

Welcome Remarks of Dr. Yutong Li, Head of CSAM

Meeting on

“Advancing Subregional Cooperation for Sustainable, Climate-smart and Integrated Management of Crop Residues”

15 September 2022

13:00 – 15:00 (Indian Standard Time) / 15.30 – 17.30 (Beijing time)

Distinguished participants,

Good afternoon or good evening depending on where you are joining from!

On behalf of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization (CSAM) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), based in Beijing, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you – along with our colleagues from the ESCAP Sub-regional Office for South and South West Asia – to today’s meeting on *‘Advancing Subregional Cooperation for Sustainable, Climate-smart and Integrated Management of Crop Residues’*.

Burning of crop residue or stubble is a common concern in many parts of Asia and the Pacific, including in South Asia. In recent times, this practice has drawn the attention of policymakers and the public due to the adverse effects of the burning on the environment including air pollution which impacts the lives of millions of people across countries, and contributes to climate change. It is a major impediment to progress towards a number of Sustainable Development Goals such as SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

In order to address crop residue burning, it is important to understand why many farmers still choose this method despite the fact that it severely undermines soil fertility in the long run. Research suggests that among the main reasons are the high cost of straw collection, transportation and storage - partially caused by the shortage of rural labour, a tight seeding schedule for the next cropping cycle, and lack of adequate methods to treat crop residue.

In order to address residue burning, various approaches are being applied, although in fragmented ways, across different countries to utilize straw as fertilizer, fodder and other purposes. However, one of the main constraints to improve and synthesize these approaches is the lack of suitable agricultural machinery and equipment. There is a need

to test and promote integrated models of utilizing straw, with a focus on enhancing the performance of relevant machinery in specific local contexts. In this, particular attention is required for the needs of resource-poor smallholder farmers who often suffer from use of outdated or inefficient farm machinery not suitable for small plots or for crops usually grown by small farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

CSAM is a regional institution of United Nations ESCAP with a vision to achieve production gains, improved rural livelihood and poverty alleviation through sustainable agricultural mechanization for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable Asia and the Pacific. In pursuit of its mandate and to accelerate progress towards the relevant Sustainable Development Goals, CSAM has been assisting member States in implementing sustainable agricultural mechanization solutions including for sustainable and integrated management of crop residue.

Regional and sub-regional cooperation – which is at the core of CSAM’s work - is vital to addressing the problem of residue burning for a number of reasons. For instance, air pollution caused by residue burning often acquires a transboundary dimension and thus requires solutions that transcend borders. Moreover, areas with similar agro-ecological characteristics in the sub-region can also benefit from common solutions and good practices, which implies that ongoing exchange of solutions and experiences is important.

I would like to highlight that CSAM has been promoting regional and sub-regional cooperation for integrated management of straw residue for several years. Initially launched in 2018 in China and Vietnam, CSAM’s Regional Initiative seeks to identify, test and promote an integrated model to utilize straw as fertilizer, fodder, base material and clean energy production in a circular manner. Building upon its success and positive results - and leveraging the South-South and Triangular Cooperation modality - the Regional Initiative is now being expanded to two LDCs (namely Cambodia and Nepal) as well as Indonesia with funding support from the China-ESCAP Cooperation Programme. I am pleased to mention that in March 2022, CSAM’s Regional Initiative on ‘Mechanization Solutions for Integrated Management of Straw Residue in Asia and the Pacific’ was cited among 80 “Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation in LDCs’ by the United Nations Office for South South Cooperation and other partners.

We are delighted to have joined hands with the ESCAP Sub-regional Office for South and South West Asia to carry forward these efforts, and promote solutions for sustainable crop residue management through analytical studies and knowledge exchange.

To conclude, I hope that the meeting today will foster active deliberations which can bring forth new ideas and synergies to tackle the common issue of residue burning we face. I wish the meeting all success and look forward to fruitful outcomes.

I thank you.