

Flooding in Pakistan: Fears for Nutrition and Food Security

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1- Introduction

Thesis Statement:

Pakistan was hit with devastating floods that not only claimed many lives but also severely affected livelihoods. The country, in which many people already have limited access to diversified diets, is expected to experience severe food shortages that will exacerbate the triple burden of malnutrition.

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Pakistan deals with rains, floods and landslides impacting more than 33 million people in different parts of the country. The level of devastation is enormous with millions living under the open sky. The destruction is immense and upsetting to witness. Flood-torn Pakistan faces a monumental hunger crisis and a stark winter with crops destroyed and millions of people still destitute after flooding left much of the country under water. There are also outbreaks of diseases like malaria, typhoid and diarrhea, which is a worrying issue that has sadly already taken some lives. The country, in which many people already have limited access to diversified diets, is expected to experience severe food shortage that will exacerbate the triple burden of malnutrition. The government must need to strengthen their policies for the development and protection of food security and social protection programs to address the nutrition needs of people with low incomes.

Devastating flooding in Pakistan has swept away crops and stockpiles and left large areas of farmland under water, deteriorating the precarious food and nutrition security in the country. The communities who were already living on the edge now need to cope with this sudden shock of lost livelihood and agriculture, as the catastrophic flood has swept away 45% of the country's cropland and in some areas 80% of farm livestock have been lost. The government, as well as humanitarian organization and private sector, are providing rations of food items to affected communities. However it is reported that still significant proportions of people are forced to live on only one meal a day or even less.

SUN Civil Society Alliance (CSA) members organization are involved in relief activities across provinces facilitating government authorities and private humanitarian organization in needs assessment and distributions of relief activities across provinces, facilitating government items and medical facilities. Nutrition International, which hosts the Civil Society Alliance, developed and shared the Nutritionally Balanced Ration Package in Emergencies' guidelines with government and humanitarian organization involved in food distribution

Dr. Nazeer Ahmed, SUN Government Focal Point Pakistan / Chief Nutrition said that "Pakistan

was hit with devastating floods which have vanished not only lives but livelihood. A country with a huge number of the population having limited physical and economic access to diversified foods is now expected to experience severe shortage of foods which will result in a triple burden of malnutrition. Hence, an effective multi sectoral well coordinated response is a must."

Malnutrition was already prevalent among young children, adolescents and pregnant and lactating women living in flood-affected areas prior to the monsoon. An increase in case of malnutrition is expected as a result of this heavy spells as million of people displaced by the floods are living under the sky with stagnant flood waters, leading to water borne diseases, including acute diarrhea, which consequently contribute to more malnutrition.

The interlinkage between nutrition and climate change are undeniable and new evidence for this statement is collected on a daily basis. The situation in Pakistan is among the latest Pakistan has witnessed one of the worst floods in recent times, with more than 1500 lives lost and large-scale destruction to the country's infrastructure. According to UNICEF, one of

every seven people in Pakistan has been impacted by the flood, and around 3.4 million children are in need of assistance and at increased risk of waterborne diseases, drowning and malnutrition.

According to Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives, this catastrophe has driven the country to hyper-malnutrition which will require a massive effort to combat. He further advised the federal and provincial governments and development partners to focus and eliminate malnutrition, enhance the nutrition status of mothers and children and rebuild people's livelihoods.

A national consultation to scale up nutrition interventions was held 27 September 2022 in Islamabad under the Chairmanship of the Honorable Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiative and the Chairman of the Federal Flood Relief Committee. The consultation, titled "Multisectoral Nutrition Stakeholders Response to Minimize the Impact of Flood Calamity on Food and Nutrition Security of Vulnerable Population," was a platform to discuss and evaluate the situation and, most importantly, development of a roadmap for effective response.

As Pakistan deals with rains, floods and landslides impacting more than 33 million people in different parts of the country, Nutrition International stands in solidarity with the Pakistani People. According to the World Health Organization's September 3 Flood Situation Report, over 1,290 people have lost their lives, more than 12,500 people have been injured, over 432 health facilities have been fully and 10,28 partially destroyed - limiting access to health care workers, essential medicines and medical supplies - and almost 634,000 people were displaced and are living in camps -

"Nutrition International has been working in Pakistan for over 20 years, and we are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of the population," said Dr. Shabina Raza, Nutrition International Pakistan Country Director. "Our thoughts are with all those who have been impacted by the flood, and we stand ready to work with national and provincial, and local authorities to help deal with the consequences brought on by this disaster in the weeks, months and years to come."

Under the leadership of Dr. Raza, the Nutrition International Pakistan Team has stepped up to contribute to emergency efforts, including helping to mitigate the health and nutrition impact of the disaster on the population, especially

women and children. Amid growing concern that waterborne diseases may kill more people than the floods themselves in the aftermath of the disasters, Nutrition International donated 75000 doses of zinc and low-osmolality rehydration salts to be distributed to children suffering from diarrhoea in Sindh, KPK, Punjab and Baluchistan provinces, helping them to recover faster and potentially even saving lives.

Nutrition International is also working together with other development partners to combine efforts for increased impact - including with UNICEF as co-chair of the Nutrition Development Partners Forum - as well as with provincial and National Health Services Regulations and Coordination has issued a letter recommending national and provincial stakeholders to include fortified food products in the package that will be distributed to people affected by the floods. In addition, the Ministry of Health has issued guidelines to humanitarian agencies to discourage bottle feeding and promotes breastfeeding during relief and recovery activities.

Food-secure Pakistan faces a monumental hunger crisis and a stark winter with crops destroyed and millions of people still destitute.

after flooding left much of the country under water, Concern Worldwide has warned. The Irish humanitarian organization is continuing to help Pakistan with its response after an area several times the size of Ireland was left submerged. ~~Following~~ Concern is calling for more support to fund these life-saving efforts as the UN also makes a fresh global appeal today to respond to the crisis.

The epic flood also damaged millions of acres of food crops, over two million homes, 13000 km of roads and more than 400 bridges. Millions of people still have nothing two months on from the disaster and people are dying from diseases caused by drinking dirty contaminated water and living in dire conditions. Vast amounts of food crops were destroyed and are still under flood waters that have yet to recede.

Food insecurity is increasing and, according to the latest estimates from officials, Pakistan lost almost 15 percent of its rice crop in the floods, which also destroyed many farming families grain reserves. There are huge areas where land is still not prepared for sowing wheat, which is a major food crop here in Pakistan. Land preparation and sowing usually started in September October. This along

with the huge number of fallen and dead livestock, means Pakistan is facing a monumental hunger crisis that requires support from the international community.

The floods were caused by weeks of extreme monsoon rainfall after months of extreme heat waves and at a time when Pakistan was trying to cope with a major economic crisis with high inflation and food and fuel prices rocketing. Preliminary estimates by the World Bank suggest the national poverty rate could increase because of recent floods by 4.5 to 7 percentage points, pushing between 9.9 and 15.4 million people into poverty and intensifying the severity of poverty for already poor households.

Agricultural land inundated by flooding is set to have long-term humanitarian and economic impacts in Pakistan. Billions of dollars worth of rice, sugar and wheat have already been lost. Flooding in dozen of district in Pakistan's Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab provinces have destroyed wide swaths of agricultural land. The country facing food shortage if thousand of acres of cropland aren't restored. The damage to the agricultural sector has caused the government to warn of a looming food security crisis.

Pakistan's National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) is leading relief efforts in

coordination with the United Nations and other international organizations. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has so far provided over 464,000 people in Balochistan, KP and Sindh with relief food assistance. The WFP added that it aims to expand this to 1.9 million people facing food insecurity in flood-affected districts, according to a September situation report.

The intensity of the situation in village is such that people are snatching ration packs from each other during distribution drives. It's really heartbreaking to see that. Some of the food relief is coordinated by the National Disaster Management Agency, who organizes the distribution of aid to their provincial counterparts. Other food relief is being distributed directly by international organizations. International NGOs have their own local partners who they give aid to. They have their own mechanism and ways of assessing the damages and victims needs. They, however, must get permission from the government to work in a particular area.

Although Pakistan's government's plans to provide cash payments to over 4.5 million flood-affected households through the Benazir Income Support Programme, it has been criticized for not doing enough to prepare for the monsoon season.

The monsoon floods come as Pakistan is facing an ongoing economic crisis, with high inflation making food staples more expensive. Pakistan is also a major exporter of agricultural products and the flood damage will likely cut into a vital source of income. Pakistan is the world's fourth-largest exporter of rice. For example, according to the nation's Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan exported a record \$2.5 billion worth of rice during 2021-2022 fiscal year.

Flood-stricken Sindh province accounts for 45% of that rice production. A report assessing crop loss in Sindh conducted by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, a Nepal-based research organization, shows that flooding was particularly severe in rice-growing areas. This has resulted in the estimated loss of 1.9 million tons of rice, equivalent to an 80% loss of the province's forecast rice production. This has resulted in the estimated loss of 1.9 million tons of rice, equivalent to an 80% loss of the province's forecast rice production. Combined with an 88% loss of sugarcane and 61% loss of cotton, the total economic impact is worth \$1.3 billion in Sindh alone, according to the report. Three key vegetable crops in several districts in Sindh - tomatoes, onions and chilli - face losses of \$374 million, it added.

Pakistan already has some of the highest levels of malnutrition in the world. With the entire supply chain damaged in recent weeks, the country is likely to witness increased vulnerability to malnutrition, especially among women, young people and children. Across 81 districts, a total of 78,000 sq km of farmland were flooded. That's an area bigger than the entire Czech Republic. More than 80% of crops across the country were damaged, according to the government. The Sindh province, which produces a considerable share of the country's food, is one of the worst affected.

Thousands of hectares of standing food crops like rice, onions, tomatoes and other vegetables have been destroyed. More than 6000 km of roads and bridges have been damaged, causing significant disruptions to the transport of the food that has survived. An assessment done in September by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and its partners found that more than 70 percentage of individuals interviewed in the KPk region reported difficulty accessing any food, let alone nutritious food.

The UN estimates the economic loss due to the floods stands at an enormous \$40bn. This in a country reeling from steep inflation, which was already running at a 14-year high of almost 25 percent in July

before the flood hit. It's worse now: food prices in the affected regions increased three to five times in just a few weeks. The import of vegetables from neighbour countries, particularly Afghanistan and Iran, will certainly help. However, the government will have to strictly regulate prices along the supply chain, so food remains affordable for everyone, especially the most vulnerable.

It isn't just causing problems in Pakistan, which is the world's eighth-largest producer of wheat. With one-third of the country under waters delays in sowing wheat - which normally happens in November and December - seem inevitable. Draining the flood waters and rejuvenating the soil is going to take several months. In July, Pakistan agreed to sell 120,000 metric tonnes of wheat towards the World Food Program's aid effort in Afghanistan. Pakistan is also a key transit route to send food into Afghanistan. But the floods have made it much harder to transport aid to Pakistan's landlocked neighbours. The UN warned in September, Afghanistan is already facing unprecedented levels of hunger and food shortages.

At least 33 million people have been directly affected by the floods in both rural and urban areas. In rural regions, the government's

efforts need to focus on draining floodwaters from agricultural lands for the sowing of winter crops. This will save the country from sinking into a prolonged food security crisis. In urban areas, the government must keep a check on further price rises caused by the cost of imports and supply chain disruption. Many informal markets, where people sell food items on pushcarts or small shops made out of mud structures in low-income areas, have been completely destroyed - along with the livelihood of those who worked there. The government needs to rehabilitate these markets, creating better infrastructure to make them more resilient to future disasters.

Of course, these devastating floods are only the latest evidence of the ways Pakistan and many other countries in the Global South are bearing the brunt of the Global North's disproportionate abuse of the climate for centuries. Leading donors must step forward and respond to the joint appeal of the UN and the Pakistani government for \$816m needed for immediate relief. But even once the current crisis passes, the outlook is grim for my country. In the World Bank's 2021 Climate Risk Country Profiles, projections for Pakistan over the next 10 years suggest "yield declines in many key food and cash crops, including cotton, wheat, sugarcane,

maize and rice?" What's so desperately sad is that women and children in countries like mine are the ones who will suffer the most and end up with the least food on their plates.

As the government of Pakistan and development agencies try to restore the supply chain and rebuild food markets, they must also focus on social safety nets for these segments of the population. The governments must also strengthen the existing social protection programs to address the nutrition needs of people with low incomes. The international community should also help secure the future by committing to a significant increase in its support to help communities adapt to increasingly extreme climates.

By putting all of the above discussion in a nutshell as country facing the after effects of flood from past some month and for long term. The main problem is of the basic nutrition facilities and food storage. The government must ensure the funds it receives are used properly both to address the immediate challenges spawned by the floods and to rebuild intelligently for when we are inevitably hit by the next large climate event. Pakistan is at a crossroads. It does not have to drown or go hungry.