

Building Local Resilient Food Systems to End Hunger – Leaving No One Behind

In collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP)

In knowledge partnership with South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)

The high prevalence of hunger poses significant challenges in South Asia. Recent estimates show that the number of severe to moderate food insecure population is highest in South Asia, which is approximately 692 million people (FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2021). Over 36% households are food insecure, 14% malnourished and 50% children under five years of age have stunted growth in South Asia. Anaemia, which is usually caused by iron deficiency due to poor or restrictive diets, remains a real public health problem in the region. For instance, around 54% of children under five have severe to moderate anaemia in Pakistan (UNICEF 2019). Such statistics are alarming for the region as livelihoods of millions of people are already under duress due to climate change and COVID-19 pandemic. The World Bank (2021) has projected increase in global extreme poverty due to COVID-19 pushing an additional 119 to 124 million into poverty, 60% of whom belong to the South Asian region.

Improving access to diverse nutritious food and eradicating hunger, particularly for the poor and marginalised population, is a critical challenge for the government. Reliable information is lacking at the national and local levels about the ways to end hunger, achieve food security, improve food security and promote sustainable agriculture. In this regard, the World Food Programme (WFP) has envisaged five key steps to achieve zero hunger, which include better farm to market access; reducing food waste; encouraging diversified dietary intake; and ensuring child nutrition.

In addition to climate change and other institutional flaws, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional adverse impact on agriculture and food systems in Pakistan. Transportation restrictions, shortage of labour, and farmers' limited access to the market are some of the challenges. Supplies of some food items such as pulses and oil have also been compromised due to export restrictions imposed by producing countries. The impact of COVID-19 on food security is even worse. Factors

contributing to worsening the situation are individual behaviour and loss of purchasing power due to unemployment (Abid 2020; Salik 2021).

To make food system resilient, policymakers, professionals, and researchers need a better understanding of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on food systems. For this, effective policy and community-level dialogue is essential to answer some key questions:

- How to respond while looking at the vulnerabilities of food supply change?
- How to ensure environmentally sustainable agriculture and food system recovery in the times of COVID-19 through short- and medium-term policy steps?
- How to improve better access to affordable food, particularly for the poor and marginalised population beyond the pandemic?
- How to sustain agri-businesses, create and retain jobs in agro-based industry and trade, while facilitating the farmer to thrive through better access to markets and institutional support?

References

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