

Opening Remarks – Ambassador Roland Kobia: EU as Chair of LIFT Fund Board

His Excellency Union Minister U Soe Thane at the President's Office
Ministers and Deputy Ministers
Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am honoured to deliver the opening remarks of this Annual Forum as Chair of the Fund Board of LIFT, the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund. As Chair I represent LIFT's eleven donors: Australia, Denmark, the European Union, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund has been working in cooperation with the Government of Myanmar since 2009. Together we work towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 1: to reduce the number of people living in poverty and hunger by half.

LIFT targets smallholder farming families and the landless rural poor, funding projects that help them to raise their incomes, improve their nutrition and food security, and live better lives.

By providing opportunities to diversify incomes, improve the quality of harvests, increase access to credit and markets, and by raising capacity at all levels, our projects work towards sustainable growth.

This means more re-investment in the land, more and better food on the table, and more children going to school. It means that people, often the most vulnerable, are better able to cope with setbacks and change.

// Since 2009, LIFT has provided around 205 million dollars to support more than 90 projects. Today, LIFT activities take place in more than half of the county's townships.

These projects are implemented through LIFT partners *(look up)* And I am glad to see so many of you here today. You come from local and international NGOs, research and academic bodies, UN entities and international institutes. I salute our partners for their effort, for their results and for building knowledge on how to improve food security for the rural poor in Myanmar.

Together, we have reached 2.5 million people - or roughly 5 per cent of the country's population. We are making a difference, but there is much more we can do.

// This year, LIFT has revised its strategy to align with the government's priority to reduce rural poverty, and to seize new opportunities to work with the government and with the private sector. The strategy builds on the experience and knowledge of our implementing partners.

With the updated strategy, donors have renewed their commitment to LIFT and have pledged new resources, in particular the UK and the European Union, but also donors such as Switzerland, the US, and new donors.

These new resources allow for the next phase of LIFT programmes to be developed - in the Dry Zone, in the Uplands and in the Delta. Details of these will be available soon. LIFT will continue working in Myanmar until 2018, at least.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests

This year's Annual Forum is jointly organised with the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development. It is a two-day learning event that brings together national and international rural development actors to stimulate discussion, share new ideas and fuel our thinking on the constraints and opportunities for improving lives in rural areas.

Our specific focus for this event is to:

- examine the changing context and the new opportunities presented for smallholder farmers and the landless poor,
- continue to promote inclusive, sustainable growth,
- to discuss ways to build the ability of the rural poor to cope with inevitable setbacks.

We also promote the concept of building a knowledge base for the rural development sector. How can the many studies being generated by various stakeholders be systematically managed and shared to provide a strong evidence base for pro-poor policies?

These discussions are particularly timely in the United Nations' international year of family farming, which highlights the role of family farms to produce food, manage natural resources sustainably and raise rural incomes.

Focusing on smallholders is one of the most critical priorities for inclusive rural growth.

It is important to create the enabling conditions for smallholders to innovate and diversify their farms and « step up » into the growing commercial farming sector.

We also need to help rural households – that is, both smallholders and landless labourers - to diversify their income sources and to « step out » into well-paid employment outside of agriculture as new opportunities become available.

The dynamism we see in the rural economy, which is already visible, will benefit millions of rural households. But, not everyone will benefit equally, especially in the short-term.

For households without the potential to « step up » into commercial farming, or the ability to « step out » into other sectors, we will need to help them « hang in ». Agriculture can work as a safety net to improve

their food security and nutrition during Myanmar's period of economic transition.

Today's key note speaker Dr. Tom Reardon will provide more insight on the changing context for smallholders and landless in a short while.

// The rural economy in Myanmar is dynamic and changing. It is characterized by movement: movement of services, movement of goods, movement of people.

We will hear more about this and the new engines of growth in the first panel discussion this morning on the Changing Dynamics of Myanmar's rural economy.

Other sessions today will provide new data on farm economics; and there will be discussion on the entrepreneurial potential of smallholders. We will also hear lessons from our implementing partners.

In just one day, a significant amount of knowledge, information and ideas will be shared.

This leads us to a key question that we will explore during day two: How can our knowledge and experience be managed, organised and shared to inform programme design and policy formulation?

Tomorrow, we will be honoured to have knowledge management expert Dr. Yvonne Pinto with us to shed light on the opportunities to set up a knowledge platform.

LIFT will put the learning agenda at the centre of its new strategy. *(look up)* We are hoping that you will help shape our thinking on this learning platform.

We will conclude day two with a focus on Resilience in its various shapes and forms. Resilience is the premise for a robust rural economy and it

underpins LIFT strategy. We will be honoured by the presence of experts in climate smart agriculture, climate change and in social safety nets.

I would like to conclude by saying that chairing LIFT is an honour. It is a privilege to be involved in a successful example of aid effectiveness. We are proud to be working collectively as donors, together with the government, the United Nations and our implementing partners.

I hope you will enjoy the presentations and panel discussions. We encourage your strong participation, not only in the Question & Answer sessions, but in your own discussions. Your participation is essential to make these two days a successful learning and sharing experience.

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Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you.