

PAK-AFFAIRS (2023)

Q2. Having the largest irrigation system in the world, Pakistan has to import food commodities. Discuss causes of agriculture decline.

INTRODUCTION.

Despite being the largest food supply basket in British India, the agriculture sector of Pakistan has been in deep crisis. It constitutes 20% of GDP, provides livelihood to 60% of people and has employed 65% of labor force. Yet, various political and economic challenges have hindered its growth that involve poor water mismanagement, natural disasters, salinity and water logging, utilization of traditional methods, energy crisis and corporate farming. This necessitate introducing various political, economic and social reforms and initiatives to address the issue.

CAUSES OF DECLINE OF AGRICULTURAL SECTOR.

1) Water mismanagement and lack of reservoirs.

In Pakistan, 60% of water in agriculture sector wastes because of flood irrigation. Secondly, the decreasing volume of water in water reservoirs owing to climate change and external factors has reduced water availability for crops production.

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Even in monsoon, vast amount of water wastes because of presence of inadequate number of reservoirs. Consequently, Pakistan is becoming water scarce.
As per Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-2025;

"Gross production in Pakistan has declined by 13.5% because of water scarcity".

2) Lack of investment in Research and development.

Insufficient investment in research and development of agricultural sector has enhanced a state's dependence on traditional methods. As per reports, Pakistan invests 0.6% to 0.11% of Agricultural GDP in research and development. Consequently, it has been deprived of innovative strategies and technology.

3) Natural - disasters.

Pakistan has been a victim of climate change and has been experiencing various disasters namely floods and cyclones. These disasters have wreaked havoc by producing food insecurity and destroying land. In 2014, floods impacted 2.40,000 farmers across Pakistan, impacting food storage and production.
As per report stated by The News;

"The agriculture production is likely to decline by 8-10% due to natural disasters by 2040."

4) Salinity and waterlogging

Salinity and water logging has reduced soil productivity, contributing to soil erosion. Additionally, the intensification of crops by farmers has added fuel to fire. Despite retaining growth at same level, they continue to erode the soil fertility.

The UN Food and Water Security program reports:

"6.6m acres of land equivalent to 29% of agricultural land in Pakistan is under salinity and water logging."

5) Energy Crisis.

Energy crisis has remained one of the significant challenge in economic growth of the country. Owing to energy crisis, tubewells cannot function. Certain machinery in Agriculture requires electricity to function but is facing the brunt of energy crisis.

6) Traditional Methods used by Farmers.

Farmers keep on relying on traditional methods of irrigation owing to lack of education about the advancing technology. Although they have resorted to solar pump and pesticides, they do not comprehend the implications of excessive use. Secondly, the IMF demand from the government to tax pesticides and fertilizers has hindered their use because farmers cannot afford them. In 2025, the government request for relief for farmers led the IMF to reduce tax demand.

t. For the agriculture inputs from 10% to 15%.

1) Corporate Farming.

Corporate Farming has reduced the prospects for incentivization of poor farmers contributing to decline. For instance, under Green Pakistan Initiative, \$, 60,000 acre of land has been given for investment from other countries with the pledge of 60% of outcome for Pakistan. However, this has reduced "Food Sovereignty" — who will claim outcomes whether foreigners or local farmers? The pledge about 60% outcome also remain vague. Consequently, poor farmers are grappling with land and financial issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAKISTAN.

a) Training of farmers.

Farmers should be trained and educated about the implications of crop intensification and flood irrigation. They should also be provided incentives through Benazir Income Support program for crops production instead of relying on corporate farming.

b) Utilization of advanced technology.

The government should enhance its investment in research and development in agricultural sector to address the

prevailing woes in the sector. This will apprise them of current challenges and importing the advanced technology needed for the purpose to replace traditional methods.

c) Providing subsidies on agriculture inputs.

The government should give tax rebates on pesticides and fertilizers to enhance agriculture production. The increased prices of inputs have enhanced the government's dependence on the traditional methods of farming.

d) Water management strategies.

The new water management techniques such as solar pumps should be used to address flooding techniques. Secondly, the government should strive to build new small water reservoirs for the storage purposes. This will address the concerns of water scarcity in the region.

e) Investing in disaster resilient crops.

The disaster resilient crops should be promoted through aids and advertisement. The farmers should be encouraged to grow such crops namely drought-resistant seeds to address concerns. Secondly, in case of floods and rainfall, the government should provide subsidies to farmers owing to the damage to facilitate them.

CONCLUSION.

The agriculture decline in Pakistan is attributable to both internal and external challenges. The internal mainly encompass political and economic constraints. Externally, the climate change and water scarcity have wreaked havoc on the production of crops. Hence, this necessitates both political and economic initiatives to address the woes of agriculture sector in Pakistan.