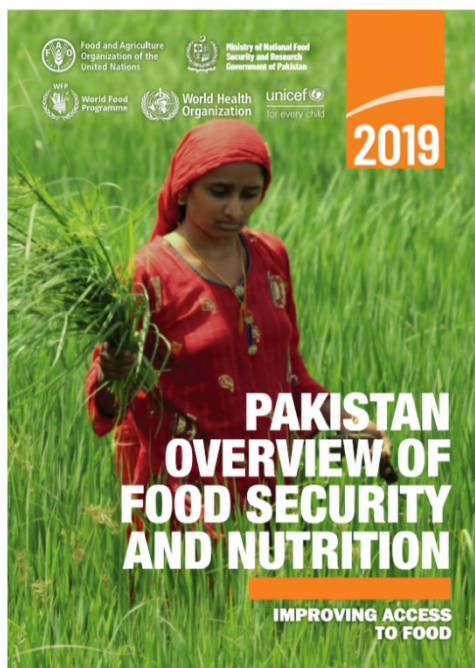


Pakistan: State of Food Security and Nutrition

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After over 53 years, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) phased out its bilateral cooperation (south cooperation and humanitarian aid) from Pakistan. Switzerland remains present in the country, with the Embassy of Switzerland in Islamabad, and continues to contribute towards the development through its global programs and the multilateral institutions. The Swiss humanitarian aid through its global mandate remains available in case of human or natural disasters. Among the last activities supported by SDC in Pakistan is the contribution to the first ever “Pakistan State of Food Security and Nutrition Report”¹.

Regular monitoring of Pakistan's food security and nutrition situation can support effective policy. This report is one part of a holistic food security and nutrition information system for the country. Its objective is to support a well-informed, action-oriented dialogue about food security and nutrition, relevant to decision-makers responsible for the health and wellbeing of Pakistan's rapidly growing population. As a joint publication, it is a compilation of the information and understanding we have in 2019 of the problem of food insecurity and malnutrition, where and why it is most prevalent, what needs further analysis and what the most promising pathways are to the eventual eradication of hunger and

malnutrition. This compilation is a stepping-stone to evidence-based formulation of positive solutions and concerted actions to correct pervasive hunger and malnutrition. Pakistan is facing a major challenge of meeting food security and nutrition targets, such as defined in the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030).

According to FAO data, the prevalence of undernourishment in Pakistan is 20.3 percent, and its marginal low reduction during the last years has been erased by the population growth, which at 2.4 percent remains the highest in South Asia. In Pakistan, 40 million people, out of an overall population of around 220 million are not getting enough food and the number of hungry people is rising every year. In recent times, natural disasters, conflicts and economic slow-downs have negatively affected both continuity of food availability and its accessibility. Communities have repeatedly faced setbacks in their ability to secure a diverse, nutritious, quality, year-round food supply, and to acquire and maintain infrastructure to support health and water systems, sanitation and hygiene. Climate change, migration and an intensive urbanization are aggravating factors, which contribute to increasing the instability. Pakistan performs slowest in South Asia in terms of child stunting, wasting and underweight, with no significant progresses in the last decade, despite several programs to address these issues.

Based on the National Nutrition Survey 2018, stunting of children under five years is nationally at 40.2 percent, while wasting is at 17.7 percent and underweight at 28.9 percent. There is no significant difference in either stunting or wasting by gender: boys and girls are almost equally affected. The lack of achievement in reducing stunting has a particularly strong bearing on the Asia Pacific region's progress towards zero hunger. The nutritional status of Pakistani women of childbearing age poses huge challenges to overcome the incidence of underweight babies (31.5 percent) and malnourished children.

Pakistan also has a rapidly emerging multiple burden of malnutrition, with rising overweight and obesity in all age groups and the prevalence of overweight children almost doubling in the last seven years, a problem which has been largely ignored. The main drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition are explored in detail in this report: poverty, climate related disasters, food safety and quality, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Although poverty is steadily declining in Pakistan, there are considerable disparities between the different provinces, and between urban and rural settings.

As with food insecurity and malnutrition, the report shows that Sindh and Balochistan are the two most affected provinces of the country. Pakistan's high climate change vulnerability and its dependence on agriculture and livestock activities means that better preparedness and adaptive responses to a hotter, drier climate with more variable rainfall will be essential to managing food insecurity and malnutrition during natural disasters. Much

¹ POFI, 2019 document to be downloaded at: https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Agriculture-and-Food-Security/news/Documents/2020_09_15_POFI_Pakistan_2019.pdf

work remains to be done throughout Pakistan to improve food safety and quality, and particularly to facilitate improved access to clean water and proper sanitation. Gains in these two areas will heighten the impact of other work aimed at arresting malnutrition among the population.

The special theme of this first Pakistan Overview of Food Security and Nutrition, 2019 report is 'Improving Access to Food'. As a lower-middle income country that has stabilized its availability of staple crops and is exporting millions of tons of wheat and rice, Pakistan can do more to improve the access dimension of food security by working to remove inequalities in physical, economic, social and knowledge access. These inequalities are most prominent between urban and rural settings, but also exist between provinces, socioeconomic groups and genders. Expansion of Government-run social protection programs is a very promising development that can be leveraged by increasing information provided along with training and education outcomes. Similarly, improvements in market arrangements, and policies that have desirable impact on prices of healthy and nutritious food, both hold high potential to open up access to affordable food in Pakistan and at the same time contribute to the development of sustainable food and agricultural systems.

This report is the combined effort of four UN agencies and the Government of Pakistan coming together to present the overall picture of where Pakistan stands in the efforts to eliminate hunger, and malnutrition. It is the first time a country level report has been attempted for Pakistan backed by the methodology of the UN's global series on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World². FAO, WFP, WHO, UNICEF, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform and Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination have collaborated to produce it with the cooperation of provincial governments and many other stakeholders (civil society organisations, resource persons, experts, etc.).

For SDC as a small donor in the context of Pakistan, this contribution represents an excellent opportunity to ensure visibility of Switzerland's support and to trigger systemic change in the country. In this case, FAO needed limited external support, provided by SDC to initiate this process, which includes capacity building and a great amount of advocacy in order to convince the Government to institutionalise data analysis and reporting. In my opinion, this is an excellent opportunity, which should be replicated by other SDC programmes around the world.

² Last version of the global SOFI report 2020 to be downloaded here: <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en/>