of the SIDS Solutions Platform¹ is timely as a key SIDS partnership tool that should be used to increase knowledge exchange to help deliver on the promises made in the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

FAO is proud to have made an active contribution to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR and its Asia-Pacific Action Plan 2021-2024. We have supported countries to develop DRM and Climate Change Adaptation strategies and actions in the agriculture sector. Specific vulnerability and risk assessment methodologies are being developed for sub-sectors (crops, livestock, fisheries/aquaculture and forestry), drawing on strengthened local knowledge as well as a regional platform that promotes sharing of data and information. FAO's leading support in transforming the regional agriculture and food systems has demonstrated impacts on building resilience of millions of vulnerable smallholder farmers while strengthening policies and an enabling environment for actions at scale. Last but not least, innovative approaches such as anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection have gained widespread buy-in, including through inter-governmental and regional collaboration as shown in ASEAN.

As a community, let us continue working together in an efficient, effective and coherent manner to ensure these goals and the Sendai Framework are fulfilled moving forward. We can – and must – pour our collective efforts firmly behind prevention and risk reduction, which strive to build a safe, sustainable, resilient and equitable future for all.

¹ The SIDS Solutions Program aims to provide an innovative intra- and inter-regional knowledge exchange platform to incubate, promote, scale up and replicate locally grown ideas to accelerate the achievement of agriculture, food, nutrition, environment and health related SDGs in SIDS.