

GOVERNMENT OF MYANMAR AND ESCAP THIRD DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP FORUM

*“Improving Rice Policies for National and Regional Food Security:
Challenges and Opportunities”*

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
27-28 June 2011

REPORT



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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background to the Third Development Partnership Forum

1. Riding on the successful implementation of the Second Development Partnership Forum (2DPF) held in Nay Pyi Taw, Union of Myanmar, on 15 December 2009, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Government of Myanmar, initiated planning and preparations for undertaking the Third Development Partnership Forum (3DPF). After numerous consultations among the stakeholders, the 3DPF was held in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 June 2011, followed by a working group meeting on 28 June 2011 to agree on the format and content of this Report.

2. The impetus for holding the 3DPF was partially attributable to a need to address the seven priority areas identified during the 2DPF where key policy recommendations, when implemented, would be expected to drive the country's development agenda and where ESCAP and the international community felt they could be of greatest assistance. These priority areas were: i) agricultural credit; ii) income and employment security; iii) expanding rice exports; iv) land policy; v) increased Investment in agricultural extension, research and development; vi) human resources development and capacity enhancement; and vii) rural infrastructure development.

3. Successful implementation of the 2DPF was significant as it pointed to the need for development objectives to be achieved through the successful engagement of local experts and practitioners who know what is happening on the ground in Myanmar and through the provision of a unique platform to exchange experience and ideas among a wide range of development practitioners and stakeholders. It also "opened space" in the country for development cooperation between ESCAP and Myanmar to move its development agenda forward and to look at key critical issues where the United Nations (UN) and international community can leverage policy change.

4. The first two ESCAP Development Partnership Fora were, likewise, notable for their ability to place the development agenda solidly into Myanmar's political dialogue. As a result, Government officials, development experts and the international community are actively discussing the challenges in reducing poverty and achieving food and nutrition security among others and the need for formulating solid economic policies across a number of key sectors (the rice economy being one).

5. It is without question that governments throughout the region acknowledge the need for change. ESCAP, via its convening power and its multi-sector, innovative approach through the Development Partnership series, is an enabler of that change -- a catalyst capable of sparking significant mindset change by placing development issues solidly on the political agenda in many countries. For Myanmar, the 2DPF opened space previously restricted in nearly every aspect.

6. Lessons learned from the 2DPF also provided insights in formulating national and regional rural economy development projects and programmes for Myanmar and for other ESCAP member states, particularly countries with special needs (CSN) in a sustainable and



inclusive manner. The findings of the forum clearly indicated that strategic investments in Myanmar's agriculture and rural economy will have multiple benefits. Not only can these investments be used to address food security and rural livelihood issues, but if done so in a sustainable manner can help develop food production systems to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

7. After the country's General Elections, the first in 20 years, held in November 2010, the new Government of Myanmar initiated a plan to organize a series of national workshops focusing on national level issues and challenges. The first "National Workshop on Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation" was held in May 2011. At the national workshop, the newly elected President U Thein Sein in his opening speech emphasized the need for creating economic opportunities for the rural poor to lift them from poverty and improve their living conditions. The President stressed these could best be achieved by boosting production of goods and economic development of rural areas, an engine of growth for the country.

8. Stimulating economic growth for the country, the President remarked, should be accompanied by a renewed analysis of policies related to monetary, financial, trade and investment issues as well as amendments to laws, regulations and procedures. The President also stressed the need for dialogue with experts, both domestic and international, on topical issues such as climate change, food security, generating increased incomes and optimizing the use of existing rural infrastructure.

9. The President then outlined a ten-point strategy for reducing poverty among the rural poor. These included the need: i) to encourage better choice on seed varieties fostering "vertical" rather than "horizontal" extension; ii) for farmers to use high-yielding strains of paddy; iii) to reduce costs of production; iv) for selected aspects of farming systems to be mechanized, accompanied by inter-farm cooperation; v) to improve the distribution of farm inputs; vi) to make micro-finance more readily available; vii) to provide extension advice to groups of farmers; viii) to improve the quality of outputs; ix) to encourage commercial-levels of production; and x) to diversify on-farm and off-farm production opportunities.

10. It is apparent that what has transpired since holding the 2DPF is a monumental shift in ownership of Myanmar's newly focused development process, a process nurtured by ESCAP, to one being taken up by the Government, in particular the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, recently-appointed presidential advisors and the international development community. By demonstrating leadership in spearheading this process, the Government of Myanmar is entering into stronger, mutually beneficial international development partnerships. As a result, the Government is getting the needed technical assistance and expertise to strengthen national capacities addressing development challenges and facilitate its engagement in regional and subregional cooperation.

B. Objectives and Scope of the Third Development Partnership Forum

11. A number of factors contributed to the decision to hold another high-level forum at this point in time. First, after the recent General Election in November 2010 and establishment of a parliament, President U Thein Sein highlighted the goals and objective of the new Government for next five years in his inaugural address to the first session of the Parliament on 30 March 2011. Economic and social issues are the top priorities of the new administration to address in cooperation with international organizations, including the United Nations.

12. Second, countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Myanmar, continue to be affected by global threats – the effects of volatile food-fuel crises and their combined effects on agriculture. Nearly 25 percent appreciation of the *kyat* against the US dollar has affected producers on the ground, especially farmers, who depend on exporting agricultural produce, bringing them further into poverty. Increasingly there are calls for a second, knowledge-based “Green Revolution”¹ in the region. A “Second Green Revolution”, focusing on enhancing food and nutrition security and reducing poverty among small-scale farmers in Asia and the Pacific could, in the framework of environmental sustainability, explore ways of increasing food production and, subsequently, family farm incomes; could make marketing of agricultural commodities more efficient; and could better educate consumers about consumption. Myanmar, with its agrarian-based economy and huge agriculture potential, has shown a willingness to participate.

13. Third, Myanmar continues to be affected by climate change. After the devastating effects wrought by cyclone Nargis in May 2008, the country was again hit in late December 2010 with cyclone Giri. In addition, the central dry zone continues to suffer from serious drought conditions. It is in the face of these opportunities and challenges that the Government of Myanmar-ESCAP development partnership fora were implemented.

14. The Third Development Partnership was a forum with the theme of “Improving Rice Policies for National and Regional Food Security: Challenges and Opportunities.” Local and international experts at the Forum shared ideas, provided strategic insights and exchanged knowledge, not only on the issue of rice exports, but also on Myanmar’s overall rice economy with implications for policy across a broad range of agricultural commodities as they move throughout the entire value chain.

15. The overall goal of the Forum was to increase national and regional food security with special focus on small and medium holders and was undertaken with the following objectives:

to provide a platform for eminent international and local scholars, researchers and planners to exchange their experiences, knowledge and ideas on improving the rice economy of Myanmar through in-depth interaction among stakeholders;

to identify, prioritize and propose a number of policy options for the Government of Myanmar to consider in advancing its rice economy in an inclusive and sustainable manner, paying particular attention to enhancing the country’s efforts to increase the production and productivity of rice in complement to increasing farmers’ welfare;

to provide insight to participating Government agencies, NGOs and INGOs, the UN, and bilateral and multilateral donor agencies on the current and potential situation of the rice economy of Myanmar;

to discuss policies and strategies in addressing the impact and sustainability of increased rice production and export, stabilization of supply and price in the domestic market and on food security for vulnerable groups in the country; and

to cooperate with ESCAP, through gathering best practices and disseminating lessons learned from the development partnership, in the process of fulfilling its

¹ A “Second Green Revolution” could focus on research that optimizes the use of agricultural inputs and minimizes damage to the environment while keeping production costs down to the benefit of small farmers.

mandate to provide technical assistance to formulate national and regional rural economic development initiatives and programmes in a sustainable and inclusive manner, not only for Myanmar, but for other member States, particularly countries with special needs (CSN).

16. The main event was organized into three sessions.² The morning's session 1, Challenges and Opportunities, focused on Myanmar perspectives, particularly from agriculture experts, small farmers and the private sector, on challenges and opportunities in agriculture production, consumption, and trade. This session assessed the needs and challenges of farmers and vulnerable groups in the rural agriculture sector, with respect to rice policies and food security, to address their well being and livelihoods. Presentations reviewed the contribution of the rice industry to GDP and the economy of Myanmar; the country's present rice production situation; and the present status and potential of rice processing and trade in Myanmar. The morning ended with a case study on rice production from the welfare perspective of small farmers and the challenges, strengths and potentials for Myanmar to re-emerge as major rice exporter. A panel of experts / discussants provided individual perspectives.

17. The afternoon's session 2, Lessons learned from the region and beyond, provided participants the opportunity to share policies drawn from lessons learned in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Development policy options for inclusive and sustainable agriculture development in Myanmar were provided. Discussed also were possible key international community integrated responses to support the improvement of rural livelihoods and the reduction of poverty through rice policy changes in Myanmar. Presentations offered up an integrated rural economic and social development programme for livelihoods improvement in Myanmar; a description of the rice economy of Viet Nam including policies and perspectives; and an overview of the present rice commodity trade, its future projections and Myanmar's integration into this process. Again, a panel of experts / discussants provided individual perspectives.

18. The third and final session, Action plans for moving forward, reflected on the way forward and identification of areas of technical cooperation and assistance in agriculture sector policy and technical development to break barriers in Myanmar's agriculture sector. The objective was to identify concrete action plans to establish a pro-poor food security system based on the principles of sustainable agriculture through building capacity in the agriculture sector, particularly in the rice industry. As with the first two sessions, a panel of experts / discussants provided their insights.

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