

16 October 2017

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

International Organization for Migration

World Food Day 2017

“Change the Future of Migration. Invest in Food Security and Rural Development”

Joint Statement

Myanmar is a country with high level of mobility. It has over 9.39 million internal migrants and estimated 4.25 million international migrants. Together, they represent 25 percent of the country’s total population of 51 million. This level of mobility - one in every four citizens is a migrant - is considerably higher than the world average of one in seven.

While Myanmar is already a highly mobile country, projections suggest that internal and international mobility will continue to grow. Currently, Myanmar remains a predominately rural country with 70 percent of the population living in rural areas. Urbanization, as in the rest of the world, is a growing trend. As the economy grows and diversifies in the industrial and service sectors, millions of farmers, whose main source of livelihood is agriculture, will continue to move to cities to take up non-farm employment.

Overseas employment opportunities in neighboring countries as well as new destinations will also continue to attract Myanmar workers with better wages. Improved communication channels, personal networks, availability of information, the brokerage and recruitment industry, and transport infrastructure will also enable more aspiring migrants to find employment abroad.

But migration should be a choice, not a necessity created by food insecurity. Migration for the rural poor is often a means of seeking out alternative income-generating opportunities. Millions are compelled to migrate in pursuit of safety and livelihoods opportunities, often congregating in urban slums where they face new risks associated with insecurity, poverty, marginalization and exposure to natural hazards.

It is therefore now more critical than ever that we intensify our collective efforts to build the resilience of at-risk rural communities to crises and displacement, increase efforts to ensure food security of all people, and shift to longer term policies and practices that enable states, communities and individuals to embrace potential opportunities.

Agriculture and rural development are directly contributing to address the root causes of migration including food insecurity. Actions directed to achieve food security and sustainable, inclusive rural development are therefore needed to make migration a choice not a necessity.

Food security has long been a priority for the United Nations and achieving food security was already a key objective of the 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals. Goal 1 was: “Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.”

In the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, food security retains a very important place, but recognition of the linkages between the different goals stresses the need for a cross-sectoral approach to each goal which cannot be achieved without strong partnerships.

Overall, food security needs to play a larger role in the debates on migration and development, and migration needs to be better integrated in the debates on agricultural and food security policies and programmes.

FAO and IOM can have a major impact in bringing these conversations together. FAO’s work in this area mainly focuses on addressing structural drivers of large movements in the development and emergency contexts. In development settings this includes interventions directed at ensuring a more productive agriculture sector, climate change adaptation, poverty reduction, enhancement of decent rural employment and social protection, and sustainable management of natural resources among others.

Meanwhile, FAO’s emergency interventions aim to foster the resilience of vulnerable agriculture-based communities, which mitigate displacement, laying the ground for long-term recovery after shocks, and pave the way for durable solutions.

IOM, the UN Migration Agency, is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems, and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

FAO and IOM collaborate on projects related to natural hazards, climate change, food security and displacement in many different parts of the world. At the international level, FAO and IOM will co-chair the Global Migration Group (GMG) in 2018, an inter-agency body which promotes dialogue on migration issues. This is very timely as states negotiate a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Here in Myanmar, FAO and IOM will continue to join forces to ensure that the food security, rural development, and migration nexus is adequately reflected and addressed in relevant national policies and programmes.

However, the challenges remain colossal and will require a more joined up response from the UN system, governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and other relevant actors. FAO and IOM are committed to expanding their support to the people and the Government of Myanmar towards the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals that pertain to food security and migration.