

# Topic: Agriculture decline in Pakistan and how to counter it

## 1. Introduction

Thesis statement: Agriculture is backbone of Pakistan's economy. Pakistan witnesses agriculture decline due to socioeconomic and environmental factors. They result in food insecurity, drop in exports and surge in unemployment. However, by taking concrete measures, the performance of agriculture can be revived.

## 2. Crisis situation of Agriculture in Pakistan

## 3. Causes of agriculture decline in Pakistan

- a. Devastating summer floods
- b. Severe energy crisis
- c. Water scarcity and droughts
- d. Use of poor quality seed
- e. Insufficient agriculture markets
- f. Lack of modern farming in fisheries and poultry sectors

## 4. Ramifications of agriculture decline on Pakistan

- a. Lack of food supply
- b. Reduction in exports
- c. Rise in unemployment
- d. Issue of waterlogging and salinity

## 5. Remedies for agriculture decline in Pakistan

- a. To fix agriculture price: End of role of middlemen
- b. Introduction of land reclamation projects
- c. Initiate credit policy to farmers
- d. Implementation of justice base agriculture reforms
- e. Promoting ecological based cropping system
- f. Adopting COP-27 recommendation: climate smart agriculture practices

## 6. Conclusion

M.S. Swaminathan has rightly said, "If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have chance to get right." This clearly depicts that future

landscape of a nation depends on the performance of agriculture sector. High performance and viable agriculture sectors leads to socioeconomic prosperity of a nation. On the other hand, ailing agriculture sector does not only fail to contribute in economy but also cause socioeconomic backwardness. Pakistan is also included in later one. The country's agriculture witnesses decline amid socioeconomic and environmental factors. They include devastating summer floods which were triggered by monsoon rains. Similarly, energy crunch obstructs proper tube wells operating system in farmlands. Furthermore, water scarcity and droughts declines agriculture productivity. Use of poor quality seed also reduces agriculture yield. Moreover, availability of insufficient markets and lack of modern farming in fisheries and poultry sectors hinder agriculture production in the country. These agents that cause agriculture decline in Pakistan pose some grave ramifications on the country. Lack of food supply emerges and exports of the country declines sharply. Similarly, surge in unemployment takes place. Problem of waterlogging and salinity also takes place. However, by taking concrete steps, problems in agriculture of the country can be tackled. They include fixing of agricultural price, introduction of land reclamation projects, initiative credit policy to farmers, promotion of ecological based cropping system, and adopting climate-smart agriculture. In conclusion, agriculture is backbone of Pakistan's economy. Pakistan witnesses agriculture decline due to socioeconomic and environmental factors. However, by taking concrete steps, it can be curbed.

Agriculture is the lifeline of Pakistan's economy. It is source of livelihood for  $\frac{2}{3}$  of country's rural population and around forty percent national labour force depends on it. This sector is also major contributor in the overall exports earnings of Pakistan. Unfortunately, it suffers from decline due to socio-economic and environmental factors today. The Planning Commission of Pakistan, in its report, said that the floods have damaged agriculture and its sub-sectors to the tune of Rs 800 billion, and over 800,000 animals have died in 94 districts of the country.

To begin with the causes that pose grave ramifications on Pakistan, devastating summer floods is one of them. These riverine and flash floods of summer have shattered Pakistan's entire agriculture sector. Torrential monsoon rains trigger small and large floods in the country. In a consequence, fertile lands, fishries and poultry farms get destroyed on a large scale. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's report of August 29, 2022, "almost eighty percent of crops in Sindh, which produces roughly thirty percent of Pakistan's total cotton output, were destroyed by the flood." In this way, devastating summer floods cause serious damage to agriculture sector of the country.

Similarly, energy crunch hits Pakistan's agriculture sector unprecedentedly. Pakistan's farm productivity is declining drastically amid severe energy crisis. Prolonged power disruptions and hike in fuel prices affect crop farming seriously as tube-wells cannot operate efficiently. In a result, targeted crop production does not achieve to farmers. Asad Mahmood who is Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Expert says that "there are 1,075,073 government tube-wells in Pakistan. Energy shortfall leads to the failure of optimum working of this water source. This causes fall of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as cotton and rice crop production fall apart on larger scale." Hence, energy crisis is contributing in the loss of Pakistan's agriculture sector.

Moreover, water scarcity and droughts have caused serious damages to agricultural sector of the country. Water scarcity and droughts reduce Pakistan's crop production as fertile land is converted into barren land amid acute water shortages. Owing to climate change, Pakistan has become water deficit country that results in acute shortage of water for crop farming and prolonged droughts. This situation is not only alarming for the country's agriculture sector but also threatening to social fabric of Pakistan. According to an article Pakistan's Water Crisis published in the Diplomat on June 8, 2022, "Agriculture is facing water shortage up to fifty percent. Besides, water shortage, droughts reduce crop production, directly impacting textile industry." Therefore, water scarcity and droughts have severe impacts on Pakistan's agriculture sector.

Furthermore, use of poor quality seed declines crop production across the country. Poor quality seed has a major effect on the germination as well as overall vigor of the plant especially in the case of wheat which is considered as staple food in Pakistan. Concerned authorities have also passive role in this regard. For instance, Provincial Seed Corporations are intended to distribute quality seed. However, they fail to distribute quality seed owing to elite class that wants to keep quality seed to itself. Thus common farmer cannot get and use quality seed. Therefore, million acres land is cropped with poor quality seed.

Apart from this, availability of limited market has <sup>hit</sup> Pakistan's agriculture sector on macro scale. The quantity of produced goods like cotton, rice etc. does not fulfill the foreign standards. Hence, our produced goods do not earn exporting revenue. Meanwhile, high inflation rate has also affected a great over the purchasing power of common people. Asian Development Bank unveiled a report on the Performance of Pakistan's agriculture sector on Feb 2021, "Pakistan's limited ~~market~~ agriculture market makes it unnecessary for farm firms to grow in size." In this way, insufficient markets deteriorate the performance of agriculture sector in Pakistan.

Additionally, lack of modern farming in fisheries and poultry sectors contributes in the dismal performance of Pakistan's agriculture sector. Modern methods of farming in fisheries and poultry are not only efficient but also high yield-oriented. Many nations in the world are utilizing modern methods of farming in fisheries and poultry sectors and get maximum yield. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Pakistan can bridge a gap of million dollars by utilizing modern farming techniques in fisheries and poultry sectors. However, use of old methods of farming can only add loss in agriculture sector in the contemporary age of globalization." In this way, lack of modern farming in fisheries and poultry sectors cause decline in agriculture of Pakistan.

These some major causes of agriculture decline pose grave ramifications on the country. Lack of food supply is one of them. Decline in agriculture triggers food insecurity across the country. This issue is going to become a big challenge as the country's population is increasing rapidly amid rising food demand. Food insecurity leaves millions of people on verge of hunger, unemployment and poverty. In the World Bank's 2021, Climate Risk Country Profile, projections for Pakistan over the next 10 years suggest, "yield declines in many key foods and cash crops, including cotton, wheat, sugarcane, maize and rice." Therefore, lack of food supply emerges in the country.

Similarly, exports of the country decline drastically as agriculture of the country declines. Pakistan is agro-economy, thus, agriculture sector is its lifeline. Dismal performance of agriculture sector directly cause reduction in exports of the country. The Economic Survey of Pakistan 2022-23 presented a dismal scenario; it is said that agriculture sector posted a 1.5 percent growth in 2022-23 against 4.4 percent in the corresponding year. Cotton production has decreased by 41 percent in this economic survey. This results in decline of Pakistan's exports. According to a report unveiled by Planning Commission of Pakistan, Pakistan's exports witnessed a decline of 26.68 percent in this fiscal year owing to agricultural decline. Thus, reduction in the exports takes place.

Moreover, the unemployment sector of the country witnesses surge as agriculture sector declines. The agro-economy provides employment for about 45 percent of the nation's workforce. Employment in agriculture sector is directly proportional to its performance. According to the Labour Force Survey 2020-21, the share of employment in Agriculture sector decreased from 39.2 percent in 2018-19 to 37.4 percent in 2020-21. This shows that unemployment is increasing in agriculture sector as its performance declines. In this way, unemployment in agriculture sector is increasing rapidly.

Furthermore, problem of waterlogging and salinity takes place across the country. This issue is ~~xxx~~ harmful for agriculture sector as water pollution emerges and results in barren land. Over-irrigation and canal leakages trigger waterlogging and salinity in fertile lands. These fertile lands get waterlogged and reduce agriculture decline of the country as they add barren lands in agriculture sector. As per a report of Planning Commission of Pakistan unveiled on May 2021, In Pakistan, about 15 lakh acres have been made unfit for cultivation due to waterlogging and salinity. Thus, severe issue of waterlogging and salinity affects fertile lands in the country.

These causes that inflict grave impacts on the agriculture sector of the country can be tackled by taking concrete measures. To begin with concrete steps for containing agriculture decline in the country, to fix agricultural price is one of them. By fixing the agricultural price, the role of middlemen can be terminated. Agriculture data analyst Gul Ahmed says, "Middlemen intervention is one of the biggest hurdles to improve socioeconomic status of small land holders." owing to this reason, farmers fail to get the real price of his handwork and inputs. Thus, there is dire need to fix agriculture prices in Pakistan.

Similarly, introduction of land reclamation projects is need of the hour to overt agriculture decline in the country. The issue of waterlogging and salinity is multiplier of non-fertile land. Like the Salinity Control and Reclamation Project (SCARP) of 1959, the government should introduce more projects for reclamation of waterlogging and salinity affected land of Pakistan, so that a vast tract of land may be saved from salinity and waterlogging. This initiative will also boost performance of agriculture sector of land of pure. In this way, by introducing land reclamation projects, the performance of agriculture sector can be improved.



Moreover, by initiating credit policy to farmers, the performance of ailing agriculture sector can be enhanced. Government has to ensure all possible credit based facilities to farmers from crop sowing to crop harvesting. Government should give them subsidized seeds. Government should also help farmers for the installation of tube-wells and water supply schemes. In this regard, new agricultural banks should be open in Pakistan. In his recent published book "Governing the Ungovernable", Dr. Ishrat Hussain describes, "There is room in Pakistan for creation of integrated rural financial markets where less profitable farmers can have access to credit." Thus, Pakistan needs to initiate credit policy to farmers so that agriculture sector can revive its performance.

Apart from this, Pakistan needs to adopt climate-smart agriculture. This is not only eco-friendly practice but also promotes climate-resilient infrastructure. In the 27th Conference of Parties Summit that was held in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt on 27th November 2022, to discuss the catastrophic summer floods in Pakistan and impact of climate change on the country, participants stressed on Pakistan to adopt climate-smart agriculture. The summit called for increased investment in climate-smart agriculture in Pakistan, including adoption of sustainable farming practices, water management systems, and drought-resistant crops. This will help to increase the resilience of agricultural communities to the impacts of climate change.

Furthermore, promotion of ecological based cropping system will exacerbate the performance of the country's ailing agriculture sector. Government should mark some important zones that have potential so that ecological based cropping system can be promoted in them.

Pakistani government has declared Potohar as olive zone, Cholistan as Grape zone, Layyah as Citrus zone.

Such types of other zones should be searched for promoting ecological based cropping system. This will increase the overall productivity per unit area due to suitability of environment. In this way, by promoting ecological based cropping system, agriculture sector can be enhanced.

In nutshell, Pakistan being an agrarian economy suffers from agriculture decline today. The country's exports, employment, and daily life commodities are highly dependent on its agriculture. Thus, the country cannot progress until and unless it is viable and strong agricultural hub. Pakistan's agriculture sector is facing numerous challenges today. Devastating summer floods have wiped out swaths of farmland across the country. Similarly, energy crunch has halted the working of tubewells which are installed for irrigation. Water scarcity and droughts also reduce crop productivity. Furthermore, availability of insufficient markets and lack of modern farming in fisheries and poultry sector have contributed in agriculture decline. As a result of this agriculture decline, food supply runs short and exports fall which hit the GDP of the country. Similarly, unemployment rises and issue of water logging and salinity takes its deep roots. However, by taking concrete steps like, fixing agriculture prices, introducing land reclamation projects, initiating credit policy to farmers, promoting ecological based cropping system and adopting climate-smart agriculture, these issues in agriculture can be turbed.

As Bill and Melinda Foundation has rightly said,  
("investments in agriculture are the best weapons  
against hunger and poverty, and they have  
made life better for billions of people.")