Food security in South Asia: The way forward
South Asia has the highest proportions of malnourished and hungry people in Asia; paradoxically, it is also one of the leading food exporting regions of the world (Hoda in Mittal & Sethi 2011). It has made improvements in education; yet, its high illiteracy rates deter people from fully utilising opportunities that the South Asian economic growth presents. Not surprisingly, such disadvantages are increasingly pushing South Asia towards a state of increased food insecurity.

Recent estimates place forty percent of South Asian population below the international poverty line (those who survive on $1.25 a day or less) (UNICEF & WHO 2012). That means more than 571 million people in the region are surviving on an income that is insufficient to buy adequate food. More regretfully, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh account for more than half of the world’s underweight children (Ibid). One child out of three in South Asia is underweight (Ibid). Forty four percent of children are stunted in South Asia, while 15 percent are wasted (Ibid). Maternal mortality rates and under-five mortality rates in South Asia are still an embarrassment when compared to the global average. Low literacy rate in the region are of high concern, considering that they, to a large extend, determine people’s chances of gaining employment. Visibly, South Asia has a long way to go before it is able to reach its targets as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The United Stated Department of Agriculture published an annual report in 2012, according to which food security in Asia is expected to worsen in 2012, further pushing another 3 million people towards hunger. The poor in South Asia are particularly more vulnerable than the rest of Asia because of relatively higher food price inflation in this region (GoP 2012). Interestingly, the trends disclose that food insecurity is not expanding world-wide; rather, it is intensifying in low-income countries like Pakistan (USDA 2012). Even when compared to other developing regions, South Asia lags far behind. Perhaps, it can learn lessons from East Asia, which has made significant improvements in many development indicators in recent decades.

Food insecurity situation, reasons of food insecurity, and future projections demands comprehensive debate on these issues. This panel will provide a platform for this debate.


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