

FOOD INSECURITY: CHALLENGES &

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WAY FORWARD

OUTLINE

1- Introduction

Thesis Statement: Increasing population and poverty are increasing food insecurity. Development at the cost of agriculture land and war has worsened the situation.

However, continued population growth, use of latest farming technologies and better economic opportunities can help in reducing food insecurity.

2- How food insecurity is a global challenge

3- Recent food crises in Pakistan

4- Why food insecurity is prevailing in the modern world.

a- Ukraine-Russia war enhanced food crises

b- COVID-19 has disrupted supply chains

c- Increasing population increases food demands

d- Expanding cities capture agriculture land

e- Wastage of food by consumers

f- Natural disasters increase food insecurity

g- Poverty leads to food insecurity

h- Politics of food

i- Traditional farming techniques reduce the crop yield

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5. How food insecurity can be eradicated

- a- Promote vertical growth of cities
- b- Controlled population growth
- c- Create more economic opportunities to end food insecurity
- d- Modern farming techniques shall be adapted
- e- Create public awareness about importance of food conservation
- f- Ensure access of quality food to under developed areas

6. Conclusion

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"These are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." (Mahatma Gandhi). These words of Gandhi are still true in the modern world of twenty-first century. Food insecurity is a global challenge. Currently, Pakistan is suffering from severe food crises. Ukraine-Russia war and Covid-19 have increased the food insecurity in the world. Also, uncontrolled population growth has increased food demands. Moreover, expanding cities reduce agriculture land which leads to lower food production. Natural disasters and food wastage by consumers enhance food insecurity. Political interferences also reduce accessibility of food to people. Traditional farming techniques also reduce the crop yield. However, food insecurity can be eradicated by promoting vertical growth of cities and controlled population growth. Also, creating more economic opportunities will reduce food insecurity. By adapting modern farming techniques and creating public awareness about importance of food conservation can help in reducing food insecurity. Increasing population and poverty are increasing food insecurity. Development at the cost of agriculture land and war has worsened the situation. However, controlled population growth, use of latest farming technologies and better

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Economic opportunities can help in reducing food insecurity. According to United States Department of Agriculture, food insecurity is lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active life. Food insecurity is a global challenge. According to Global Alliance for Food Security report, prevalence of undernourishment was 9.8% in 2021 while it is predicted to reach a number of 669.1 million undernourished people in 2030. This data clearly shows that food insecurity will be one of the biggest problem for the world in near future.

Pakistan is also suffering from severe food crises. The food crises is the result of bad governance, lack of economic resources and some natural factors too. Despite being an agriculture based economy, Pakistan is not able to produce enough food for itself.

According to GAFS, in 2021, the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in Pakistan was 32.60% and it is projected that from September 2022 to December 2023, 8.62 million more people will face food crises or worst. Hence, Pakistan will suffer from food crises in the coming years as well.

To begin with, the Ukraine-Russia war has enhanced food crises all across the world.

Russia and Ukraine are prime producers of agricultural products especially wheat. Ukraine is known as 'breadbasket of Europe'. According to European Parliament Research Service (EPAS), Russia and Ukraine are key agricultural players, together exporting nearly 12% of food calories traded globally. The war has disrupted the food production capacity of both countries. According to United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, in addition to the 720 to 811 million people already facing chronic hunger in 2020, Russia and Ukraine war has added 7.6 to 13.1 million to them. Thus, Ukraine-Russia war is one of the prime reason for current food crises.

In addition to Ukraine-Russia war, Covid-19 has disrupted supply chains. Covid-19 is transmissible virus due to which, governments had to impose country lockdown. The miserable state of lockdown caused disturbances in the supply chains all across the world. The supply chain disruption caused high food prices which has increased the severity of food insecurity. According to US Global Leadership Coalition report 'Covid-19 Brief: Impact on Food Security', the number of severely food insecure people has doubled from before the pandemic to 276 million people. Hence, the pandemic is one of the biggest reason of increased food insecurity in the world.

The menace of increasing population

increases food insecurity. As the number of mouths to be feeded are increased, the food insecurity increases. The increased population stresses the food resources and the competition for food among population increases. According to United Nations, the world's population has reached 8 billion and it is projected to reach 9.7 billion in 2050 and 10.4 billion in 2100. The world's population was 5.294 billion in 1996. The increasing population is increasing the demands of food and thus, adding to food insecurity around the world.

In order to accommodate the increasing population, the cities are expanding at the cost of agricultural land. The decrease in agricultural land is technically increasing food insecurity. The real estate tycoons find the levelled agricultural land an ideal place to convert it into five moola, 10 moola and one kanal's flats. A report published by Turkey News Agency, Anadolu Agency, indicates that real estate developers offer farmers to triple the market price and even use administrative and political power if any farmer tries to refuse selling land. Pakistan is facing similar situation. According to a report of the Kisan Board of Pakistan, around 20-30 percent of fertile land in Punjab province, which produces 65 percent of the country's total food requirement, has been converted into industrial units and housing schemes. Hence,

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the growth of cities is eating up agricultural lands.

Another factor which contributes to food insecurity is the wastage of food by consumers. People try to get as much as they can in their baskets out of their animalistic desires. They either waste their food or leave it in a condition not eatable for anyone. Similarly, a lot of food is wasted between harvest and retail. According to World Food Programme, Global Hunger is not about a lack of food. Right now, the world produces enough food to nourish every child, woman and man on the planet but nearly a third of all food produced each year is squandered or lost before it can be consumed. Thus, careless and irresponsible practices of human beings contribute to food insecurity.

Also; natural disasters increase food insecurity. Flood, tsunami, earthquakes and forest fires are among the prime natural disasters which amplify food insecurity. These natural disasters not only destroy the sources of food production but also make the accessibility of food difficult. It takes many years for a third world country to recover from losses due to natural disasters. Pakistan is a prime example of a country suffering from natural disasters. According to UN report 'Post Disaster Needs Assessment', about 4.4 million acres of crop area is affected by recent floods.

in Pakistan while 872,000 ~~live~~ livestock is killed. Therefore, natural disasters also add up to the food insecurity.

The most important and prime reason of food insecurity is poverty. Poverty leads to food insecurity. Due to Ukraine-Russia war and population explosion, the demand for food has increased due to which the price of food has increased. Food insecurity is not all about getting any food but it is more about unpredictability to get next meal. In Pakistan, almost quarters of country lives below poverty line, around 50 million people. Due to such high level of poverty, the malnutrition rate is also high. According to Unicef, child malnutrition rate is 36.7 percent in Pakistan. To conclude; poverty breeds food insecurity. Moreover, the existing food insecurity is amplified by political factors. Natural factors which contribute towards food insecurity can be tackled with good policies and legislation. The dilemma is that food insecurity is deliberately maintained by certain groups so that the ruled population cannot get out of vicious cycle of food insecurity. In Pakistan, natural calamity is seened as an opportunity by stakeholders. The sugar cane crises and the current wheat crises highly speaks of lack of political will in solving food related issues. Politicians try to do so to maintain the status quo.

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Therefore, politics of food contribute to increasing food insecurity.

Moreover, one of the biggest problems which reduces crop yield is use of traditional farming techniques. Traditional farming is a particular problem of third world countries which cannot afford to buy expensive and latest agricultural equipment. In Pakistan, bullocks are still used in some areas to plow and to sow seeds. Farmers still use sickles to harvest, reap, grain or cut crops. These mechanical processes are highly inefficient. Also, the technology being used is very inefficient as compared to latest technologies. According to FAO, in the presence of current cropping practices, water shortages and expected climate changes, it will be challenging to improve yield substantially. Hence, the current technologies being deployed in Pakistan are reducing crop yield. In the

following paragraphs, few solutions will be discussed which can help in reducing food crisis.

Firstly, there is a dire need to promote vertical growth of cities in countries where horizontal growth is possible. In most parts of the world, especially Dubai, Shanghai, Seoul and Hanoi, the cities are evolving vertically. But surprisingly in Pakistan, 'plot culture' is evolving. The administrations have also refused to allow cities to evolve vertically. As a result,

cooperative housing societies have mushroomed in a world of plots. For instance, areas like Raja Bazar, Hall Road, and even Mall Road in Lahore are all congested. They are growing without room to expand. The officials should allow high buildings with adequate building standards. The step will save agricultural land to be exploited by cooperative societies. This land can be used for efficient farming which in return will reduce food insecurity.

Secondly, there is a dire need of controlled population growth. China is a prime example which enforced one child policy three to four decades ago and now they have adequate resources for population. If the number of people will be less, they will have more share of food resources. According to World Bank, Pakistan's population is increasing at the rate of 1.9% with 50 to 55 million children added every year. The current population of Pakistan stands at 231.4 million. It is nearly impossible for the state to manage food for everyone. The government should form strict policies to control birth rate which will reduce food insecurity in the coming years.

Thirdly, creating more economic opportunities will end food insecurity. If the income of population is high, fluctuations in food prices can be neglected. There is global rise in food prices but developed nations

are less worried about it as compared to third world countries. In fiscal year 2022, per capita income was recorded at \$1798 in Pakistan (www.finance.gov.pk). Contrastingly, per capita income in United States was \$61855 in the year 2021 (www.tradingeconomics.com, United States per GDP per capita). Hence, strengthening itself economically can help a country to counter threats of food insecurity.

Fourthly, modern farming techniques can help in mitigating food insecurity. Modern farming includes regenerative farming, data powered decision making, precision farming, micro farming, vertical farming and many more methods. These techniques are highly efficient. They require less resources and produce more yield. For instance, consider vertical farming. Vertical farming is the practice of growing crops in vertically stacked layers making it land efficient. Vertical farms use up to 70% less water than traditional farms. According to US Department of Agriculture, for some crops, 10 to 20 times yield can be obtained per acre in vertical farming compared to open field crops. Hence, by deploying modern techniques, the menace of food insecurity can be tackled.

Fifthly, there is an immediate need to create public awareness about importance of food conservation. As discussed earlier, there is enough food on earth for humans but they

themselves are responsible for food insecurity. For instance, Pakistan is ranked 107 out of 118 developing countries on Global Hunger Index but at the same time 30 million tonnes of food is wasted in Pakistan every year of which 50 per cent is edible food which is wasted at consumer level. By raising awareness, the wasted food can be saved which can be served to hunger threatened people. To sum up, by establishing sense of responsibility regarding food, the food insecurity can be reduced.

Mostly, equal distribution of food to all areas is mandatory to tackle food insecurity. In Pakistan, unequal distribution of resources is the biggest challenge. The resource rich areas suffer from poverty and thus food insecurity prevails there. Similarly, there are many areas where sub-standard food is supplied to the market. Food Departments shall be created in larger numbers so that equal and quality food distribution can be made possible. When the food will be available and accessible to all, food insecurity will vanish.

In a nutshell, food insecurity is the biggest challenge for the world as well as Pakistan. Human lust for power and power resource management have amplified it. There is a little doubt that natural factors sometime play their part in amplifying food insecurity. Economic disparity and political

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interference have increased food insecurity as well.

The situation can only be solved by sheer efforts of both public and political leaders. Better

economic opportunities, equal distribution of resources and adapting latest technology

can help in mitigating food insecurity. People should strictly adhere to the saying of Mother Teresa;

Te Besa;

"If you cannot feed a hundred people, then feed just one".

