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Food Security in Pakistan

Abstract: *During the last thirty years (1980-2010), Pakistan has produced enough food to ensure food availability for all. However, the country has failed to translate this achievement into sufficient reduction of hunger, poverty and malnutrition. This is attributed to unequal access to food due to low purchasing power. Pakistan needs to focus on pro-poor and inclusive growth policies with high level of political commitment to reduce food insecurity. The policy brief suggests ways and policy options to address the issues of hunger, poverty and malnutrition.*

Key Points

a) In 2011, 58 per cent of people in Pakistan were food insecure compared to 38 per cent in 2003.

b) The focus of economic policy has been on the reduction of poverty, hunger and malnutrition, the government's financial allocations, however, do not show its commitment.

c) A high level of political commitment is essential to prioritize at policy levels the need to end hunger, poverty and malnutrition.

The right to food is central to human development and a major human right. Despite a marked increase in food production and availability over the past three decades, 6 out of every 10 people in Pakistan are food insecure and do not have enough to eat. This policy brief addresses following questions:

- What has been the state of food security in Pakistan over the last 30 years?
- What has been the role of poverty reduction strategies and policies for the reduction of hunger, poverty and malnutrition?
- Have social safety nets improved the food security of people?
- How can the country formulate a growth policy that ensures food security for all?

Food production, availability and access

Food production: Pakistan has sufficient capacity to ensure food availability for all of its residents. Over the last three decades (1980-2010), food production and availability has increased.

- The agricultural sector output grew at an annual rate of 5.1 per cent.
- Total food grain production increased by 2.6 per cent per annum.
- All food items such as cereals, pulses, milk, meat and eggs increased.
- As a result, per capita food availability also increased from 2,302 kcal/person/day to 2,415 kcal/person/day.

Sufficient availability and production of food has been attributed to sustained and high grow-

th of agriculture. This fact has been emphasized in various policy documents. The focus has been on increase in farm sector productivity to ensure food security. The main objectives have been food self-sufficiency, stable food prices for consumers and suitable prices for farmers. A number of measures have been used for this purpose such as direct subsidies, price controls, minimum support prices, restrictions on the movement of food and agricultural goods, etc.

Nutrition: While food availability has improved, the indicators of malnutrition and hunger show a different picture. They remain very high especially among children and women. The nutritional status of the population appears to have stagnated, or perhaps even deteriorated, with variations between rural and urban areas and among provinces, with women receiving less nutrition than men.

- Between 1977 and 2011, the stunting rate among children under-five increased from 43 to 44 per cent, the wasting ratio also rose from 9 to 15 per cent, while the percentage of underweight decreased from 53 to 32 per cent in 2002 but remained stagnant after that.
- Micronutrient deficiency is also very high. The prevalence of anaemia among children under-five decreased marginally from 65 to 62 per cent between 1987 and 2011, while vitamin A and Zinc deficiencies rose from 13 to 54 per cent and 37 to 39 per cent between 2001 and 2011 respectively.
- In 2011, 18 per cent of women aged 15-49 years were underweight. Overall, only 53 per cent women had normal Body mass index (BMI). The prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women increased from 49 to 51 per cent between 1990 and 2011.
- Overall in 2011, 58 per cent of people in Pakistan were food insecure compared to 38 per cent in

2003, with the highest ratio in Sindh (72 per cent).

Access to food: The high levels of hunger and malnutrition are attributed to low purchasing power, exacerbated by high levels of poverty and inflation.

- In Pakistan, the population living below the national poverty line increased from 30.7 to 35.6 per cent between 1979 and 2011. The incidence of poverty declined in the 1980s, but increased in the 1990s, indicating the absence of pro-poor policies. It remained stagnant during the early 2000s, but increased after that mainly due to high inflation, low economic growth and natural disasters.
- Income inequality as measured by Gini coefficient decreased in the 1980s from 0.39 in 1977 to 0.35 in 1988. Between 1988 and 2005, it increased from 0.35 to 0.41. The situation worsened in the 2000s.
- Between 1980 and 2010, food inflation increased by 9.3 per cent annually. It increased from 7.9 per cent in the 1980s to 10.1 per cent in the 1990s, and reached to 14 per cent between 2005-10.
- Economic growth has created sufficient number of jobs, however there have been issues with respect to the quality of work.

An evaluation of poverty reduction strategies and policies

Historically, the focus of economic policy in Pakistan has been on the reduction of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Since the First Five Year Plan (1956-60), different governments tried to create physical and social infrastructure and social protection measures for the poor, hungry, deprived and vulnerable. The Village Aid Programme (1952-61), the Rural Works Programme (1963-72), the People's Works Programme (1972-80), the Five Point Programme (1985-88), the *Tameer-e-Watan* Programme (1991) and Social Action Programme (1993) are few examples.

- *In the 1980s*, the 6th Five Year Plan focused extensively on agricultural and rural development, education and health sector. The government implemented various rural development programmes (Prime Minister's Five Point Programme). Economic growth and human development improved, while

poverty, hunger and malnutrition decreased.

- *In the 1990s*, the poverty reduction strategy was framed under the Structural Adjustment Programme (in 1993). Realizing the role of human development for sustained economic growth and poverty reduction in the long run, the programme aimed to increase public spending on health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation in rural and slum areas, and population welfare with a special focus on women and children. The programme spent about Rs.420 billion against the total budget of Rs.627 billion and failed in terms of coverage, quality and utilization of funds. Public sector development expenditure also decreased from 7 to 4 per cent of GDP between 1980s and the 1990s. During the period, the growth rate of GDP decreased, while poverty, inequality and child malnutrition increased.
- *In the 2000s*, Pakistan followed the strategy of Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP). The country formulated its strategies in the light of interim-PRSP in 2001, PRSP-I for 2004-06 and PRSP-II for 2008-10 and beyond. Poverty alleviation programmes were grouped into four categories: income and employment creation, social and human development, infrastructure and community development, and social protection schemes. Between 2002 and 2012, pro-poor budgetary expenditures increased at an annual rate of 28 per cent. However, the share of expenditure on health, education, population planning, and water supply and sanitation in total pro-poor expenditure declined massively. Poverty, hunger and malnutrition decreased during the first half of the 2000s (due to inflow of foreign aid and remittances), but rose during the second half.
- In 2014, the government formulated the Vision 2025 for sustained and inclusive growth. It also addresses the issues of availability, access and utilization of food and targets to reduce malnutrition from 60 to 30 per cent. The government's financial allocations, however, do not show its commitment for social sector and human development.
- A draft of National Food and Nutrition Security Policy is being formulated on the basis of provincial policy strategies. Recently, the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have passed 'Promotion and Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Acts 2014 and 2015 respectively to promote breast milk. In 2002, at federal level a law to discourage bottle feeding was set up, but the Infant Feeding Board, the implementing authority, has been established last year, but has been ineffective so far.

About Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre

Under the umbrella of Foundation for Human Development in Pakistan, Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre was set up in November 1995 in Islamabad, Pakistan by the late Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, founder and chief architect of UNDP Human Development Reports. With a special focus on South Asia, the Centre is a policy research institute and think tank, committed to the promotion of the human development paradigm as a powerful tool for informing people-centred development policy, nationally and regionally.

Social safety nets (subsidies, social assistance programmes)

The government provides social safety nets through direct transfers as well as through subsidies on food and non-food items to improve access to food. The impact of these programmes varies with respect to their effectiveness for reduction of poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

Subsidies: In Pakistan, a large proportion of social protection spending is provided in the form of subsidies for food, fertilizer and energy. Of total federal subsidies in 2013, the power sector accounted for 96.1 per cent, food and agriculture for 2.4 per cent, and oil refineries for 1.0 per cent. An analysis of the provision of subsidies shows their regressive nature.

The government intervenes in the food market through 'Utility Stores' channel. However, most of the benefits go to the rich. This is evident from the fact that the Utility Stores are situated in urban areas and provide both food and non-food subsidized goods without any discrimination among the poor and the non-poor. The government also provides subsidy on flour prices, however the benefits go to the flour millers and traders. A similar situation is observed in case of fertilizer subsidies. Energy subsidies are even more regressive than food subsidies. In 2013, less than 30 per cent of the electricity subsidies went to the poorest 40 per cent of population, compared to 40 per cent of the electricity subsidies going to the richest 20 per cent.

Social assistance programmes: Besides subsidies, the government also has three social assistance programmes to address the issues of hunger, poverty and malnutrition: Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) and Zakat. The allocations for these programmes have increased significantly (Rs. 45.3 billion in 2012) from a historical low level. The performance of these programmes varies with respect to coverage, targeting, leakage and adequacy. BISP has addressed most of these issues.

- *BISP.* Initiated in 2008 with the allocation of Rs.34 billion to 3.5 million people, the programme aimed to provide Rs.1,000 per month to families earning less than Rs.6,000. According to the *Economic Survey of Pakistan 2014-15*, the beneficiaries of the programme increased from 1.76 million to 5.0 million (women head of families) between 2009 and 2015. Annual disbursement also increased from Rs.15.8 billion to Rs.90.0 billion. BISP also has four

graduation programmes: *Waseela-e-Sehat*, *Waseela-e-Taleem*, *Waseela-e-Haq* and *Waseela-e-Rozgar*. The coverage and the impact of these programmes have been limited.

- *PBM.* Initiated in 1992, the programme provides support to the needy irrespective of religion. Food Support Programme, the largest component of PBM, was launched in 2000. In 2008, it benefited 1.8 million households with a budget of Rs.6 billion, but disbanded in 2009 due to poor targeting and BISP. Another initiative, *Tawana* programme to provide cooked food to school-going children was also discontinued due to targeting and logistics. In 2012, PBM benefitted 0.85 million people with a budget of Rs.1.8 billion.
- *Zakat.* The initiative was started in 1980 to benefit the poor Muslims by collecting a religious levy on bank accounts. It was mandatory in the start but now account holders can opt out. As a result, Zakat collections declined from 0.3 per cent of GDP in the 1980s to 0.05-0.08 per cent in 2004-06. In 2012, Zakat benefited 1.04 million recipients with the cost of Rs.3.13 billion.

Policy recommendations to improve food security in Pakistan

The Government of Pakistan needs to focus on a pro-poor and inclusive growth policy with the clear objective of addressing the issues of hunger, poverty and malnutrition.

- A high level of political commitment is essential to prioritize at policy levels the need to end hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Much can be learned from Brazil where poverty, income inequality, hunger and malnutrition decreased significantly as a result of that country's clearly stated political commitment.
- It is crucial to have a truly representative local level governance system. This will ensure the inclusion of input from all stakeholders in the process of the formulation of food security and related policies as well as the effective implementation of policies.
- The focus of rural development programmes should be on promoting small scale farming by endowing the poor with land, credit, crop and farm technology, and access to output markets. It should also promote the non-farm sector to provide jobs to surplus labour.
- The government not only needs to improve the governance but also the coordination among the departments of agriculture, health, education, women's empowerment, social protection, and water and sanitation.

- The focus of social safety nets should be towards the poorest 40 per cent of the population. The approach of such support measures has to be very comprehensive to include from the provision of sufficient and nutritious food, cash, education, clean water and sanitation to awareness about the

nutritional aspects of food.

- Most importantly, there is a need to empower women to improve their food security and overall human development. Women need more educational opportunities, provision of health facilities, control over resources and participation in decision making.

This policy brief is based on the findings of Human Development in South Asia 2015: The Economy and the People. Nazam Magbool, senior research fellow, prepared this brief.

Themes of the Report of Human Development in South Asia

1997	The Challenge of Human Development
1998	The Education Challenge
1999	The Crisis of Governance
2000	The Gender Question
2001	Globalization and Human Development
2002	Agriculture and Rural Development
2003	The Employment Challenge
2004	The Health Challenge
2005	Human Security in South Asia
2006	Poverty in South Asia: Challenges and Responses
2007	A Ten-Year Review
2008	Technology and Human Development in South Asia
2009	Trade and Human Development
2010/11	Food Security in South Asia
2012	Governance for People's Empowerment
2013	Water for Human Development
2014	Urbanization: Challenges and Opportunities
2015	The Economy and the People

Other Books on Human Development

1995	Reflections on Human Development by Mahbub ul Haq
2002	The South Asian Challenge by Khadija Haq (editor)
2003	Readings in Human Development by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A. K. Shiva Kumar (editors)
2008	Pioneering the Human Development Revolution: An Intellectual Biography of Mahbub ul Haq by Khadija Haq and Richard Ponzio (editors)

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