



POVERTY & FOOD SECURITY

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Inflation & Food Security

Domestic Context

Food Insecurity Affecting 60% of Women and Children

Around 60% of Pakistan's total population is facing food insecurity, revealed by Pakistan's National Nutrition Survey (NNS) 2011. The results of the survey, termed by health experts as "alarming", indicate a significant decline in the nutritional status of the people of the country over the past decade. The national survey, conducted by Ministry of Health's (MoH) Nutrition Wing in collaboration with Agha Khan University (AKU), assessed the nutritional status of the population, especially women and children, while also covering morbidity and family care practices. The survey took a sample of 30,000 households nationwide covering all the provinces and found that around 57% of the households were facing food insecurity. In these households, 50% of the women and children were found to be malnourished. This confirms that the maternal and child malnutrition remains a major issue for Pakistan. The report stated that iron deficiency (anemia) and vitamin A deficiency remains widespread in the country; however, iodine deficiency rate had reduced during the last decade. Other important nutritional indicators measured by the survey included maternal anemia at 49%, night blindness 16%, child stunting level 43%, while wasting among children (child's weight-for-height measured less than -2 standard deviations from the mean) was found to be 13%. The survey found major differentials for chronic malnutrition between provinces, with Sindh, Balochistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas being the major contributors to childhood malnutrition in the country. Health experts noted that the increasing rate of chronic and acute malnutrition in the country is primarily due to poverty, higher illiteracy rate among mothers and the government's lack of commitment towards ensuring food security to each and every citizen. They also attributed it to the inherent problems in infant feeding practices and access to "right" foods. The survey provides "unquestionable evidence of the problem of malnutrition in Pakistan". The level of malnutrition is unacceptably high and will not only represent a challenge in reaching millennium development goals but will also constrain economic growth. A concerted multi-sector national and provincial nutrition strategy along with oversight mechanisms are needed to address mother and child health and nutrition problems. Nutritional survey like this holds immense importance as it would help in policy making.

[The Express Tribune - September 18, 2011]

5.6% Price Increase in 30 Commodities

Prices of 30 essential commodities including meat, sweeteners, onion, tomato and wheat, registered an average increase of 5.6% in September, compared to the previous month. FAFEN, a non-governmental organization, said its retail price monitors collected the prices of 52 commodities from 161 retail outlets in 81 districts across the country. The report found that 15 commodities registered an average decrease of 6.3% while the prices of five remained unchanged. The report said that the prices of onion and tomato went up by 40% and 24% respectively – most probably due to the season. The prices of plain bread, local sugar, potato and rice basmati-386 increased by 10%, 4%, 3%, and 2% respectively. After Ramazan, prices of fruits registered a decrease. In September, the price of dark red apples witnessed the highest decrease of 34%, followed by a 14% decrease in banana and 10% in golden apples. Prices of chicken meat, live chicken, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and vegetable oil also came down by 11%, 10%, 3% and 1% respectively. Among poultry products, only eggs per dozen registered a

4% increase. However, the prices of mutton and beef registered 2% and 1% increase respectively. The prices of salt powder, red chilies powder, turmeric and ginger increased by 11%, 4%, 2% and 1% respectively, while garlic's price registered a decrease of 2%. Prices of sugar, sugarcane and local sugar went up by 1%, 2% and 4% respectively. Despite an increase in the price of milk by 1%, the price of yoghurt decreased by 1%. Similarly, vegetable oil, cooking oil and mustard oil each registered a 1% decrease in their respective prices. Prices of cooked items went up. The price of cooked beef price went up by 13%, followed by a 7% increase in cooked lentils. The price of a cup of tea registered a 2% increase. Meanwhile, over-the-counter medicines, such as Panadol and Disprin, registered a 4% and 3% increase in their prices.

[The Express Tribune - September 30th, 2011]

Sindh Floods Affect Vegetable Supply

The impact of floods in southern Sindh has taken its toll on the retail markets all over the country as the supplies of tomatoes and other vegetables have almost been cut off. Tomato prices had surged to a new high of Rs. 150 per kilogram in the retail market at the start of the month but that was mainly due to Eid holidays. This time the situation is different and the country has almost standing tomato crop. Apart from tomatoes, almost all vegetables are being sold above Rs. 50 per kilogram which is mainly due to the seasonal change. However, tomatoes' short supply has become a blessing in disguise for the traders while the retailers are making inventory gains by jacking up the rates of their old stocks. The supply curtailment due to floods has even benefited the wholesalers and importers as cargoes bought at normal rates in India are being sold at exorbitant rates. Incidentally, the surge in prices came suddenly within two days as tomatoes were easily available at around Rs. 50 to Rs. 60 in the mid-level retail markets. Despite the massive surge of almost 100%, the shopkeepers have a simple and effective tool of blaming the floods for everything. All the crops of poor farmers in Sindh have been washed away; there is nothing to eat and the prices will rise further is what the shopkeepers are saying. This may be a good advertising tool to encourage the customers to buy tomatoes and vegetables even at higher rates but the ground realities are not that bad. The surge came as the sale of green groceries was at its peak on the weekly holiday, when more people come out to buy essential farm products not only from the retail markets but also from weekly bazaars. The retailers are still making significant profits as the 17 kg crate of Indian tomatoes was auctioned at the average rate of Rs. 1,150, which means that the price of one kg would be Rs. 68, far less than the retailers were demanding. The situation became serious as choking at the border delayed some cargoes; as a result, the wholesalers created panic. However, adequate fruits availability has kept their prices at reasonable level and sufficient bananas are arriving from upper Sindh that has lowered its prices to Rs. 20 to Rs. 40 per dozen.

[Dawn - September 26, 2011]

Child Malnutrition Aggravates

Inability of the flood victims to harvest crops in the swamped lands is feared to intensify child malnutrition in Sindh. Children in Badin and Khairpur are in desperate need of nutritious food to help them survive this second disaster, that constitute about half of all 5.4 million flood victims. Malnutrition that already existed among children in many parts of the province has reached emergency levels after the recent flooding. Malnutrition was closely linked to hygienic practices among the people and therefore equal efforts were being made to sensitize victims about its relevance. Simultaneously a quick, well-coordinated relief effort was urgently needed to reach children and their families who had lost everything. This was extremely relevant as 49% of the more than 5.4 million flood victims are women and around five% of the one million affected households that is 56,000 households are headed by female. The number of victims had doubled in the last month only, adding that nearly half a million people have been displaced into

camps, half of them are children, and the numbers are rising daily. Out of 824,000 displaced people, 66% were currently living in temporary settlements and 20.4% affected people were living in open air, 34.1% were using plastic sheets as shelter and only 0.2% were living in a house.

[Pakistan Today - September 26, 2011]

UN Warns Of Food Crisis in Flood-Hit Areas

The United Nations warned of a food security and shelter crisis, saying it would soon run out of its stocks of food, essential medicines and tents if the international community failed to support the rapid response plan for flood victims in Sindh. After almost a week of its launch, confirmed donor contributions to the rapid response plan amounted to only \$9 million — just around 3 % of the funds required. This is awfully inadequate. Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said the scale of devastation this year was no less than what the nation experienced last year. Since the spread of the floods is all across Sindh, the national and international relief agencies and the media must portray its severity to the world. Mr. Gilani said the calamity besides claiming hundreds of lives had also resulted in huge economic loss as standing crops had been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of houses washed away or damaged. Appeal to the international community to fully support the people of Pakistan is needed and the rapid response plan to ensure that lives can be saved now as well as tomorrow. An emergency grant was being processed for Pakistan from the UN's central emergency response fund. The UN emergency support came largely from contingency and in-country stocks. The UN will face a depletion of relief food in one month and emergency shelter items will run out within weeks. More than 80% of people affected by floods relied directly or indirectly upon agriculture and livestock for their livelihood. There are serious concerns related to the rise in cases of waterborne diseases, along with malaria and dengue fever. Many people are living without shelter and are exposed to contaminated stagnant water. The death toll had reached 392 and the number of houses damaged by the floods was 1.5 million.

[Dawn - September 25, 2011]

Rains Spark Food and Vegetable Inflation in Karachi

Prices of fruits and vegetables have almost doubled in Karachi as devastating rains cause bottlenecks and long suspensions in key supply routes leading to the city. While these blockages have stopped the supply of various fruits and vegetables, prices of available stocks have registered increases of 100% in some cases. Both retailers of fruits and vegetables are charging 50 to 100% increased prices from poverty stricken masses, as compared to the prices of the commodities recorded previously. The price of onions particularly, already increased, is likely to face more jumps as almost 90% of the onion crop in Sindh has been devastated after the prolonged and heavy rains. Beside losses to growers and the price hike affecting millions of consumers, damage to the onion crop is also going to cause over \$60 million to the country's exporters. Sindh was expected to produce almost 275,000 tones onion during this season. Currently, onion and tomato in the city are being supplied from Balochistan at comparatively higher price. As heavy rains continue in various parts of the province, the aftermath has caused retail prices of tomatoes, potatoes, lemons, cucumbers, etc, to record increases of between 10 and 100%, much to the dismay of consumers. Coupled with rain and flooding related hardships in their own lives, high prices of essential kitchen items are an unbearable burden on much of the population.

In fruits, prices of apples, mangoes, bananas, grapes, etc, have also skyrocketed. Mangoes, which were sold at Rs. 100 per kilogram recently, are now available at Rs. 200/ kg, while bananas and apples are also being sold with the enhanced charges of Rs. 50-60/ kg in the retail market. Small bunches of coriander are being sold at Rs. 15-20 against the previous prices of Rs. 5-10. After

climatic changes in interior Sindh brought heavy rains, fruit prices in fruit markets at Super Highway have increased by four times, and yet more increase is on the cards as supply from rest of the country has not been restored. In addition to the issue of abrupt price increases in the retail market, abandoned supply has caused fruit and vegetable stocks in Karachi's wholesale markets to reach alarmingly low levels, prompting fears of further price jumps. Damage to 90% of the onion crop in Sindh has almost stopped export of the vegetable. Such problems are likely to cause approximately \$70 million in trade losses. 40,000 tons of onions have been made available from Balochistan since the beginning of the current season in June. Exporters depend on the onion crop to meet the rest of their export orders between September and February. About one million tons of onion every year, fulfilling 50% of the local demand, while meeting 80-90% of the export target.

[Pakistan Today – September 07, 2011]

Pakistan's Flooded Breadbasket Spells Economic Misery

Monsoon floods that sunk Pakistan's arable belt for a second year running have piled economic woes on top of a humanitarian catastrophe facing up to eight million people in the south. Crops of grain, cotton, sugarcane, fruit and vegetables have been submerged, clocking up nearly \$2 billion in farming losses, and experts say the disaster could worsen the country's already dismal growth and inflation prospects. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that nearly three quarters of southern Sindh province's crops have been damaged or destroyed by the waters & the other two third of food stocks have also been hit. One year after the country experienced its worst-ever floods, affecting 21 million people, farmers were again viewing their fields with despair. In Mirpurkhas, one of the most fertile and badly-flooded districts, the branches of the cotton plants were blackened with water damage, and the usually white buds were colorless and droopy. Rice plants that usually bloom above watery paddy fields were completely submerged, while stalks of sugarcane were miserably short at five feet tall. Sindh's agriculture ministry said the financial cost of crop losses so far was estimated at 163 billion Pakistani rupees (\$1.87 billion). Cotton faces losses of \$998 million, income from chili crops will be down \$427 million and both rice and sugarcane will lose an estimated \$135 million. Besides, Sindh have lost \$180 million through the destruction of tomato, onion, banana and other vegetable crops. Agriculture makes up 23 % of Pakistan's GDP and due to this disaster the country's overall growth rate could fall from 4.5-3% on current trends. Exports are likely to be hit as Pakistan struggles to provide enough food to feed its own population in the wake of the floods. Pakistan's largest agricultural trading customers are the United States, which takes more than one fifth of cotton, textiles and rice exports, and China, which takes 15 %. The floods will certainly affect the trade and may cause a loss of at least \$3 billion to the Pakistani exchequer, leaving export receipts at \$25 billion for the fiscal year.

[Pakistan Today – September 28, 2011]

Global Context

750,000 Facing Death as Somalia Famine Spreads

Famine has spread to six out of eight regions in southern Somalia, with 750,000 people facing imminent starvation and hundreds of people are dying each day despite a ramping up of aid relief. The entire Bay region has now been declared a famine area. Bay is the sixth region of Somalia to slip into famine since the UN's initial declaration of famine in the war-torn country in July that has left 4 million Somalis, or 53 % of the population, unable to meet their food needs. Hundreds of people are dying each day and at least half of them are children. The remaining regions of southern Somalia are expected to slip into famine by the end of the year. The rate of malnutrition (among children) in Bay region is 58 %. This is a record rate of acute malnutrition.

Aid agencies are only able to get food aid to 1 million of those in need because the al Qaeda-affiliated rebel group, al Shabaab, which controls much of the south, will not allow food shipments in. Instead, agencies are using food and cash vouchers which hungry families can exchange for commodities in local markets. Focusing on the access that people have to food will help to stabilize the situation more than just looking entirely at food distributions as a solution. Somalia is at the epicenter of a hunger crisis in the Horn of Africa region which is affecting over 13 million people. While a small harvest is expected in January, following rains in October, the situation is unlikely to improve until main harvest of August 2012 and the rains are not without their risks. The rains unfortunately bring with them increased risk of disease. Cholera, malaria and measles could dramatically increase death rates amongst an already weakened population. Aids agencies say they are still short an estimated \$1 billion (622 million pounds) in emergency funds. The African Union was shunned by most heads of state and raised \$351 million, \$300 million of which came from the African Development Bank to be spent over a four-year period. Kenya, where parts of the country are facing the most severe drought in decades, is hosting a regional summit to discuss the food crisis on September 8-9. Famine exists where at least 20 % of households cannot access enough food, over 30 % are acutely malnourished and two people per 10,000 die every day.

[The Nation - September 06, 2011]

Water Crisis in Pakistan

Water Crisis Grows Into a Test of Landlord-Peasant Relations

Once known for its rich agricultural base, Sindh now stands on a dry land. With water becoming a source of tension between landlord and farmers, and the latter bracing for an acute shortage every sowing season, it has led to an agricultural crisis. As 35 % of water shortage is recorded year after year, both argue over their rights to the Indus. Often, it is the Sardars, Pirs, Waderas and Jagirdars who succeed in influencing and stealing the share of farmers to irrigate their own lands. But in the eyes of the landlord, it is a cycle of revenge. The blame game starts with India being accused of building dams which allow it to manipulate the water flow as and when it wants, stealing Pakistan's share. Subsequently, the Punjab province is accused of taking away Sindh's share as a result of which landlords in Sindh deprive peasants, particularly during the crucial sowing season Rabi and Kharif, as they divert excess water towards their agricultural lands for irrigation, and hence, create an artificial water shortage. According to officials in the irrigation department, water shortage mostly occurs in the Kharif season during the months of May and June and in November, December and February for Rabi. It is during these months that most of the disputes are reported among landlords and peasants. Interestingly, water-crisis in the districts led them to try a more economical option which produced better results.

Due to an acute water shortage peasants switched to hybrid paddy seeds three years ago, which actually proved to be a better option. Hybrid seeds require less water and grow in 100 to 120 days and its yield is between 80 and 120 maunds. Moreover, the use of hybrid varieties increased the annual paddy cultivation in the entire rice belt of upper Sindh. But this does not solve the problem of other crops that do require lots of water during the sowing season. The irrigation system of Sindh is part of the Indus Basin irrigation system and is divided into multiple channels. Canals originating from River Indus divide into Wahs, minors, Shakhs, modules and ultimately, pipelines – in the same order. Often, landlords and the political elite are accused of misusing their power by controlling the flow of water as they attach direct outlet pipes to canals and modules. These pipelines have larger diameters to allow more water to flow through to irrigate hundreds of acres of their land. Although this is a clear violation of irrigation laws, there is no check on this practice nor are the landlords held accountable. However, in 2006, the government had deployed Rangers across the southern province to control water theft and monitor an equal distribution of water and end the illegal practice of constructing

modules and direct outlets. This yielded positive results as farmers at the tail-end of Sindh received sufficient water for their crops. But their happiness was short-lived as the Rangers were called back, leaving the peasants at the mercy of the landlords yet again.

According to the Indus River System Authority (Irsa), the province's water indent starts from Chashma Barrage in Punjab, which is 190 miles away from Sindh's first barrage – Guddu. Sources in the irrigation department disclosed that if 100,000 cusecs of water is released from Chashma for Sindh, only 75,000 to 80,000 cusecs reaches the Guddu barrage as 5% is lost to evaporation and soaking of dried embankments, while the remaining 15 to 20% is stolen by the landlords of Punjab through lift machines. For several years now, Sindh's peasants have demanded that Irsa brings into account Sindh's water share from Guddu barrage instead of Chashma barrage, but their concerns have not been addressed. However, Punjab is somewhat responsible, 40 % of Sindh's water is lost owing to a poor irrigation system. Most of the canals, Wahs and minors are choked with shrubs and other sediments, which hampers the smooth flow of water. As a result, those at the tail-end are deprived of their share. Citing the example of Kirthar and Rice canals, the official explained that both are situated on the lower ground and end at comparatively higher grounds. In case of a water shortage, the water instantly flows downstream, unless a landlord forcibly lowers the gate of a regulator to prevent the water from flowing back down. Ghotki where farmers have not only been facing an acute water shortage for several years, but the little they receive is also contaminated. Most of the water flowing in Ghotki carries the industrial waste of Punjab. Our lands have turned barren by the use of this water. While some farmers organize small protests by blocking roads for a few hours, in most cases, they avoid confronting the landlords fearing a backlash. But some experts fear that this water crisis may soon become a source of discontent and spiral out of control. It is only after irrigation authorities launch an operation against the landlords and their illegally constructed modules and pipe outlets, that a just distribution of water would be possible. But that isn't going to happen. These landlords make up the parliament and authorities cannot afford to upset a government they're part of.

[The Express Tribune - September 15, 2011]

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