

Mr. S.K. Sur Chowdhury, APRACA Chairman and Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank

Welcome speech

During the Grand opening Ceremony of the 19th APRACA General Assembly
Hotel Radisson, 19 May 2014
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Hon'ble Chairman
Delegates from the member institutions
Distinguished resource persons
Dear participants
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning,

It is my great pleasure to join you in this Grand Opening Ceremony; and on behalf of Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA) and the Bangladesh Bank, I heartily welcome you all to Dhaka on the occasion of the 19th General Assembly of APRACA and the two-day Regional Policy Forum on "Risk Management for Smallholder Farmers and Communities".

APRACA, representing 68 member institutions from 21 countries in Asia and the Pacific, has been involved in the promotion of agricultural development and facilitation of exchange of information and expertise in rural and agricultural finance in the region ever since it was established in October 1977. Bangladesh Bank, one of the 37 institutions that joined the APRACA as founding members, is honored to host the 19th General Assembly of APRACA, the most important statutory meeting organized every two years where all members attend to direct the future course of action of the Association. APRACA came a long way since its inception and the growth and development of APRACA certainly is the result of active cooperation and unsparing support of the member institutions throughout these years, and therefore, taking this opportunity, I extend my deep gratitude to all the member delegates present here.

This year's General Assembly is particularly important for the member institutions, as we have assembled here for the first time after the adoption of APRACA's Strategic Plan for 2013-2018 setting the direction of our Association for the next six years. Undoubtedly, the goals and objectives set out in the strategic plans can only be achieved by active participation by the member institutions, and this event gives us an opportunity to chalk out future action plans for fulfillment of the strategic objectives in a timely and effective manner.

In addition to the support from member institutions, APRACA receives continued financial support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in its endeavor. The member institutions acknowledge with deepest gratitude that the support from IFAD is a very significant contributing factor to the realization of APRACA's goals and objectives.

Steadily growing but still a low income economy, Bangladesh has over years developed a social consensus for inclusive socioeconomic growth equitably opening up advancement opportunities for all population segments. Bangladesh Bank has been promoting inclusive financing of all productive initiatives including those of the traditionally underserved farm & non-farm SMEs and other innovative niche area entrepreneurs. The entire Bangladesh banking sector has been induced to engage enthusiastically in inclusive financing initiatives, on the one hand by invoking their corporate social responsibility, and on the other hand by steering facilitation and adoption of cost saving modes of off-branch delivery and management of numerous loans to SMEs in dispersed locations. Liquidity support refinance to lenders, mainly funded by development partners, against their loans to the inclusive financing target sectors including agriculture, SME and 'green' initiatives has also been arranged.

Despite commendable success in increasing outreach and impact of rural finance delivery, our rural poor are still facing many risks and challenges due to the rising prices of food and fuel, adverse effects of global financial crisis, rapid shrinkage of agricultural land, inadequacy of appropriate technology, underdeveloped marketing system, absence of farmers' organization, increased incidence and intensity of natural disasters resulting from climate change, etc. In fact, these risks and challenges are somewhat common in most of the rural finance system in the APRACA member countries, and we have not yet been able to deal with these problems.

Tomorrow, we have the Regional Policy Forum on "Risk Management for Smallholder Farmers and Communities" organized as part of the activities of the IFAD-supported FinServAccess Project. The goal and objectives of this project are—to make a broad range of financial services available for both agricultural and related non-farm activities, with attention to those services which enhance resilience and improve risk management at the farm and household levels so that small-scale agricultural producers and other rural people can capture new opportunities in agriculture and related markets at reduced risk.

As mutual learning and sharing are important components of the project, it aims to replicate innovations and best practices, strengthen capacities at managerial and technical levels and build on the wealth of knowledge of APRACA members and its partners. Distinguished speakers have been invited from the member institutions who will share

with us their insightful views and valuable experiences on major issues, challenges, strategies, best practices or success stories on agricultural and rural finance of their institutions or countries. I would like to convey my warmest thanks to them and eagerly looking forward to listen to them attentively. I'm confident that we will benefit greatly from their thought-provoking ideas, practices and experience.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the delegates from the member institutions for their enthusiasm to support APRACA activities including making time for participation in the Executive Committee Meeting, General Assembly and the Regional Policy Forum despite their busy schedules. I firmly believe that APRACA will develop further with such strong cooperation and sincere support from the members. I would also like to sincerely thank APRACA Secretariat and its supporting staffs for organizing the Meeting, the Assembly and the Forum in such an efficient manner.

Again, I welcome all of you to the 19th General Assembly and the APRACA Regional Policy Forum and, and wish you a very comfortable stay in Bangladesh.

Thank you very much for your attention.