

**Opening Remarks of the President of ECOSOC
H.E. Mr. Lok Bahadur Thapa (Nepal)
IFAD High-Level Roundtable
Partnering to Reach the First Mile:
Delivering Development**

22 September 2025

**Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues,**

It is my honor to open this high-level roundtable.

We meet less than three months after the adoption of the *Sevilla Commitment* at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development.

That outcome was a landmark, reminding us that eradicating poverty, ending hunger and achieving the SDGs require closing a \$4 trillion annual financing gap and channeling resources to the people and places most in needed.

Today, I would like to frame our dialogue around three priorities.

First, aligning financing for the “first mile”.

Too often, rural communities remain the last to benefit from global capital flows.

Yet these are the places where poverty is deepest, where resilience is weakest, and where the potential for growth and climate action is greatest.

No single actor – whether MDBs, governments, or private investors – can close this gap alone.

The challenge is not only to mobilize more capital, but to align it, including by enabling policy environments that encourage long-term investment.

It also requires using public finance strategically – to de-risk and catalyze private investment in agriculture, rural infrastructure, and food systems.

And it means building insurance and risk-management markets that can help smallholder farmers withstand shocks.

Second, investing through country-led platforms.

Country-led investment platforms, such as those advanced through IFAD14, can reduce fragmentation, improve efficiency, and ensure that financing responds to national priorities.

But these platforms should not become another layer of bureaucracy.

Instead, they must be engines of impact - channeling investment into youth entrepreneurship, digital innovation, and climate-smart agriculture.

Here I want to add a personal note. As the Permanent Representative of Nepal, I cannot ignore the voices of our young people.

Across South Asia and beyond, Generation Z is demanding opportunities - not just jobs, but dignity and agency, and the chance to shape their future at home. Their voices are clearer and stronger than ever. We must listen.

Investing in youth-led enterprises, digital skills, and rural innovation is not charity.

It is the smartest investment we can make - for peace, for resilience, and for sustainable growth.

Third, connecting today's dialogue to tomorrow's global processes.

What we agreed here cannot remain in this room.

It must resonate in the broader multilateral agenda - at UNGA, in the UN80 initiative, and in the ongoing MDB reform dialogues.

Food security and nutrition cannot be treated as add-ons.

They must be central to fiscal and development planning, aligned with poverty eradication strategies and national circumstances.

This also means ensuring that LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS - together with net food-importing developing countries - have greater access to markets and the resilience needed to manage food shocks.

Excellencies,

Food security and agricultural development are central to my Presidency of ECOSOC.

As the Council approaches its 80th anniversary, I look forward to harnessing its convening power to keep these priorities at the top of the global agenda.

The Biennial Summit this week will be a first opportunity to take stock of progress since Sevilla.

The Financing for Development Forum in April 2026 will provide a platform for a deeper review of commitments on private finance, international trade, and international financial architecture reform and systemic issues.

And the STI Forum will offer further opportunities to link investments in research, technology and innovation to rural transformation.

As we follow up to the UN Food Systems Summit +4, I look forward to the active engagement of the Rome-based agencies in ECOSOC segments, forums, and special meetings.

In this milestone year, we have an opportunity to showcase multilateral solutions that encourage investment in the first mile and deliver tangible results for those who need it most.

The theme of my Presidency is *Delivering Better*.

Delivering better means ensuring that resources flow where they are needed most.

It means transforming agriculture and food systems so that no child goes to bed hungry, no farmer is left behind, and no

young person feels forced to abandon their community in search of opportunity elsewhere.

Let's use this roundtable to build momentum – so that the commitments of Sevilla, the promise of IFAD14, and the spirit of UN80 converge in tangible results for the world's most vulnerable.

Thank you.