

Honorable Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs Division (if present)
Mr. Noor Ahmad

Mr. Adil Akbar Khan, Joint Secretary, Economic Affairs Division,
Government of Pakistan

Representatives of the Provincial Planning and Development
Departments

Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very pleased to be here with you today, at this Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation Workshop, co-organized by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and IFAD's Independent Office of Evaluation, in close collaboration with IFAD's Asia and the Pacific Division.

IFAD and Pakistan have enjoyed a strong, strategic partnership over the last four decades and more. Since 1978, we have supported 28 projects in the country, which have had a positive impact on the livelihoods of 2.8 million households. IFAD currently finances 4 projects in Pakistan, with investments totalling US\$538 million.

Pakistan today is - of course - not the country it was when we first joined forces to tackle rural poverty issues many years ago. The country has

overcome major internal natural and man-made challenges, some of which were unfortunately exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. While extreme poverty stubbornly persists in specific pockets, Pakistan can now benefit from a comprehensive social safety programme that includes a strategy for poverty graduation. The Government's vision to make the country an economic hub relies on strong investments in infrastructure, human and social development as well as in the services sector.

Yet, IFAD remains a very relevant player in the sustainable and inclusive transformation of rural areas, where 63% of Pakistan's population lives with limited access to services and markets. More than 80% of the poor live in rural areas and whilst the contribution of the agriculture sector to the national economy has declined over time, a significant proportion (36%) of the country's labour-force is still engaged primarily in conventional agriculture.

On a separate, but related note, the Global Climate Risk Index has ranked Pakistan fifth among countries most vulnerable to climate change in its annual report for 2020. Vulnerability to climate predominately affects smallholder farmers and re-emphasizes the urgency to invest in climate-smart agriculture.

As acknowledged by the evaluation, IFAD and the Government of Pakistan have been successful in supporting rural households in poverty graduation, improving their livelihoods and connecting them to better services and markets, working through community mobilization, farmer organizations and public-private producer partnerships. A strong focus of the programme has also been on community driven participatory rural development and promoting technological innovations, and many lessons are reflected in the current and upcoming portfolio.

IFAD is committed to providing further tailored, financial, technical and operational support to the Government of Pakistan in its efforts to meet the objectives of Agenda 2030, placing greater emphasis on partnerships with the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, on policy engagement, on nutrition, on women's empowerment and youth, while paving the way for sustainability, institutionalization and scaling up pathways.

And it is our ambition to do so even more prominently as IFAD engages in a significant decentralization process through which it wishes to consolidate and strengthen its presence in countries of operation, including of course Pakistan. To this end, the Fund relies on the Government of Pakistan to facilitate the finalization of a Host Country Agreement as one of the means

to address some of the weaknesses highlighted in the evaluation, not least IFAD's modest performance on the policy engagement area.

I am pleased to note that the evaluation reaffirms the effectiveness of IFAD's and of the Government's ongoing work in the country and provides substantial insights for the development of the new country strategy. It is indeed heartening that the parties have discussed the findings and will bear these in mind as the future lending and non-lending country strategy is devised, bearing in mind priorities such as climate resilience, the promotion of 4Ps, of market linkages and value addition.

Before I conclude, I would like to mention that the work of our Independent Office of Evaluation is essential. I personally look forward to the rich discussion that is expected from today's workshop, which will help us to reflect on the key challenges, priorities and way forward. Allow me to thank Ms. Fumiko and her team for this evaluation and for bringing us together to discuss the future strategic direction of our engagement.

Finally, let me take the opportunity to express sincere appreciation to the Government of Pakistan, particularly the Economic Affairs Division, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Provincial Planning and Development Departments, the project teams, partner organizations as

well as our smallholder farmers for their hospitality and continued support to IFAD. I also wish to thank all of our development partners who play a key role in promoting the country's agricultural and rural development priorities.

Thank you.