Factors affecting the Food Security Situation in a Resource Constrained Pakistan

Agriculture is the major source of livelihood of Pakistan’s 66% poor population living in rural areas. A major factor for the poor performance of the agriculture sector in Pakistan is the low productive capacities of small farmers. Small farmers usually have poor access to quality seeds, appropriate implements, fertilizers at low prices and access to markets for selling at fair price; and there is poor access to government extension and credit services.

Pakistan has been severely affected by the food crisis with massive food price hikes and food inflation going as high as 28.9% in July-February 2008-09. Millions of households have been affected, with the poorest fifth of the population spending nearly 30% of their monthly income on cereals and other food expenses. The worst affected groups have been the agricultural labourers and smallholder farmers dependent on the market to meet their food gap. As discussed earlier Pakistan has also seen dramatic increases in food prices (especially since the wheat flour crisis in 2007-08). The most vulnerable section of the population i.e. the small farmers (small holders, labourers / landless women and men, and children living in rural areas) are at risk of severe food insecurity. The negative impact of volatile food prices has also threatened progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In the past decade, Pakistan has invested little in strengthening its agriculture systems. Women and other vulnerable groups are largely absent during the planning and implementation of government agriculture programmes.

Poverty is aggravating due to the real impacts of climate change on poor people and communities. In addition to this, this region is prone to natural disasters. As it is already established, climate change is going to affect mostly poor and vulnerable communities if necessary steps are not taken in due time. The people and government of Pakistan face a dual challenge: lifting their people out of widespread poverty and underdevelopment while coping with frequent environmental hazards ranging from floods and cyclones to earthquakes. The two challenges are closely linked as disasters consume resources that are urgently needed for climate change adaptation to improve the lives of poor people.

In this backdrop the panel intends to raise the following questions:

1. What impact does climate change and inflation have had on agriculture in Pakistan?
2. What is the policy, present legal and institutional framework for support prices in agriculture sector in Pakistan to support small landholders?
3. How does the agricultural credit policies in Pakistan impact small farmers?

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2 Food Crisis in Pakistan: Real or Artificial, Oxfam, October 2008