



# LANSA

Leveraging Agriculture for  
Nutrition in South Asia

## Country Policy Landscape Analysis

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A brief review of the agriculture/ nutrition  
policy landscape in Pakistan

April 2014

The LANSAs Country Policy Landscape Analysis papers have been produced to provide context for LANSAs work. It should be noted these are living / evolving papers, not intended for publication.

# Agriculture policies and strategies

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## Background

During the 1960s and 1970s, Pakistan benefited from Green Revolution-related technological changes, including the introduction of higher-yielding seed varieties and modern inputs. Major public investments were made in the construction of irrigation infrastructure which led to steady increases in irrigated area, and subsequent agricultural growth, until the 1970s. In more recent decades, agriculture has been framed as an important sector within national public rhetoric, yet agricultural policies and programmes have become increasingly fragmented into special interest issues. Investment into agricultural extension services, for example, has waned, and most agricultural innovation is now sourced from markets.

## More Recent Developments

Agriculture policies, programmes and research have historically been the responsibility of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MINFAL) at the federal level with most projects being implemented by provincial-level departments of agriculture, food, livestock and fisheries. Following the 2010 ratification of the 18th amendment to Pakistan's constitution, MINFAL has been devolved with most powers given to provincial governments and other functions given to the newly created Ministry of Food Security and Research. The mandate of this new ministry is to ensure food security; plan and coordinate agricultural strategy in relation to the larger economy; and standardize and regulate agricultural inputs. It has already drafted an Agricultural and Food Security Policy, which is expected to be approved in April-May 2014. Autonomous bodies such as the Agricultural Policy Institute (responsible for pricing policies) and PASSCO (responsible for procurement and storage) that were attached to MINFAL now come under the new ministry. Irrigation has a separate department within each province.

The food price crisis of 2007-08 brought food security to the forefront of the Pakistani national agenda. A National Task Force on Food Security was set up in 2008 to review existing policies, and recommend the way forward. The Task Force discussed the need for a revised agricultural policy in light of low agricultural growth rates experienced in the 2000s. It recommended a 4 percent agricultural growth rate in order to safeguard sustained food availability. Some of the agriculture-relevant measures it proposed include careful monitoring of agricultural prices and terms of trade; improving agricultural market mechanisms including procurement, storage and distribution; capacity building of agricultural policy and research systems; ensuring availability of and access to agricultural credit for small farmers and marginal regions; better water management systems; approving legislation on plant breeding and seed distribution to incentivize the private sector; and creating a food security index that would be updated regularly along with other price indices to monitor food availability in the country. One of the most important contributions of the Task Force was to push for a reformulation

of pricing policy of wheat, arguably the country's most important agricultural product. The government of Pakistan has historically set a floor price for wheat as a way of supporting farmers. Over the decades, however, the government's ability to insulate the national economy from global market prices has declined. Agricultural produce, including wheat, is currently exported (often without government sanction) to neighbouring countries at global prices. Formally recognizing these market conditions, the Task Force proposed that the key objective of a government support price should be to guarantee local farmers some level of parity with global market prices.

Government policy in agriculture is focused on increasing food availability by improving crop yields, maintaining food price stability, and improving the distribution network of food crops. Recently initiated development projects can be classified into 4 categories:

1. Water availability – Initiatives include on-farm water management projects, barani village development programme, canal rehabilitation and improvement projects with the aim of bringing new areas under irrigation and rehabilitating existing resources.
2. Research and extension - This includes projects that strengthen research systems focusing on the development of seed varieties and improving livestock services and extension programmes such as training of farmers on reduced pesticide usage, agribusiness development and diversification programmes and village support programmes.
3. Procurement and distribution – Major initiatives in this area are the Agriculture Sector Linkages Programme funded by AusAID which focuses on horticulture, livestock and enhancing value chains that benefit the rural poor by creating markets and employment opportunities; supply chain improvement of selected agriculture and livestock projects. In Punjaband, projects focus on improving shelf life of perishable foods through irradiation and cold chain systems.
4. Crop Maximization Project - In 1998, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) launched piloted a 3-village pilot programme called “The Improved Irrigation Technologies, Farm Inputs and Extension Services”, aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and income of small farmers, who often lack access to inputs, credit and knowledge. The government of Pakistan extended the project to 15 districts in 2003-2006 but slightly modified the modalities, giving farmers bank loans instead of subsidized inputs. This was not as successful as expected and the second phase of the project was launched in 2007 with the original FAO model, covering 26 districts and over 1,000 villages.

Other initiatives abound. Harvest Plus, for example, has begun collaborating with the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council on biofortification of wheat (zinc, with iron as a secondary trait). The first wave of biofortified varieties underwent performance testing in 2010-2011, and were submitted to registration trials in 2012-2014. They are scheduled for adaptability trials in 2014-2015 and release in 2015.

# Nutrition policies and strategies

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## Background

Pakistan has had high rates of undernutrition for many decades, with no improvements in over half a century. The oldest nutrition-friendly policies were aimed at increasing food consumption through distribution schemes using ration shops. These were put into place in 1947 and continued in various forms until 1987 when they were eliminated as a result of ineffective targeting of the rural poor. During the 1970s, nutrition was housed within the Federal Planning Commission under the belief that nutrition is a multi-sectoral issue. This Nutrition Section carried out nutrition planning, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation, while the Nutrition Division of the National Institute of Health undertook research. In 2002, the Ministry of Health established a Nutrition Wing in 2002, but the wing had no direct presence in the country's districts for actually implementing and monitoring health-related nutrition activities. A National Nutrition Strategic Plan was approved that same year but was never implemented. The Ministry of Health also initiated a development programme proposal called the "Enhanced Nutrition Programme" but its approval by the Planning Commission was stalled by constitutional changes in 2009. Nutrition has thus received little attention from policymakers and has historically been dealt with through a project-based bureaucratic approach. Operationalizing nutrition actions has fallen to provincial health departments.

## More Recent Developments

Only recently has the government begun to devote attention to nutrition, due to pressure from international donors and the impacts of national disasters on poor populations. Horizontal coordination is slowly improving and funds are now available to develop various, coordinated interventions. The constitutional devolution of power from the federal level to provincial governments (18th constitutional amendment) has created many opportunities and challenges. In all provinces, Inter-Sectoral Nutrition Committees and Technical Working Groups have been set up, with support and lobbying from UNICEF and the World Bank. Bilateral and UN agencies have also been prompted to support globally recommended cost-effective interventions. However, the ownership and capacity of provincial governments to tackle malnutrition still remain to be seen.

In September 2011, the federal government presented the results of the National Nutrition Survey (NNS), the largest nutrition survey in the history of the country. The 2011 survey shows no improvement in nutrition indicators in almost four decades, and highlighted alarming rates of chronic malnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies including vitamins A and D, iron, zinc, and iodine. The NNS, as the first comprehensive assessment of Pakistan's nutrition status, succeeded in placing nutrition higher on the legislative agenda.

After the 2010-2011 monsoon floods, a Nutrition Working Group was established to coordinate nutrition-related programmes and pave the way for inter-sectoral action by the government to combat malnutrition. The Nutrition Working Group proposed a Pakistan Integrated Nutrition Strategy (PINS), which frames malnutrition as a multi-dimensional issue that encompasses many facets, such as the consumption of food, childcare practices, household food insecurity, income, water and sanitation, high fertility rate, low levels of literacy and natural disasters and emergencies. The proposed strategy outlines 3 broad areas of action: treatment of acute and chronic malnutrition; interventions to address the underlying causes of malnutrition; and leadership, coordination, advocacy, policy, planning and financing

Activities under the first action area involve addressing the immediate causes of malnutrition such as promotion of good childcare practices, through the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) initiative, as well as hygiene practices, micronutrient supplementation and food fortification, and the provision of therapeutic foods under the Community based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) programme. Under action area 2, interventions focus on food diversification, water and sanitation and health. Some activities under this include provision of seeds and other agricultural inputs to farmers, school feeding, and the provision of safe water containers to CMAM target families. Lastly, to build institutional capacity to combat malnutrition, the third action area focuses on advocacy for commitment in the government, including nutrition in health care training, developing nutrition monitoring and surveillance systems, and building national capacity to produce Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF). PINS is currently in the preliminary stages of adoption.

The Nutrition Working Group was focused around federal government stakeholders, and PINS, consequently, is a strategy proposal pegged at the federal level. Since the devolution, a Pakistan Nutrition Development Partners Group has been formed out of the D-10 meetings, which include bilateral and multilateral development partners, donor agencies, and international NGOs such as Save the Children, GAIN, and Micronutrient Initiative. The meetings are coordinated by the World Bank, and chaired by the Ministry of Finance. The group aims to work with the designated Nutrition Cells within the health departments and the Planning and Development departments of provincial governments to develop action plans for each of the four provinces and three regions of Pakistan. Using consultants in each province, the group developed guidelines that are meant to serve as background documents for the Inter-sectoral Nutrition Strategy. A perusal of the guidance notes for Balochistan, Khyber, Punjab, Sindh, shows some common recommendations, including calls for: improved water supply and sanitation, soap provision, and hygiene counseling; dietary diversity, targeted service delivery, and mandatory fortification of certain commodities (such as wheat and edible oil); increased micronutrient supplementation, better LHW coverage, health care provider training, deworming, girls' education, and nutrition education, among many other promising recommendations. Sindh has also approved an inter-sectoral nutrition strategy.

The Pakistan National Nutrition Cluster is a common framework to guide the actions of all partners in the nutrition sector in the event of a disaster with the goal of reducing

mortality and morbidity of acutely malnourished children (6-59 months) and pregnant and lactating women through lifesaving nutrition services, treatment and prevention of micronutrient deficiencies, promotion of infant and young child feeding and breastfeeding, and strengthening capacity through enhanced coordination and information management. The National Nutrition Cluster is represented by 29 organizations including the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), international and local NGOs, UN Agencies, and donors. UNICEF chairs the Nutrition Cluster, and the NDMA focal point for nutrition is co-chair during a declared emergency. As of 2013, it was still active but current status is unclear.

Pakistan has also initiated a large-scale national cash transfer programme, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), aimed at women in poor households. The programme currently reaches 5 million female heads of households with a stipend of Rs 1,200, covering 15 percent of the national population. Although this is not a nutritional programme, its initial justification was to provide food support to food-insecure households and there is some evidence that the programme has resulted in improved food consumption among beneficiaries, with more than 80 percent of beneficiaries reporting using the cash transfer for food and nutrition. The National Task Force on Food Security 2007-08 had advocated a large-scale income support programme as a way of reducing the impact of price volatility and rises. Nutritional interventions are under consideration as part of the possible expansion of BISP into a conditional cash transfer programme.

In April 2013, the country joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) global initiative. SUN is an opportunity for the national and provincial governments to draw on the support of international donors, UN agencies, and civil society to make progress against malnutrition.

## Integrating Agriculture and Nutrition Policies

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In February 2013, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research finalized and distributed for comment the draft of the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy, which is aimed at halving malnutrition by 2030, and eliminating poverty and food insecurity by 2050—the current status of this policy is unclear. The draft NFNSP seeks to ensure that all Pakistanis have physical and economic access to enough nutritious foods for an active and healthy life; that food is produced and distributed in an environmentally sustainable way; and that the production and consumption of food is governed by just, equitable, and ethical social values. The policy is divided into the four facets of food security: sustainable food availability, food accessibility, food utilization, and nutrition and stability in food supplies (with special reference to improving food security during disasters and shocks). It also proposes the establishment of a Food and Nutrition Security Council (FNCS) at the national, provincial and district levels, the main role of which would be to ensure the coordination of federal and provincial ministries and government agencies in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. This

follows on the Prime Minister's commitment to establish a National Food Security Council in March 2012.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research has also drafted an Agriculture and Food Security Policy with technical assistance from FAO. The Policy introduces a set of directions to help the provinces articulate their own strategies for agriculture and rural development, and formulate investment plans for both the public and private sectors. It also establishes minimum standards for food safety, seed certification, and pest and animal health surveillance. Finally, it proposes the establishment of a number of federally-funded flagship programmes that focus on fisheries and aquaculture, non-traditional horticulture crops, improved management of rain-fed areas and rangelands, targeted food distribution schemes, food education and awareness, and strengthening networks of agricultural service providers. The policy has been sent to the Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet for review and is likely to be approved in spring of 2014.

The Nutrition Cluster faces multisectoral challenges within the arena of disaster management. National disaster response is decentralized, and the Department of Health in each province has established a nutrition cell to contribute to the nutrition cluster in a technical capacity. However, no line ministry is involved in the Nutrition Cluster at the national level, making it difficult to coordinate among provinces, as well as build up capacity. As of 2013, the Nutrition Cluster was reaching out to agriculture, aiming to develop partnerships with the Food Security Cluster to strengthen and harmonize nutrition and food security linkages and integrate Disaster Risk Reduction strategies and activities for improved community resilience to disasters. As mentioned previously, its status in 2014 is unclear.

Post devolution, nutrition is now housed in a Nutrition Wing within the Federal Planning Commission once again. This may again create issues of unclear roles and responsibilities in regards to implementation of nutrition activities, being that the Planning Commission is not an implementing agency. Nutrition is still not an integrated part of the recurrent budget of the Ministry of Finance (rather, it is considered a project proposal under the development budget of the Planning Commission). However, as part of the inter-sectoral initiative, a nutrition focal person is to be appointed in the Planning and Development department of each province and the health department of each province hosts a nutrition wing.

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