

## **Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security: Challenges for Women**

With 39% of the population poor; 20% deprived of basic needs of life; 42.5 million people food insecure; two third households malnourished; 42% children stunted; 68% households unable to earn enough to secure a nutritious diet back in 2016, limited dietary diversity,<sup>1</sup> supply disruption of food commodities and price hike coupled with job loss due to the COVID-19 has played havoc in Pakistan. One-time government assistance of PKR 12,000 is not enough to meet the needs of poor households, especially in a country that declared an ‘Agriculture Emergency’ and is facing an agrarian crisis (UNDP 2020; Abdali and bin Rashid 2020).

Across Pakistan, on average a household spends 49% of its total monthly expenditure on food. Thus, poor households - and those which spend a higher proportion of their monthly expenditure on food - are particularly vulnerable to food price inflation (currently at 11.3%) which is the prime shock affecting food security in the country. It is pertinent to note here that a majority of households in Pakistan are market-dependent to meet their needs: 79% for cereals; 92% for vegetables; 50% for milk; and 70% for meat intake (WFP 2018).

The disrupted food system due to the pandemic has significant gender implications as women, particularly in rural areas (64% of the total population [PBS GoP 2019]) are facing knowledge gaps, lack of access to inputs, markets, required finances, extension services, low skills in value addition and marketing (FAO 2015 and 2020). A similar situation exists in terms of food utilisation that results in malnutrition as Women of Reproductive Age (WRA) bear the double burden of malnutrition (UNICEF and MoH GoP 2018). One in seven WRA are undernourished and 42% are anemic (Ibid.).

Being a lowest ranked country (151 out of 153 countries) by Global Gender Parity Index 2020 (WEF 2020), Pakistan has witnessed worsening gender inequality after COVID-19 (Quresh 2020). In this scenario, the government’s response strategy can play a transformative role if due attention is given to ensure gender-equitable measures by identifying roadblocks in design, financing and at the operational level.

---

<sup>1</sup> Three quarters of the population depend on wheat flour alone for 72% daily caloric intake.

In this backdrop, the panel aims to challenge the existing norms, practices and policies in wider food system which favour men over women farmers and will highlight the impact of COVID-19 on food security and food systems with a gender lens. Analysis of gender responsiveness of the COVID-19 response strategy will also be part of the discussion.

The session will bring together relevant stakeholders from the government, academia, and development partners to generate discussion around:

- COVID-19 and its impact on food security and food system of Pakistan;
- Gendered impact of the pandemic on food security (food availability, access, and utilisation) in context of pre-COVID-19 challenges for women;
- Design, financial, and operational roadblocks in government response with gender lens; and,
- Exploring ways to make food systems inclusive and minimising the impact of the pandemic focusing on the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, including women.

## References

Abdali, M. and bin Rashid, H. 2020, 'Before COVID-19 and Now: Roots of Food Crisis in Pakistan', 14 May, Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières  
<<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53333>>.

FAO 2020, 'Gendered impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition', Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization, <<https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9198en>>.

FAO 2015, 'Women in Agriculture in Pakistan', Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization, <<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4330e.pdf>>.

PBS GoP 2019, 'Provisional Province Wise Population By Sex And Rural/Urban, Census 2017', Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, <[http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//DISTRICT\\_WISE\\_CENSUS\\_RESULTS\\_CENSUS\\_2017.pdf](http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//DISTRICT_WISE_CENSUS_RESULTS_CENSUS_2017.pdf)>.

Quresh, U. 2020, 'Women and Girls must be at the Center of Pakistan's COVID-19 Recovery', World Bank Blogs, 9 June,

<<https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/women-and-girls-must-be-center-pakistans-covid-19-recovery>>.

UNDP 2020, ‘COVID-19 Pakistan Socio-economic Framework’, United Nations Development Programme, 14 May,  
<<https://www.pk.undp.org/content/dam/pakistan/docs/DevelopmentPolicy/COVID-19%20Socio-economic%20Framework%20V3%2016%20May.pdf>>.

UNICEF and MoH GoP 2018, ‘National Nutrition Survey 2018 - Key Findings Report’, United Nations Children’s Fund and Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, Government of Pakistan,  
<<https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/1871/file/KeyFindings-NationalNutritionSurvey2018.pdf>>.

WEF 2020, ‘Global Gender Gap Report 2020’, Davos: World Economic Forum,  
<[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf)>.

WFP 2018, ‘Climate Risks and Food Security Analysis: A Special Report for Pakistan’, December, World Food Programme,  
<[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Climate\\_Risks\\_and\\_Food\\_Security\\_Analysis\\_December\\_2018.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Climate_Risks_and_Food_Security_Analysis_December_2018.pdf)>.

### **Panel Organisers**

Mr Syed Qasim Ali Shah, Deputy Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: [qasim@sdpi.org](mailto:qasim@sdpi.org)

Ms Rabia Tabassum, Research Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: [rabia\\_tabassum@sdpi.org](mailto:rabia_tabassum@sdpi.org)