Keynote Address

By
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Special Seminar on Food Security, Focusing on Water Management and Sustainable Agriculture

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Mr. Chairman,
Honorable SOM-AMAF of the ASEAN Member States
Distinguished Participants, Development Partners, and
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honor for me to be present at the special seminar on food security, focusing on water management and sustainable agriculture under the project for strengthening capacity building in agriculture sector in ASEAN countries. This seminar is the special event to be hosted back-to-back with the occasion of the 40th Years of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. At the outset, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan for hosting this important event and has extended the warm welcome to us.

As we are aware, the World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences.

With the above mentioned definition, how Cambodia has struggling to fight against poverty and sustain the food security? I would begin by telling you that Cambodia started from year zero in 1979, a time of total poverty, to attaining full peace in 1998 under Win-Win Policy and subsequent political and sound macroeconomic stability. We have made great progress, and have been ranked the 15th fastest growing economy in the world during the decade and the 5th developing country expected to achieve the MDGs. An annual growth rate of more than 7 percent is projected over the medium term.
Rice remains the main crop for Cambodian rural livelihoods. Under clear direction from the Government with full supports from all concerned institutions and development partners, we have greatly achieved agricultural production annually, especially rice. It is noted that the Government defined the year 2015 as the target year to promote rice production and to reach the paddy surplus of more than 4 million tons. The target indicator for paddy surplus in 2012 is 3.8 million tons of paddy. Comparing to this target, the paddy surplus reached 4.73 million tons in 2012; higher than the set target.

The livestock production, especially cows, buffalo and poultry is remarkably developed to supply the domestic consumption and for export (cow and buffalo). The poultry population, duck and chicken, has tremendously increased. In 2012, the poultry production increased about 4.82%, compared to 2011.

Fish production and shrimp, in 2012, was 74,000 tons. In order to efficient and effective fishery management, the Government focuses on the implementation of key principles, including the protection of the flooded forest in banned areas as well as areas around the Tonle Sap Great Lake and mangrove forest, and implementing specific measures in order to prevent the encroachment of flooded forest and mangrove forest land.

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Audiences,

The Government is fully aware that despite impressive economic growth and considerable improvement in the living standard during recent years, significant segments of Cambodians, especially those living in rural areas, continue to occasionally suffer from poverty and food insecurity. The Government has made a priority to make significant reductions in poverty reduction and food insecurity in the country and improve the institutional and management capacity of the Government to support farmers and the agricultural sector.

In response to this priority, the Strategy for Agriculture and Water (SAW) was designed to improve food security and economic growth by enhancing agricultural productivity and diversification and by improving water resource development and management. Indirectly, it will create opportunities for further diversification and intensification of production within various farming systems.

In addition to that, The Government always considers agricultural water use contributed to the growth of food productivity and poverty reduction. With this view, the Law on Water Resource Management was promulgated. The general purpose of this Law is to foster the effective and sustainable management of the water resources of the Kingdom of Cambodia to attain socio-economic development and the welfare of the people, by determining the rights and obligations of water users,
the fundamental principles of water resources management, and the participation of users and their associations in the sustainable development of water resources.

Moreover, the climate change has far-reaching consequences for agriculture that disproportionally affect the poor. Greater risk of crop failures, livestock death and declines in fisheries products have imposed economic loses and undermine food security, and they are likely to get far more severe as global warming continues.

In responses, the Government has prepared a strategy on climate change adaptation - the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) endorsed in 2006 to address the immediate needs and concerns of those affected at grassroots level and guide the implementation of adaptation initiatives. Extended long dry seasons, irregular rainfall and natural disasters in recent years have affected agricultural activities, especially rice cultivation which is traditionally dependent on rainfall. Rainfall distribution determines the success and size of the harvest and as a result farmers generally only grow one crop per year. However, double-cropping is possible where sufficient irrigation water is available.

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Audiences,

For future set objectives, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries targets the Enhancement of agricultural productivity and diversification, especially the rice, crops and agriculture productions. These required the increase of both technical and financial supports, and the participation of all concerned stakeholders so as to promote and increase the accessibility of agricultural extension service, agricultural input supply and credit supports. Research and development, especially crop seed industry needed more technical assistance and investment.

Additionally, the expansion of irrigation structure in agriculture is still the issue to be considered and it is required to increase the investment, while ensuring the better benefit for farmers through secure markets for selling their production, contract farming, is the issue to be continuously solved to assist farmers to sell their products and increase market competing ability in the context of free market economy.

The farmers’ awareness of the technical use of agricultural inputs and agricultural materials, and proper soil fertility management remained the challenges, and the activities related to these challenges would be paid attention for continuous and strong implementation.

Likewise, post-harvest management needs to be improved, farmer organizations/cooperatives are continued to establish, aiming at empowering the bargaining ability. The encouragement of
participation from private sector in agricultural development is needed, and human resource development, vocational and professional trainings are the issues that have to be accelerated.

To achieve obtain the objectives, the Royal Government of Cambodia has placed a high priority on tackling the key challenges. Firstly, it is to continue to address long term issues through improved competitiveness. Cambodia will be looking at ways to improve its competitiveness in the regional and international arena, as well as actively look for opportunities to diversify and expand the economic base,

secondly, to increase crop production growth by 10%, livestock production of 3% per year based on broader acceleration and improvement of the agricultural research and extension and efficient animal disease prevention, and third, to ensure and maintain the fishing areas for fisheries communities, to protect fisheries resources.

Mr. Chairman,

Honorable Audiences,

Cambodia expects to have more capacity development programs for technical staffs from the external development partners’ assistances and supports. We do hope that the cooperation among ASEAN member countries and with Japan will be further developed and strengthen to jointly deal with the fight against poverty and food insecurity.

I am also hoping that the Cambodia’s experiences and challenges to combat poverty and maintain food security, water resource management and action against climate change will be of inputs to contribute to regional policy and strategy.

To the end, I would like to reiterate that sustainable agricultural policies in all countries are critical to ensure food security at regional and international level. Urgent actions in order to ensure world food security governance are needed, alongside coordinated implementation and efficient monitoring. We are here to find the right and better responses to poverty and hunger, so that every person in the world would enjoy ‘the right to food’.

Thanks You for Your Attention!