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## Agriculture on the Peg

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The share of agriculture in Pakistan's economy as 21.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product in 2009-10, has been dwindling progressively over the last many years. In monetary terms it is rupee 5670.768 billion. It was 22.47 percent in 2005-6, which was rupee 4860.476 billion. In nominal terms, the monetary value of agriculture has grown over these years by rupee 810.292 billion. In real terms, discounting for often double digit annual inflation during these five years, it has shrunk.

The reason is simple, at the back of public policy; resource mobilization from rural to urban economy continues unabated and, major investment including foreign direct investment and investment through the annual development programme has been channelized to the non agriculture sector. Even public investment in the water sector has been allocated to maintain the existing water distribution system, rather than in projects responsible for increase in the availability of water for irrigation. The biggest natural resource as an important input to agriculture is

water, of which, 59 million acre feet ended up in the Arabian Sea, during the recent floods. This is more than six times the total water storage capacity of the country.

Pakistan's agriculture sector largely comprises of livestock, and four major crops; wheat, sugarcane, cotton and rice. Pakistan is among the top five dairy producing countries in the world, and the four crops are producing yield sufficient for the domestic staple consumption of the population. Nevertheless, food insecurity is on the rise, as edible products such as wheat-flour, sugar, milk and meat are far too expensive, to be affordable as staple food items, on a regular basis and in the recommended quantity. Clearly, public policy is at the heart of this strategic insecurity. The current price determining mechanism of the produce chain at different levels is not in line with national goals, most important of which is feeding the population, thus creating food insecurity which can be a catalyst for negative social mobilization.

Growth in the agriculture sector has decelerated over the last many decades. On average, it was 5.4 percent in 1980's, which came down to 4.4 percent during the decade of nineties, which progressively dwindled to 3.2 percent in the last decade.



### Policy Reform?

In the absence of any time relevant agriculture policy, decisions about important agriculture matters are made at the federal level to cater for the needs of the time, rather than achieving any benchmark in the framework of policy. The last agriculture policy was given by the then federal minister Sartaj Aziz about two decades ago. The policy was in line with the FAO, which stresses crop maximization for food security and agriculture income in the long-term. The next minister with the relevant portfolio, Majeed Malik, changed the emphasis from the crop side to livestock, resulting in weakening of the policy, which later became ineffective. This virtual absence of policy has given rise to administrative decision making,

often taken in isolation to support fiscal maximization of the federal budget. Policy decisions taken by the Finance Minister, Shaukat Aziz in 1999-2000 about the bumper cotton crop, proved counterproductive. A bumper cotton crop in 1999-2000 had a negative price impact on raw cotton produce. As the chief executive of the country, General (R) Pervaiz Mushraff had little knowledge of taking important economic decisions, so he was dependent on the then finance minister Shaukat Aziz, who took the first important decision of his tenure. He instructed the Trading Corporation of Pakistan, not to indulge in cotton price stabilization operation, which is otherwise a norm in the absence of any support price mechanism for the crop. As a result, raw cotton prices fell down to an all time low of below three hundred rupees per forty kilogram. The middle man purchased the produce, at throw away prices. Farmers, especially the small ones working as tenants, lost their money. After several months, the TCP was asked to start purchasing, and the middle man became the sole beneficiary. As a result, it is estimated that more than two billion dollars worth of capital was transferred from the rural to urban economy. Later, the textile industry used that easy money for its BMR. The following year there was no cash in the hands of the farmers to maintain and repair machinery and buy essentials. As a result, there was a general recession in the allied industry and the following year in the agriculture sector due to lack of purchasing power. Plough makers, tube well manufacturers etc. particularly felt the impact. Almost all major value added exports of the textile sector today are a direct result of that BMR. Production capacity for their manufacturing was acquired by the industry through the BMR, completed with an investment of about \$ 2 billion. The rural economy feels the brunt of that one single decision even today, and the large scale textile industry has benefited from it.

#### No Money, No Seed

The bulk of Pakistan's farmers finance crop sowing and input cost through credit. Non availability or non affordability puts limits on their productivity, profitability and produce as well. In Pakistan agriculture accounts for only 4.5 percent of the total credit portfolio, whereas, it accounts for 21.4 percent of the GDP and employ's 44 percent of the national labor force. In 2009-10, only 47 percent needs of the agriculture credit could be met. The remaining 53 percent needs were unmet. This was 248.12 billion rupees, out of which 119.61 billion rupees were advanced by the five major commercial banks. The public sector bank, ZTBL provided only 79.01 billion rupees. Obviously, the bulk of the credit provided by the five commercial banks was not available to the small farmers who tilled the leased land as tenants. They could not provide collateral. Out of this 248.12 billion rupees 11.3 billion were spend on purchasing tractors, straight away benefiting bigger farmers. This is what has been happening for many decades.

Similarly, inputs like seed and fertilizer are out of their reach as well. In 2009-10 only 45 percent of the required certified

cotton seed was available before sowing. Available rice seed was sufficient for only 31 percent of the hopefuls. Maize seed to 33 percent, wheat seed to 21.5 percent and oilseeds were available for only 18.9 percent of sowing. The fodder seed was in extreme short supply. It was sufficient for only 10.3 percent of the required needs. The rest of the cultivation was done with contaminated seed, resulting in low yield and disease. This short supply of seed brought overall seed prices higher, bringing profitability of the agriculture sector even lower.

#### Knowledge without Extension

Little has been done for the extension of research, on which Pakistan spends too little to be productive. Public sector investment in agriculture research as a percentage of the GDP has been 0.3 percent, whereas, in developed countries it is 2.36 percent and 0.53 percent in developing countries. And, little has been done to extend whatever knowledge is created.

#### Reforms of the Time

Some land reforms have taken place over time, the single largest of which is reduction in form size and, land redistribution. With each passing generation, inheritance has multiplied the number of forms in almost the same pool of land area. The total form cultivated area grew by just one million hector in the next thirty years after 1972, whereas number of agriculture forms almost doubled in this time period. In 1972 the total area under cultivation was 19.854 million hectares, which grew to 20.406 million hectares, which was almost the same. But, in comparison the total number of farms in this period grew from 3.762 million to 6.618 million; it almost doubled. This has reduced the average farm size to half, bringing in efficiency and productivity.

#### Not a Grain to Eat

Despite poor policy and bad administration, agriculture is contributing to its limit. Infact, for the last two years, it is agriculture which is supporting growth. According to the preliminary data gathered by the federal government the



situation with regard to new crops being grown seems promising.

Sowing for wheat crop has been completed over more than 97 percent of the targeted area, and the government is expecting 25 million tonnes of wheat grain this season, a million tonnes more than the last year. Pakistan needs only 23 million tonnes per annum to feed 170 million people. The paddy crop last year produced 7 million tonnes of rice; this season the initial statistics have put that figure at 6.8 million tonnes. Only 3.5 million tonnes are enough for national food requirements. Sugarcane is also providing a sizable crop of 49.3 million tonnes, it was 53 million tonnes last year, and this is the reason that sugar mills are still crushing cane to their capacity.

Despite, all this food, insecurity is growing to an extent where it has acquired huge dimensions. Wheat flour prices have jumped to rupee 28 per kilogram, bringing bread (roti) prices to rupee 7 a piece. Rice prices have reached close to rupee 90 per kilograms, and sugar has reached a record rupee 75 per kilogram. Food inflation has pushed a large number of citizens below the food insecurity line. The reason for this are twofold: policy relating to support prices mechanism and poor distribution policy.

#### Conclusion

Agriculture land and the unskilled rural labor are the two biggest assets, Pakistan has. Unless they are exploited to the optimal level Pakistan cannot move forward towards a quick and sustainable growth pattern. Reforming agriculture is nothing but the combination of the two, presented in different models and schemes. Human resource development/skills development in the rural areas is the need of the hour. This should be linked with the overall policy and institution reforms attached with the market reforms for better marketing of agriculture produce. The government should improve policy governance at the macro level reducing vulnerability. If this is done the private sector can start to play a positive role with new investments and knowledge contribution. Agriculture should be declared an industry, so that a massive wave of rural unemployment, unprecedented in the last five thousand years of Indus valley's history, could be tamed. Otherwise, we have reached a point where social dimensions of economic life could be devastating. ●

## Agriculture Labour Market Dynamics and their Potential of Labour Absorption

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### Trends in Agriculture Growth and Employment

It is well known that the agriculture sector of our economy has been the dominant sector in the country since the time of its independence in 1947, which contributed 53 percent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at that time. Although the sector had a low level of productivity, it achieved a reasonable rate of growth of output and employment in the past. During the period 1960-85, an average growth rate of 3.8 percent was achieved by agriculture, which rose to an average rate of about 4.37 percent per annum during 1986-87/1990-91, but declined to a rate of 3.2 percent during 2001-02/2004/05. However; it slightly increased to an average rate of 3.4 percent during the years 2005-06/2007/08-09 but as a whole, a declining trend in its growth rate was witnessed in the economy with a few exceptions of upward trends in some years. It may be seen that although the share of agriculture fell considerably in the national income during the last three decades or so, yet it is the largest single contributor to the GDP.

The employment elasticity in the sector, which was as high as 1.05 on average in the seventies came down to 0.49 in the eighties and to 0.14 during 1987-88/92-93, which rose slightly to 0.20 during the period 1995-96/2000-01 and substantially during 2000-01/02 005-06 showing some upward trend by increasing, on average, to a level of 0.48 but further declined to an average rate of 0.27 during 2005-06/2008-09. While the rate of growth in employment, which was 3.2 percent in the seventies declined to 1.9 percent in



eighties and to 1.6 percent during 1990-91/95-96. At a later stage the average employment growth in the agriculture sector increased by a decreasing average rate of 1.40 percent during 1996-97/1999-2000 and increased by a decreased average rate of 1.30 percent during 200-01/2004-05. However, the period 2005-06/2008-09 witnessed an impressive rate of increase in the employment growth in agriculture sector as it rose by an average of 6.77 percent during the period.

Despite a substantial increase in the rate of employment growth in agriculture during a few years, the increase, as a whole, is much slower than the rate of growth of labor force in rural areas. Similarly the share of economically active population engaged in agriculture declined from 57 percent in 1971-72 to 53 percent in 1981 and to 47 percent in 1996-97, while it further fell to 42.1 percent in 2001-02, but it is recorded to have originally increased to 43.4 percent in 2005-06 and to 45.1 percent in 2008-2009. Given the situation, the declining absorption in agriculture sector, as a whole, is quite evident. To identify some policy measures needed to ensure its productivity and labour absorption capacity, an attempt has been made first in the following section to analyse some of the important factors responsible for this trend.

#### Factors Affecting the Labour Absorption in Agricultural Sector

##### *Domination of the 'Major Crop Sector' in Agriculture Production:*

On tracing the reasons for this trend, it has been found that apart from the relatively faster growth of the tertiary sector along with the a reasonable rate of expansion of the manufacturing sector (secondary sector), the most important factor for the declining weight of agriculture is its increasing emphasis on the 'major crop' sector in agricultural production comprising mainly of a few crops such as wheat, rice, cotton and sugar-cane. The analysis made by some economists reveal that in the years ahead, these crops might have only a limited potential for growth of output and employment absorption. In the year 2008-09, though there was an increase in the growth rate in the major crop sector but as a whole the crop production growth rate has been found continuously decreasing with few exceptions in the years after 2000-01[at constant factor cost of 1999-2000]. Whereas ironically, the so called 'minor crops' such as fruits, vegetables, pulses and oilseeds which have,

in fact, a great potential for agricultural growth, employment creation, export earnings and reducing import expenditure, accounted for only 11.43 percent of the total contribution of agriculture in GDP during 2008-09 [at constant factor cost of 1999-2000], coming down from 19.53 in 1980-81(at constant factor cost of 1959-60 on new methodology adopted in 1988-89) and 13.51 percent in 1999-2000 (at constant factor cost of 1980-81)

This is largely due to the fact that the cropped area devoted to minor crops which was found already low even in the past, has suffered a decline in their area share as it came down from 246111 million hectares in 1995-96 to 228223 million hectares in 2001-02 but slightly increased to 205694 million hectares in 2008-09. This has been particularly noteworthy in the case of pulses and oil seeds. However, the share of fruits and vegetables has shown an increase during the last twenty-five years by only about 37.4 percent. Within the agricultural sector, livestock, fisheries and forestry did not show any impressive growth.

Of this, the livestock accounted for almost all the contribution, since fisheries and forestry together provided only for about 4.1 percent of the total agriculture output in 2008-09, which too has been reported to have declined marginally from 4.8 percent in 1990-91 and 5.15 percent in 1980-81. Forestry is, in fact, one of the most neglected components of agriculture. All these factors together result in a limited potential of growth for the agriculture sector and employment expansion unless structural changes are initiated along the most pragmatic lines.

##### *Agrarian Changes and Demand for Farm Labour*

The changes in the demand for agriculture labour, as consequences of agrarian change are another aspect, which deserve attention. There is a widely held view that that the Green Revolution has set in motion a tendency towards polarization in farm areas and farming arrangements,



having an impact on the demand for agriculture labour. There is a tendency among landowners to resume owner cultivation of smaller or major part of their land formerly rented out to tenants. This has led to the dispossession of tenant farmers and reduction in the size of operational holdings.

There is also a marked reduction in the size of 'permanent hired workers', seemingly due to resumption of land by owners who might have introduced a widespread mechanized operation on their medium sized and large farms. Similarly, the number of 'casual workers' has increased by a large proportion since their demand rose for specific operations as cropping intensities increased. As a whole, the consequences of agrarian changes on the labour absorption capacity of the sector, it has been witnessed that 'labour surplus' has been constantly increasing resulting in the increase in the proportion of non-farm households. On the other hand, there are evidences that localized labour shortages existed, during peak seasons in certain areas. The imperfect labour mobility due to inadequate information regarding place and job availability, costly and still unsatisfactory transportation accentuated the paradoxical situation of labour shortages.

Given the propensity of small farmers to use family labour rather than hired labour, and given the tendency of the large farmers to adopt a labour displacing mechanism, a polarization in the size of distribution of farms which is most likely to increase substantially in future, will dampen the demand for hired labour.

#### *Absence of Scientific Planning for Agriculture Sector*

The agricultural sector planning in the country focused, so far, mainly on short-term food provision concerns while issues such as land tenure reforms and markets that stimulate entrepreneurship for land investment received low priority. On a less than adequate basis, the public sector extension agents provided some basic training concerning agricultural practices for a limited number of skills related to raising crop yield. Although the era of 'produce and sell' has ended almost nothing has been done in our system to develop market information services to keep abreast of promising products.

The cropping area devoted to 'minor crops' which was found already low even in the past, has suffered a decline in its area share. This has been particularly noteworthy in the case of pulses and oil seeds. Despite various successive governments promising to change policies to develop the sector, not much has been done to initiate a wide farm-to-market roads network, sound extension services in the sector to increase productivity along with crop diversity, establish regional packing points, refrigeration facilities etc. which seemed to have affected the growth and labour absorptive capacity of the sector. It is also felt that the policy environment in the country was usually not conducive for

introducing sustainable resource management practices and land improvement and its reclamation except occasionally by government extension workers in a few areas and NGOs.

#### *Strategies Required for Raising Labour Absorptive Capacity of Agricultural Sector*

Against the backdrop of existing levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty in the country, and their likely future trends, which are anticipated to be pessimistic if permitted to behave without major policy intervention, the need to generate employment opportunities on a substantial scale can hardly be exaggerated. Some major policy measures needed in this context are stated as follows:

#### *Creation of Capacity to Promote National Comparative Advantages and Competitiveness*

Short and medium term strategies are needed to take advantage of national, regional and international market opportunities in light of national capacities and endowments to respond to international competition with a view to create a market for agriculture products. Services that offer market intelligence and assessment concerning agroecological conditions, labour and labour productivity, production costs and marketing needs will need to be developed. It will help guide agricultural research and development projects, technological development and training programmes for the expansion of agricultural activities.

#### *Development of Necessary Management and Marketing and Support Services*

A new human capital base should be developed to respond to (i) promising activities associated with high value cropping, (ii) market-oriented crops and more remunerative land use practices; and (iii) reduction in production costs for traditional cereal crops. In addition, post-harvest handling, agro processing and skills that address the environment, consumer health etc. will also be required. Grower business arrangements, producer associations and special short courses by the government extension departments, universities and viable NGOs specializing in the area need to be encouraged, these will help in the development of agricultural sector and enhance the labour absorptive capacity.

#### *Formulation of Policy Framework for Supportive Linkages of Agriculture with Other Sectors*

Regional and global trade reforms will create opportunities for rural economies that have definite comparative advantages. Thus to ensure maximum advantage, the government must suitably integrate its commercial, educational and environmental needs. In light of these, the agriculture and agro-industrial system, boundaries between agriculture and the industrial activities should not be so traditionally sectionalized. Further, given the capital formation that enhances land, investment becomes essential to promote economic activities in the agriculture sector.

### *Development of Small Farm Sector:*

It has to be kept in view that large farms are found to have reached close to their ceilings on yield with existing technologies and labour absorptive capacity, whereas the small farms are found having considerable potential not only for the increase in yield but also for higher labour input use per acre. It may, therefore, be suggested that for the improvement both in output and employment, the small farms (farms of less than 25 acres constituted for more than ninety percent of the total number of farms and more than 60 percent of the farm area) should be given special attention for their development. Tenancy rights and the weak financial position of small farmers are major areas needing attention to develop a small farm sector in the country.

### *Development of 'minor crop sector' and 'Other Rural Pursuits':*

Although amongst all the crops the highest and the most lucrative growth potential exists in the case of 'minor' crops such as vegetables, pulses, oilseeds and fruits, not yet much headway has, so far, been made even at par with many countries of Asian region such as of SAARC and ASEAN, in realizing this potential. Despite a great concern expressed in recent years for the shortage of oil seeds production and resultant high import of oilseeds requirements, progress in this direction is highly un-satisfactory. A well-planned programme encouraging the growth of fruits and a newly introduced variety of oilseeds i.e., sunflower, safflower and soybean, which have a great potential, is required to be launched on a much wider scale. The programme package should also contain extension services to develop improved varieties adopted to local conditions and institutional support at the village level for credit processing, marketing and storage.

Other rural pursuits in the agricultural sector like forestation, animal husbandry, poultry farming and fishing may be developed at a much higher scale to raise the level of employment and income of rural masses. Forestry and fishing are, in fact, among the most important components of agriculture, which have a great potential but have not been given priority for their development to take place. Efforts should be made to initiate the process of mobilizing the local community to become engaged in forestry and fishing to institutionalize these for their sustainable development at the grass root level.

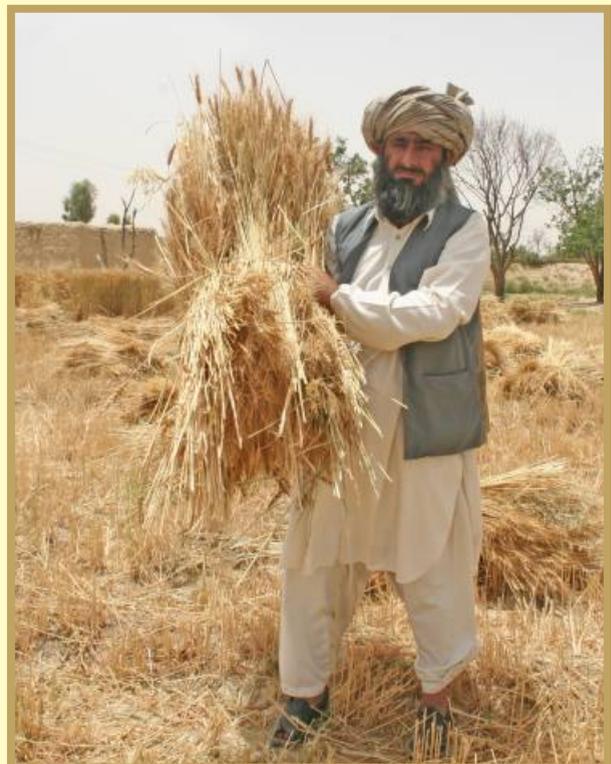
For ensuring the success and effectiveness of any programme of social and economic development; a strong political commitment supported by good governance by the competent government functionaries for the job along with popular participation of the community are most essential elements for achieving the desired goals. Also in the present context, the above factors need to be addressed meticulously to achieve success in the implementation of the above stated strategies for employment expansion in the agricultural sector and in alleviating poverty. ●

## Insecurity breeds Insecurity

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It is often said, "Food insecurity anywhere, threatens peace everywhere". Food insecurity is one of the causes of unrest and/or political instability (and vice-versa). Persistent food insecurity may cause conflicts, civil wars and can threaten the overall peace of the community, society, nation or even the world depending on the extent and spectrum of hunger and poverty.

The term food security reflects the desire to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. The World Food Summit in 1996 defined food security as, "when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". This definition implies that food security has three pillars i.e., physical availability of food, socio-economic access to food and food absorption. Based on a composite index of the above mentioned pillars of food security, SDPI (in collaboration with WFP and SDC) observed that the state of food security in Pakistan has deteriorated since 2003. According to SDPI's "Food Insecurity in Pakistan" report released last year, the conditions for food security are inadequate in 61 percent districts (80 out of 131 districts<sup>1</sup>) of Pakistan. This is a sharp increase from 2003, when conditions for food security were inadequate in 45 percent districts (54 out of 120 districts) of Pakistan. Almost half of the population of Pakistan (48.6 percent) doesn't have access to sufficient food for an active and healthy life at all times.



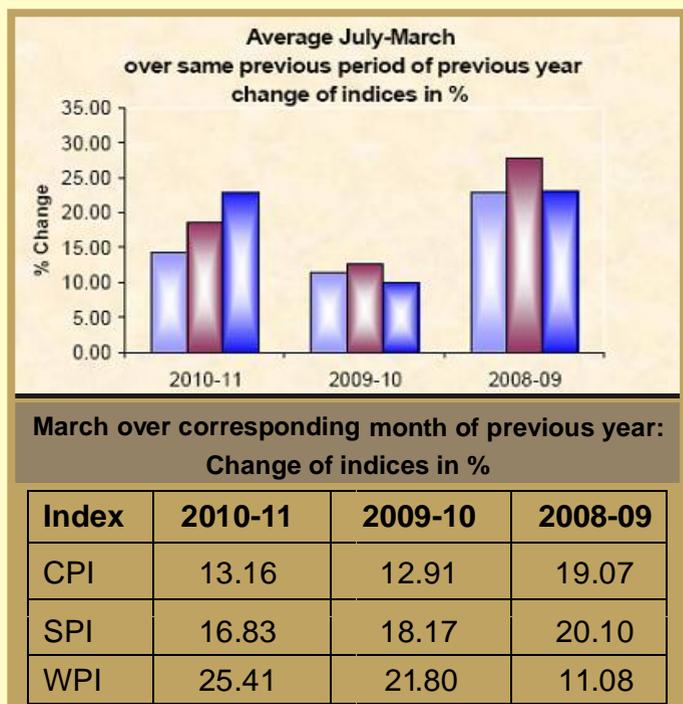
SDPI's Food Insecurity report highlights substantial evidence that inter and intra provincial disparities exist in terms of food security. FATA has the highest percentage of a food insecure population (67.7 percent) followed by Balochistan (61.2 percent), and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) (56.2 percent). The lowest percentage of a food insecure population (23.6 percent) is in Islamabad. Among the districts, Dera Bugti in Balochistan has the highest percentage of food insecure people (82.4 percent). Balochistan has the highest number of districts with worst conditions for food security. The 20 districts of Pakistan with worst conditions for food security include 10 districts from Balochistan, 5 from FATA; 3 from KPK; and 1 from Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Sindh each. The number of districts from Balochistan in this category has doubled since 2003. Dera Bugti, Musa Khel, Upper Dir, North Waziristan, Kohistan, Muhmmmand, Dalbidin, South Waziristan, Orakzai, and Panjgur are the 10 districts with worst conditions for food security in Pakistan. Islamabad Capital Territory is the most food secure district of Pakistan. Among the top twenty districts with best conditions for food security, besides Islamabad, are 14 districts in Punjab and 5 districts in Sindh. There are two major sources of food; one is crop based while the other one is animal based. Physical availability of food is determined on the basis of "consumption versus production". Although Pakistan witnessed a six percent increase in surplus wheat producing districts (from 24 percent in 2003 to 30 percent in 2009) during the last few years, the percentage of surplus food (aggregate of both animal and crop based food) producing districts declined from 28.3 percent in 2003 to 17.5 percent in 2009. This means that the majority of districts in Pakistan are relying on external food supply either from domestic or international sources. This reliance occasionally creates marked disparity of prices in food surplus and food deficient regions. At times, this also results in hoarding of food leading to food price hikes, thus taking food beyond the economic access of many. This phenomenon is also supported by the observation that consumption of wheat in Pakistan declined by 10 percent in 2009- 10 due to lack of purchasing power. It can be safely claimed that ensuring food security is much beyond the increased wheat production.

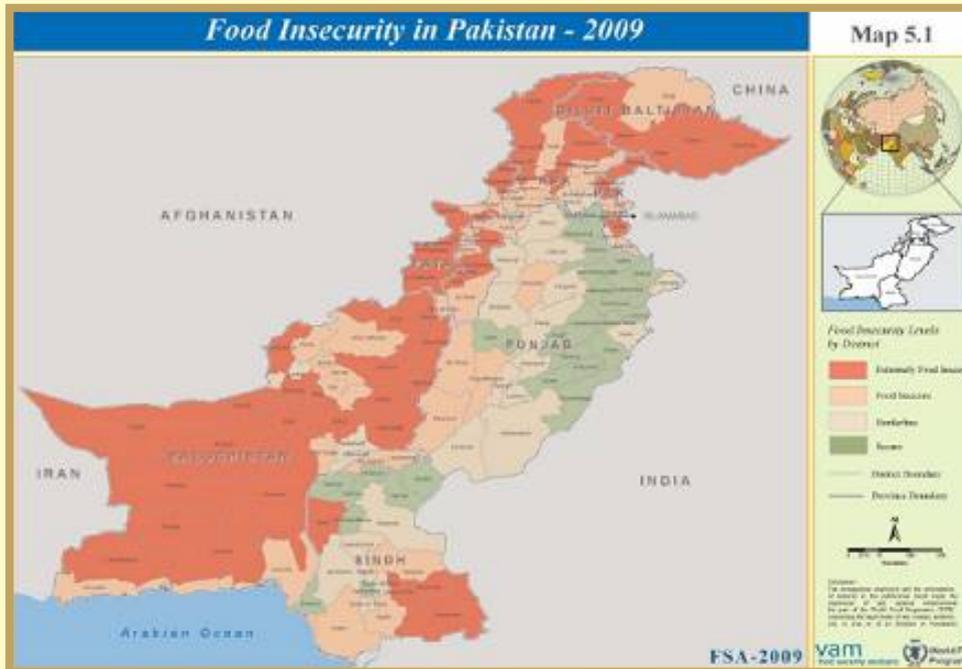
SDP and WFP determined "Access to Food" by the Food Consumption Scores- household income, child dependency, living conditions, food expenditures, market prices of food commodities, and coping strategies. The percentage of districts with adequate conditions for reasonable access to food was not very promising in 2003. Only 13.3 percent i.e., 16 out of 120 districts had adequate conditions for reasonable access to food. However, this situation seems to be further aggravated in 2009 when only 7.6 percent districts (10 out of 131) fell in the category of having reasonable conditions for access to food. Conditions of access to food in Balochistan have particularly deteriorated. In

2003, the 20 districts in Pakistan with the worst conditions for access to food included 8 districts from KPK, 4 from FATA, 3 from GB, 1 from Sindh and 1 from Punjab. In 2009, this category includes 16 districts from Balochistan, 3 from KPK and 1 from Sindh.

The third pillar of food security, i.e. food absorption, was measured based on the state of sanitation, access to drinking water, and female literacy rate. Only 9 percent districts (11 out of 120) displayed conditions for reasonable food absorption in 2003. In 2009 the situation had further deteriorated with only 7.6 percent (10 out of 131) districts in Pakistan meeting these prerequisites. One quarter of the total districts in Pakistan has extremely poor sanitation facilities where more than 50 percent of houses have no toilets. Similarly one quarter of the total districts has an extremely poor state of drinking water where more than 50 percent households have no access to clean potable water. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of the districts have an extremely low female literacy rate (10 percent or below). FATA with 6.2 percent female literacy rate is the worst.

Provision of adequate conditions for reasonable access to food merits the immediate attention of policy makers and international community as 25 out of 29 districts in Balochistan, 5 out of 7 agencies of FATA, 12 out of 24 districts in KPK, 8 out of 23 districts in Sindh, and 5 out of 34 districts in Punjab have extremely poor conditions for access to food. It is important to note that 4 out of 5 districts with extremely low conditions for access to food in Punjab are in Southern Punjab. With the increase in poverty, people spend more on food as compared to non-food items. Within the poorest group, the average household's expenditure share on food has gone up to 61.6 percent in 2009 against





Coping with growing food insecurity is a daunting challenge for the Government of Pakistan that has to prioritize its limited resources amongst defense related expenditures (to curb militancy); debt retirement; day to day administration; and public sector development. However, the potential militancy-food insecurity nexus cannot be ignored in Pakistan and requires a change in paradigm where food insecurity should not be treated merely as a humanitarian issue, but a national security issue.

The Food Insecurity

55.6 percent in 2005-06. The most common coping strategy both in urban as well as rural areas is to rely on less preferred and less expensive food. The second most adopted strategy is limiting the size of meals. Negative coping strategies, including reducing expenditure on health and education, lead to chronic food insecurity.

Most of the above mentioned figures reveal that individual food security in Pakistan has deteriorated from 2003 to 2009. One can try to understand the insurgency and militancy in Balochistan, FATA, KPK and four remote districts of Southern Punjab from a food security angle. Although it is difficult to develop conclusive empirical proof, the strong overlap of food insecurity and militancy provides considerable evidence of a potential nexus.

Insecurity breeds insecurity and it is not surprising that most of the food insecure districts such as Upper Dir, Shangla, Malakand, Swat, D.G. Khan, Rajin Pur, Muzaffargarh, Kohlo, Kashmore, Jacobabad and Dadu were also the worst affected districts during recent floods. Incidentally these districts are also marred by various forms of militancy and violence too. The links are quite clear, wrong policies lead to poverty and marginalisation, which in turn not only lead to militancy but also increased vulnerabilities to natural calamities thus leading to more poverty and food insecurity. The vicious cycle goes on.

Report endorses the recommendations of the Planning Commission's Task Force on Food Security that a National Food Security Strategy must be evolved. We suggest that the primary focus of such a strategy should be ensuring food security in extremely food insecure districts. Resources channelized to improve the food security situation at the local level are critical to improve development and security at the provincial, national and regional level.

Coping with growing food insecurity is a daunting challenge for the Government of Pakistan that has to prioritize its limited resources amongst defense related expenditures (to curb militancy); debt retirement; day to day administration; and public sector development. However, the potential militancy-food insecurity nexus cannot be ignored in Pakistan and requires a change in paradigm where food insecurity should not be treated merely as a humanitarian issue, but a national security issue. SDPI's report endorses the recommendations of the Planning Commission's Task Force on Food Security that a National Food Security Strategy must be evolved. We suggest that the primary focus of such a strategy should be ensuring food security in extremely food insecure districts. Resources channelized to improve the food security situation at the local level are critical to improve development and security at province, national and regional level. It looks like that the country is already paying its price for having neglected food security. ●

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