



POVERTY & FOOD SECURITY

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Inflation & Food Security

Sindh Floods: 2.5 Million People without Food, Water and Shelter

Six months after the devastating floods hit Sindh and parts of Balochistan millions are still struggling to survive. Representatives of national and international agencies came together to discuss the existing and upcoming challenges for Pakistan's flood-hit communities. With the monsoons fast approaching and a slow response from international donors' agencies fear that severe needs will remain unmet. Millions will find it hard to get through the next few months. An estimated 2.5 million are still living without basic necessities including food, water, shelter and sanitation. The United Nations (UN) launched the Floods 2011 Rapid Response Plan, seeking \$357 million but less than 50% funds have been raised. Though some donors, notably the European Commission and the United States have responded generously, the response from others has been disappointing.

Agriculture and food insecurity

April farming season is likely to be missed by most farmers this year unless immediate action is taken to rehabilitate the fields and redistribute seeds and tools required for farming. Agencies warn that the next disaster may be just a few months away and are calling on the government to intensify efforts to limit the impact of future disasters. One in four farmers missed the November-December planting season either because help was not received in time or their land was still submerged. Agencies fear that the rising malnutrition rates caused by the floods which were already above the emergency threshold before the floods will continue to increase if immediate action is not taken. The floods have exposed and deepened a food crisis in Sindh that has resulted in malnutrition rates far worse than the Sub-Saharan Africa.

Security

Even though we have experience in working in insecure areas we really have to strengthen our systems and dial it up to revamp our procedures and ensure that workers stay safe. Staff security remains the number one priority. The agencies called on the humanitarian community to continue providing assistance so that flood-affected families not only meet their basic needs but rebuild their lives. They also called on the Pakistan government to boost its efforts for seeking avenues to limit the impact of future disasters.

The Express Tribune - February 17, 2012

20 Commodities Registered 7% Price Hike in January: FAFEN Report

The Free and Fair Election Networks (FAFEN) report said the prices of 20 commodities increased while the prices of 25 commodities decreased and seven remained unchanged. The FAFEN collected the prices of 52 commodities from 179 retail outlets in 91 districts across the country on January 10, 2012.

An Average Increase Of 7 Percent	An Average Decrease Of 4 Percent
20 commodities including poultry products, kitchen fuels, meat, medical services and fruits	25 commodities, including pulses, rice varieties, cooked items, vegetables and condiments

A major increase and decrease recorded in the prices of items are:

- Broiler chicken live registering the highest increase of 29 percent
- Broiler chicken meat 28 percent
- 19 percent hike in the price of eggs per dozen
- Beef and mutton registered an increase of 2 percent and 1 percent
- The prices of all the observed kitchen fuels - LPG (11 percent), firewood (1 percent) and kerosene oil (1 percent) - also went up.

- Among fruits, oranges (24 percent), red apples (5 percent) and bananas (3 percent) registered an increase in prices while that of golden apples fell by 2 percent.
- Gram pulse and chickpeas each registered a 1 percent increase, whereas the prices of pulses, masoor (4 percent), moong (3 percent), mash (3 percent), red beans (2 percent), black gram (2 percent) and white beans (2 percent) registered a decline. The change in prices of vegetables was due to the seasonal effect, the prices of potatoes (19 percent) and tomatoes (10 percent) came down as the harvesting season of these crops continued across the country. However, onions recorded a 6 percent increase in price.
- Similarly, as the harvest of the sugarcane crop continued, desi shaker, sugar and gur, registered a respective decrease of 9 percent, 7 percent and 7 percent in prices.
- The prices of all the observed rice varieties decreased as well, with irri-6, basmati-386 and basmati broken decreasing by 2 percent, 1 percent and 1 percent, respectively.
- Among condiments and spices, garlic and ginger registered a decline of 8 percent in their respective prices, while the price of turmeric decreased by 4 percent and red chili powder by 3 percent. Only the price of salt powder registered an increase of 2 percent.
- Despite an increase in the prices; however, a prepared tea cup registered a 2 percent increase.
- Among medical services, the cost of blood and urine tests increased by 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively.
- The average prices of yoghurt, fresh milk, branded cooking oil and vegetable ghee, blood sugar test, wheat flour and Disprin tablets remained unchanged.

Pakistan Today – February 01, 2012

Coming Season - Crop Targets to Fall Victim to Bad Management

First an unwanted devolution and then the lack of coordination between the newly created Federal Ministry for Food Security (FMFS) and Research Division could lead to missing crop targets in the coming year. This was stated by a senior ministry official. He said that no strategies have been evolved by the provinces and the ministry to meet the crop targets for the coming year. The basic problem is the absence of development funds and technical staff, his said. Under the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture was devolved to the provinces. However, almost all previous functions of the previous ministry were restored after the creation of the FMFS. This was a useless exercise, the devolution of the ministry only to bring it back is nothing more than a waste of time and resources, said the official. The official added that all furniture and related properties of the previous ministry were sold cheaply after the ministry's devolution, only to have the ministry in need of the same resources again. Employees are now biding their time, sitting idle in the office in the absence of a development budget or technical staff. After the creation of FMFS, the finance ministry has allocated Rs40 million in funds for its recurring expenditure. However, the Establishment Division has not given its approval for creating positions for technical staff. When contacted, Food Security and Research Federal Secretary Shafqat Naghmi said that they are trying to create technical positions and generate development funds. He added that the ministry's function has been affected following the devolution and that they plan to coordinate with the provinces and other stakeholders to achieve the crop targets. Naghmi said that the current ministry has additional responsibilities than the previous one and that the devolution was not a wise decision, holding former Food Federal Secretary Ismail Qureshi responsible for paving the way. We gave a detailed presentation to the 18th Amendment implementation committee about not devolving the ministry, but were not heard [by the committee. Agri Forum Pakistan Chairman Muhammad Ibrahim Mughal said, it is likely that Pakistan would lose approximately 2.5 million tons of wheat this year from the 25 million tons target, due to illogical decisions of the government. He added that farmers have decreased their per acre cultivation due to the delayed announcement of wheat prices announced by the Prime Minister in December instead of September. Mughal added that until October, no work attributed to food security had yet begun by the ministry whose officials are sitting idle but getting full salaries and incentives. Despite being stakeholders, the Agri Forum was never taken on board. It seems that the creation of the ministry was merely a political decision to please ministers and give jobs to secretaries.

The Express Tribune - February 20, 2012

Feeding the Bomb, Starving the Nation: Analysis by Murtaza Haider

Pakistanis are fast becoming a wasted nation. The alarmingly high level of malnutrition observed in Pakistan in the past few years is far worse than what has been observed in the sub-Saharan Africa. Millions of Pakistani children have been identified as stunted, under-weight, and wasting because of hunger, disease, and poverty. While the future of millions of children is threatened by hunger, the civil and military elites in Pakistan continue to pour undisclosed billions into conventional and nuclear weapons. The oft morbidly obese leaders of the right-wing religious and political parties are also in step with the military establishment as they continue to mobilize the starving masses to support developing Pakistan's nuclear weapons. In 2006, the United Nations estimated that no fewer than 35 million Pakistanis were malnourished. However, those who put the nation on the path to pursue nuclear weapons never suffered poverty, disease or hunger. For instance, Dr. Qadeer Khan's daughters did not have to starve even when their father was pursuing prohibitively expensive Uranium enrichment for the weapons program. And whereas Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto promised to eat grass if he had to for pursuing nuclear weapons, he or his kin never did. Between their villas in Europe and hotels in Mali, those who pushed Pakistan into pursuing nuclear weapons did quite well for their personal fortunes. The same could not be said for millions of starving Pakistanis whose welfare, experts believe, is worse than those in the war-torn Africa. Last week, Pakistan Humanitarian Forum, a consortium of 41 large international NGOs, revealed that 2.5 million people in the flood-stricken areas were still without food, water, shelter, sanitation, and healthcare. David Wright, country director of the NGO Save the Children, was explicit in his warnings about the dire conditions threatening the very survival of the flood-affected families in Sindh. The floods have exposed and deepened a food crisis in Sindh that has resulted in malnutrition rates far worse than those in sub-Saharan Africa, he warned. Masroor Gilani of AFP reported last week on the plight of Najma Warag, a mother of three children rendered homeless by the floods in southern Badin. If you want to see what a miserable life is, come and visit us. Our children are sick, we have no home, no clothes, no money, and eat only one meal a day, Ms. Warag told AFP of her daily struggle with life. Unlike Aafia Siddiqui, whose detention in the United States is a cause célèbre for the urban Pakistanis, Najma Warag and her children are no one's top priority on the political left or right of Pakistan. The hardliners amongst the religious political parties and their proxies in the outlawed militant groups neither help the starving in Pakistan nor let others come to their rescue. Pakistan has become one of the most dangerous places for expatriate workers. In fact, no other single country has recorded as many expat workers kidnapped as in Pakistan. While the right-wing religious parties, militants and their handlers have been reluctant to help the starving flood victims, the federal government has not fared any better. In a recently released report, international aid agencies revealed that as they rushed in to help in August 2011, Pakistani government preempted them for assisting the flood victims. The aid agencies wanted to disburse cash directly to the flood victims. The government instead wanted to be in the middle, adding extra layers of bureaucracy and increasing the odds of graft in relief aid distribution. By end of August 2011, 2 million Pakistanis were already hit by the floods. The government reluctantly permitted international aid agencies to operate in Pakistan weeks later on September 07, 2011. It is hard to comprehend why Pakistani government initially prevented relief efforts by international donors, especially when the government itself had fallen short of providing relief to the flood victims in 2011 and earlier in 2010 when the UN declared that floods in Pakistan were the greatest humanitarian crisis in its 65 year history. The Associated Press (AP) reported in January 2011 that the UN had declared that flood-hit areas in Pakistan were experiencing famine-like malnutrition. A survey jointly conducted by UNICEF and the government of Sindh revealed that one in every four children in Sindh was suffering from acute malnutrition. Karen Allen, UNICEF's deputy representative in Pakistan, was alarmed by the shockingly bad conditions of the victims of flood. She told AP in January 2011 that she had not seen levels of malnutrition this bad since the worst famine in Ethiopia, Darfur, and Chad. With such dire warnings from the international relief organizations issued as early as in January 2011, the Pakistani government failed to heed when the floods hit yet again in August 2011.

Food Price Inflation

While the floods played havoc with Pakistan's food supply chains, the very poor in Pakistan were already finding it hard to feed their families, owing to the grain price inflation in 2007. As the prices of staple food items increased globally, the poor in Pakistan had to cut their food intake because their food budgets could not afford enough. Whereas the grain prices stabilized in 2008 and 2009, the same did not happen in Pakistan where wheat prices continued to soar, owing to the ill-planning and lack of foresight on the part of the government. Wolfgang Harbinger, director of the World Food Program (WFP) in Pakistan told AFP in March 2011 that the reason behind sustained food price inflation in Pakistan is the fact that the

government of Pakistan, being the largest wheat buyer, sets the farm-gate prices. And even when grain production normalized globally, as well as in Pakistan, the prices did not adjust in Pakistan because the government continued to buy wheat at higher than the market price in Pakistan, thus raising the price for all wheat buyers. If the prices are not adjusted, warned Harbinger, the country can be full of food, however, the majority may still not be able to afford it. Asma Razzaq, writing in the Business Reorder, reported in October 2011 that Pakistan produces 36 million tons of grains and consumes 28 million tons. Even with a surplus of 8 million tons, 60 per cent Pakistanis reported experiencing food insecurity because of inflated prices of food staples. Food price inflation continues to threaten the welfare of the very poor across the globe. According to Save the Children, 250 million parents globally fed their children less in 2011. The food price inflation has contributed to malnutrition that has caused stunted growth in 170 million children globally. Justin Forsyth, who heads Save the Children, told the Independent earlier in February that if no concentrated action was taken, half a billion children will be physically and mentally stunted over the next 15 years. Pakistan, like other developing countries facing malnutrition, runs the risk of a 2 to 3 per cent decline in GDP resulting from stunted growth. At the individual level, a 15 point decline in IQ has been observed for those experiencing stunted growth.

Global Indifference To Pakistan's Misery

By early 2011 it was obvious that one in four children in Sindh were malnourished. While malnutrition reached alarmingly high levels in Sindh, much above the WHO's 15 per cent threshold, which triggers the alarms for an humanitarian crisis, the global response to Pakistan's misery was inadequate. The UN and its sister organizations appealed for hundred of millions of dollars. Only a fraction of the needed funds were raised. Many believe that the poor image of Pakistan after the 9/11 tragedy has contributed to apathy towards Pakistan. Not all malnourished are ignored like the ones in Pakistan. Singer Bono and his friends have run campaigns and held concerts to raise funds for the starving in Africa. The millions of starving Pakistanis did not attract Bono's attention. In fact, if it were not for Angelina Jolie, the plight of starving Pakistanis would not have made to the six o'clock news in most of the western world. While Bono and the rest failed to notice the plight of starving victims of flood, Shahzad Roy, Abrar-ul-Haq, and others have lent their voices and songs to raise the plight of the unfortunate Pakistanis. They are no less sincere and dedicated than Bono and Company. The question is if anybody's listening.

Musharraf's Regime Did No Better

Many in Pakistan and abroad naively believe that the false economy General Musharraf had constructed on a house of cards was better than the civilian rule that followed. Nothing is farther from the truth. While the current civilian government had to cope with two devastating floods and deal with the civil war that has spilled from Pakistan's frontiers into its urban heartland, the Musharraf regime had to cope mostly with the aftermath of the devastating earthquake, which despite the horrendous death toll of approximately 80,000 did not disrupt food production. One would have hoped to see less hunger in Pakistan in 2007 after the Musharraf regime had a freehand to rule since 1999. According to an international survey by Gallup International, which interviewed 58,000 people in 56 countries between June and September 2008, 53 per cent Pakistanis reported often or sometimes lacking food in the past 12 months? Notice the same survey revealed that 48 per cent of Nigerians, 42 per cent of Peruvians, and 40 per cent in Philippines also reported lack of adequate access to food. A disproportionately large number of Pakistanis, even when compared with other countries of similar socio-economics, suffered from hunger when General Musharraf was in control either in civvies or in fatigues.

A Bad Neighborhood

Malnutrition among children is indeed a global problem. Each year, five to seven million children die of malnutrition. South Asia, however, is one of the worst affected areas which is home to half of the world's malnourished children. The 2008 UNICEF's State of the World's Children Report revealed that 48 per cent of children in India, 43 per cent in Bangladesh, and 37 per cent in Pakistan had stunted growth. While India's economic miracle is praised all over, it does not change the fact that child malnourishment is more prevalent in India than in Pakistan. According to a report jointly commissioned by UNICEF, the World Bank, and USAID, 50 per cent of children born in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan in 1999 weighed less than 2.5 kg. Research has revealed that underweight children at birth rarely catch-up in weight and height later. In Afghanistan, 40 to 50 per cent children are estimated to have stunted growth. Pervez Shaukat, a Pakistan journalist and a friend, visited India after she tested a nuclear weapon in Pokhran. While in New Delhi, Pervez's cab stopped at an intersection. A malnourished older woman clutching two weak children in her arms begged for money. Pervez gave her some money and asked her where she was from. Pokhran, she replied. You must be very proud of your hometown that became the symbol of India's

nuclear prowess, Pervez inquired. The woman's response stunned Pervez. Why don't they drop a bomb on us as well to deliver us from the misery that we are in? For those millions whose children are starving today in Pakistan, the choice between the bomb and bread is not a difficult one. They need bread for their starving children. However, their misery and hunger is not a priority for the civil and military rulers. In the guise of feeding the bomb, elites in Pakistan have fed themselves and their children. The nuclear scientists, armed forces personnel, members of the civil establishment, politicians, and others (including mullahs) associated with Pakistan's conventional and nuclear weapons have all grown fatter over the past four decades. Their children either live abroad or hold dual nationalities. They never had to eat grass. As for millions of other partially-fed Pakistanis, whose future is supposedly guaranteed by nuclear and other bombs, there is an urgent need to secure their present. Thousands of nuclear weapons did not prevent the Soviet Union from disintegrating after it failed to feed and clothe its citizens. Pakistan must avoid the same fate by putting bread before bombs.

Dawn – February 22, 2012

Poverty a Stark Specter for 79m Pakistanis: Report

As the government continues to shy away from calculating official poverty figures, an independent expert has claimed that around 43 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line in Pakistan. According to a study titled Institutional Imperatives of Poverty Reduction, by 2011-2012 as much as 43.1 per cent or 79.1 million persons in the country will be destitute. The academician undertook the research and said that his estimates are based on the elasticity of food price inflation with respect to the incidence of poverty. His research concludes that 40.7 per cent of Pakistan's population would be classified as being 'poor' last year, compared to 38.5 per cent in 2009-10. Last year, the government carried out the Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) which provides basic information for working out poverty numbers. The exercise has yet to produce any official numbers on poverty trends in the country. The most recent official figures are from 2005-06, when poverty was estimated at 22.9 per cent. The Pakistan People's Party led government did not accept the 2007-08 HIES that projected a reduction in poverty to 17.2 per cent, and there have been no official numbers available since then. Hussain said that his own estimates were based on certain projection, but he was confident that they did not fall too far from the mark. If poverty were to be calculated using HIES 2010-11, the number would be close or even higher than his projections, he said. Offering his services, he said that he would provide even accurate figures for the government if it was willing to provide him with the raw data. There are reports that the Planning Commission might take him up on the offer. It is considering assigning the job either to him or to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. The paper also challenges the poverty estimates of the Musharraf regime, terming them incorrect. Instead, the study tries to establish that from 1999 to 2007-08, the incidence of poverty has increased by 3.8 percentage points from 30 percent in 1998-99 to 33.8 percent in 2007-08, with an additional 16 million people entering the category of poor over the period. Musharraf's government had claimed that it reduced the percentage of population below the poverty line from 34 percent in the year 2000-01, to 23 percent in the year 2004-05; that is, a reduction of 11 percentage points. This was meant to show that almost a third of Pakistan's poverty stricken populace had been brought up within a period of four years. The author argues that if this was true, it would be one of the most remarkable economic achievements in the history of developing countries; including the Soviet Union under Stalin, and China under Mao. Even India had managed only a 10 percentage point reduction in poverty with its high average annual growth rate of 8 per cent. The study also states that an analysis of the sources of growth, during the period 2000-01 to 2004-05, shows that the composition of growth during the period was pro-rich rather than pro-poor. GDP growth during the period was overwhelmingly pro-rich since the sectors which contributed it were neither producing goods for the poor nor directly providing employment to them, claims the author. In fact, labor force survey data from the government shows that unemployment rates raised sharply from 6.1 per cent in 1999 to 8.3 per cent in 2004. Therefore, the nature and composition of GDP growth during this period could not be expected to have substantially reduced poverty, says Hussain. Hussain said that the regime's decisions to take 2001 as the base year for estimating poverty and measuring inflation on the basis of the Consumer Price Index, instead of inflation data of Pakistan Living Standard Measurement Survey (PLSM), led to the incorrect poverty estimates.

The Express Tribune, February 22, 2012
