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Cultivating Resilience

The Role of Innovation, Inclusion, and Sustainability

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The #1 source for in-depth analyses, expert opinions, and cutting-edge research on topics such as sustainable farming practices, global food security, agricultural policies, market trends, and technological innovations.

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Editorial

April Focus: Building Resilience in Modern Agriculture

Explore the importance of cultivating resilience in the agricultural sector as we face challenges like climate change, extreme weather, and supply chain disruptions. Learn how strategic approaches can safeguard global food security and rural livelihoods through modern agriculture.

Muhammad Khalid Bashir

4/1/2025

Resilience has always been at the heart of agriculture. From the earliest civilizations to modern agribusiness, the ability to adapt, endure, and grow despite challenges has defined the industry. Today, as climate change, economic pressures, and shifting societal expectations reshape the agricultural landscape, resilience is no longer just an asset—it is a necessity.

This month, we explore the theme **"Cultivating Resilience: Innovation, Inclusion, and Sustainability in Agriculture."** These three pillars form the foundation of a future-ready agricultural sector, one that is not only productive but also equitable and environmentally responsible.

Innovation: The Key to Adaptability

Agriculture has always evolved alongside human ingenuity. From mechanized farming to precision agriculture, every breakthrough has strengthened the industry's ability to meet rising food demands. Today, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and biotech solutions are leading the charge. Smart irrigation, drought-resistant crops, and automation are helping farmers optimize production while conserving resources. Innovation is no longer a luxury—it is the driving force behind sustainable agricultural progress.

Globally, the demand for food is projected to surge by 70% by 2050, in line with rapid population growth. However, about 9.9% of the world's population still experiences hunger, underscoring the need for innovative agricultural solutions.

In Pakistan, the agriculture sector accounts for approximately 23% of GDP and employs 36.4% of the total workforce. Recognizing the importance of innovation, initiatives like the Agricultural Innovation Program (AIP) aim to sustainably increase agricultural productivity and income through the promotion of modern technologies and practices across various sectors, including livestock, horticulture, and cereals.

Inclusion: Strengthening Communities, Empowering Farmers

True resilience in agriculture cannot be achieved without inclusion. Smallholder farmers, women, and marginalized communities must have access to resources, technology, and markets to contribute fully to global food security. Inclusive policies and investment in rural development ensure that all stakeholders benefit from the agricultural value chain. By fostering education, fair trade, and cooperative models, we can create a system where every farmer has a seat at the table.

Women constitute nearly half of the agricultural workforce globally. Investing in women's access to climate finance and decision-making is fundamental, potentially increasing productivity by up to 30% and reducing global hunger.

In Pakistan, where agriculture is the backbone of the economy, contributing 24% to the GDP and employing 37.4% of the labor force, empowering smallholder farmers and ensuring their inclusion in the agricultural value chain is crucial for national food security and economic development.

Sustainability: The Long-Term Commitment

Resilience is incomplete without sustainability. Climate change has intensified the need for responsible agricultural practices that protect soil health, biodiversity, and water resources. Regenerative farming, agroecology, and carbon-smart agriculture are not just trends; they are essential tools for mitigating environmental impact. Governments, corporations, and consumers must work together to incentivize sustainability while ensuring economic viability for farmers.

For instance, the OECD reports that total agricultural greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 3.8% over the past 15 years, from 1.45 billion tonnes in 2004-2006 to 1.51 billion tonnes in recent years, highlighting the need for sustainable practices.

In Pakistan, public investment in agricultural research has declined from 0.37% of agricultural GDP in 1996 to 0.12% in 2016, indicating a need for renewed focus on sustainable agricultural practices and innovation.

Looking Ahead: A Call to Action

As we navigate the complexities of modern agriculture, resilience must be cultivated with intent. The agricultural sector faces mounting challenges, from climate change-induced extreme weather events to supply chain disruptions and resource depletion. Without a strategic approach to resilience, food production systems risk becoming more fragile, threatening global food security and rural livelihoods.

To address these challenges, policymakers must prioritize agricultural innovation by investing in research, infrastructure, and policies that support climate-smart agriculture. Governments worldwide are recognizing the importance of agricultural resilience, with initiatives such as precision farming, drought-resistant crops, and digital tools helping farmers adapt to changing environmental conditions. In Pakistan, programs like the Punjab Resilient and

Inclusive Agriculture Transformation Project (PRIAT) are supporting farmers in adopting climate-resilient techniques to mitigate the impact of erratic weather patterns.

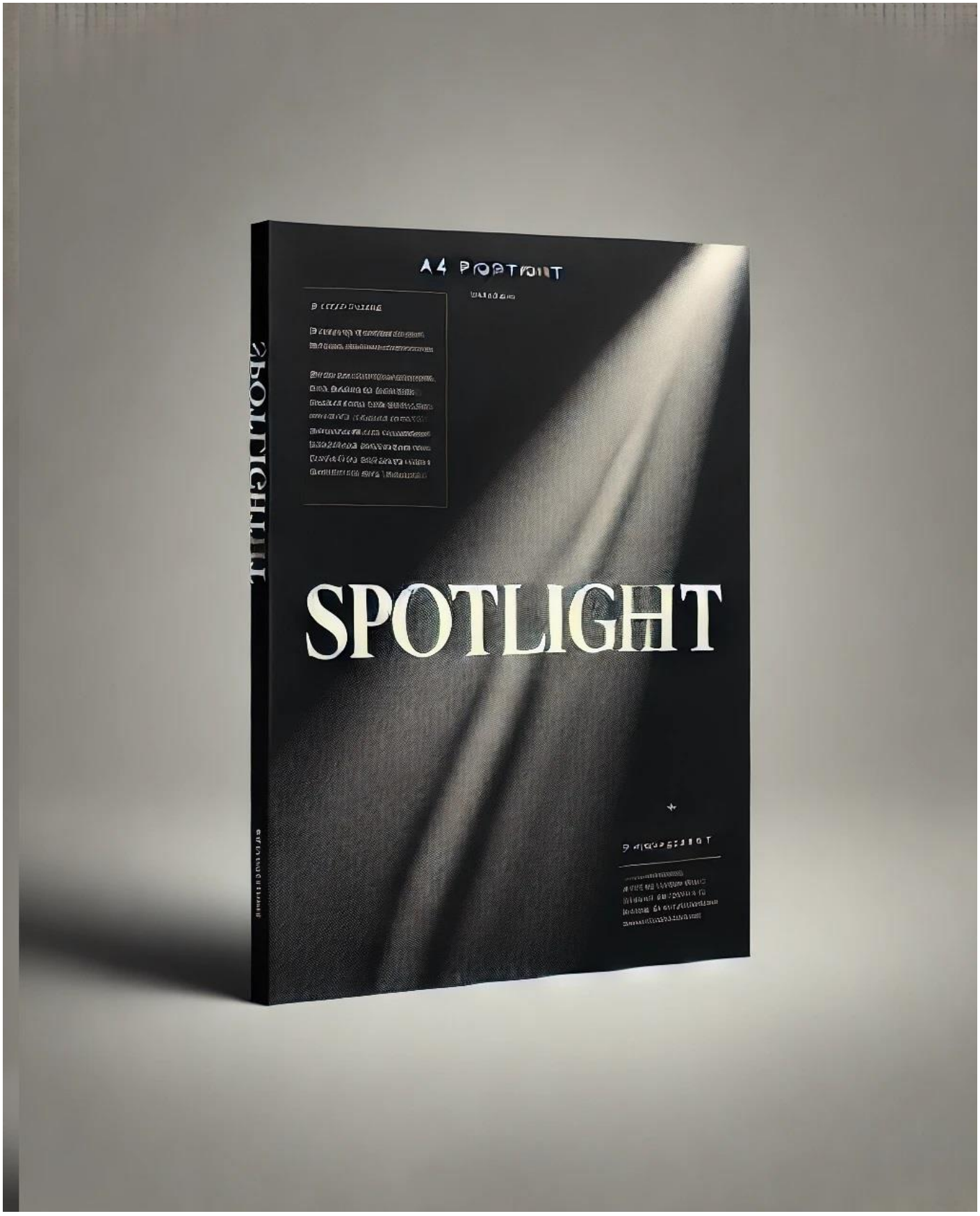
At the same time, businesses must commit to inclusive growth, ensuring that smallholder farmers, women, and marginalized communities are not left behind. While small-scale farmers contribute significantly to global food production, they often lack access to financial resources, modern technology, and fair market opportunities. By investing in fair trade, cooperative farming models, and capacity-building initiatives, businesses can help bridge these gaps, creating a more equitable agricultural system.

Farmers, too, play a crucial role in fostering sustainability. By embracing regenerative agriculture, crop diversification, and water conservation practices, they can enhance productivity while preserving natural ecosystems. Sustainable farming is not just an environmental necessity, it is an economic imperative for long-term agricultural viability.

In this issue, we bring you insights from leading experts, case studies from across the world, and solutions that exemplify resilience in action. Join us in this conversation as we work toward a more innovative, inclusive, and sustainable agricultural future.

Warm regards,

Muhammad Khalid Bashir
Managing Editor
The Agricultural Economist


SPOTLIGHT

Water Crisis in Pakistan: Governance & Scarcity Issues

Water crisis in Pakistan is a pressing issue fueled by governance failures, mismanagement, and neglect. With the economy and public health at stake, addressing water scarcity is crucial for the nation's stability and future.

Nadeem Riyaz

4/7/2025

Imagine waking up in Karachi in 2030: your taps have run completely dry, forcing you to queue for hours at a tanker just to get a few buckets of water. The price of everyday vegetables has doubled overnight due to failed crops and shrinking agricultural yields, while hospitals are overwhelmed with children and elderly patients suffering from waterborne diseases like cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis. This isn't a scene from a dystopian film, this is a very real and looming threat to Pakistan's future if immediate and meaningful action is not taken.

Water is not just a necessity, it is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, the foundation of its agriculture, and the lifeblood of its people. Yet today, the country finds itself on the verge of a full-scale water crisis that could spiral into a humanitarian disaster and destabilize the entire socio-economic landscape. Back in 1951, Pakistan enjoyed a comfortable per capita water availability of 5,260 cubic meters, which was more than sufficient to meet the needs of its population. Fast forward to 2024, that figure has plunged to around 850 cubic meters, according to the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), categorizing the country as "water stressed."

If current trends continue, Pakistan is projected to dip below 500 cubic meters per capita by 2030, a level defined as "absolute water scarcity." This means the country will not have enough water to meet even the most basic human and environmental needs. The consequences will be dire: food insecurity, public health crises, urban unrest, and intensified regional tensions over shared water sources. The urgency is clear. Without bold reforms, strategic investments, and collective responsibility, Pakistan's water crisis will become an existential threat to its future prosperity and stability.

Growing Water Scarcity

Pakistan's dependency on the Indus River system and its tributaries makes it highly vulnerable to both climatic shifts and regional political tension particularly with India, which controls the upper reaches of the basin. While the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty has helped prevent major conflict, the growing impacts of climate change and the construction of more upstream water infrastructure by India have disrupted the once-predictable flow of the river.

At the heart of the crisis is Pakistan's rapidly expanding population, now exceeding 240 million and projected to surpass 300 million by 2050. This surge places overwhelming pressure on water resources, escalating demand across domestic, industrial, and agricultural sectors. Urban megacities like Karachi and Lahore face severe water shortages due to outdated infrastructure, poor management, and inequitable distribution.

Agriculture, the largest consumer of water in Pakistan, uses over 93% of the country's freshwater resources. Yet, water efficiency remains shockingly low. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), over 60% of water is wasted through seepage in canals and unlined watercourses. Outmoded irrigation practices, particularly flood irrigation, waste as much as 50–60% more water than modern drip systems. Moreover, the cultivation of water-intensive crops like rice and sugarcane in arid regions further exacerbates the stress on already depleted water supplies.

Pakistan's water storage capacity is another critical issue. The country can only store enough water for 30 days, far less than the global norm of 120 days. In contrast, India stores water for an average of 220 days, and Egypt for up to 700 days. Over 35 million acre-feet (MAF) of water annually flows into the Arabian Sea without being utilized due to insufficient storage capacity. As major reservoirs such as Tarbela and Mangla age and suffer from sedimentation, new projects like the Diamer-Bhasha Dam face delays, stalled by political, financial, and administrative hurdles.

Another alarming factor is unregulated groundwater extraction. Pakistan is the fourth-largest user of groundwater in the world, withdrawing over 50 MAF annually. With more than 1.2 million tube wells operating largely unchecked, water tables are falling by 0.5 to 1 meter per year in regions like Punjab, and aquifers in Balochistan are depleting faster than they can recharge.

Water quality is another pressing concern. According to the PCRWR, 70–80% of Pakistan's water is unsafe for drinking, contaminated with harmful substances such as arsenic, nitrates, and bacteria. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 40% of diseases and 30% of deaths in Pakistan are water related. Shockingly, more than 50,000 children under the age of five die each year from diarrhea linked to unsafe drinking water, according to UNICEF.

The impact of climate change only adds fuel to the fire. Ranked 8th on the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. Glaciers in the Indus Basin, which feed Pakistan's river system, are melting at a rate of 1 meter per year. Additionally, the country faces increasing droughts and floods. The 2022 floods alone displaced over 33 million people and caused damage exceeding $30 billion,

destroying vital infrastructure and agricultural lands.

Impacts of the Water Dilemma

The consequences of Pakistan's water crisis are far-reaching and devastating. Declining agricultural productivity, especially for water-intensive crops, is just one of many impacts. As water becomes scarcer, Pakistan is struggling to meet its food demand, exacerbating food insecurity, rural poverty, and inflation. According to the World Bank, water-related losses could cost Pakistan up to 4–7% of its GDP each year, a staggering blow to the nation's economic growth and stability.

Industries, too, are suffering from water shortages and poor-quality water, which hinder production and reduce Pakistan's competitiveness in global markets. The textile and food processing industries, which rely heavily on water, are particularly affected. Additionally, the healthcare system is under extreme strain as it grapples with a rising tide of waterborne diseases. WHO reports that 30–40% of all illnesses in Pakistan are water-related, including life-threatening diseases like diarrhea, cholera, hepatitis, and typhoid.

The scarcity of water is also triggering intense inter-provincial disputes over water allocations from the Indus River. Tensions between Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan are growing, as each province struggles to secure its share of diminishing resources. These conflicts not only fuel social unrest but also threaten the unity of the nation, further complicating efforts to address the water crisis.

Internationally, while the Indus Waters Treaty has so far helped prevent outright conflict with India, the growing number of dams and diversion projects being built by India in Kashmir pose a significant challenge to future cooperation. As Pakistan's water situation becomes more precarious, regional cooperation on transboundary water management will become increasingly difficult to navigate.

The Way Forward

To avert a full-scale water crisis, Pakistan must act swiftly and decisively. The country's future hinges on how effectively it transforms its approach to water management. Water must be treated not just as a sectoral issue, but as a national priority embedded deeply into the country's economic planning and development agenda. This transformation demands a long-term vision, strong political will, inclusive policies, and the active engagement of stakeholders at all levels.

One of the most urgent priorities is expanding water storage capacity across the country. At present, Pakistan can only store a limited number of days' worth of water, leaving it highly vulnerable to seasonal variations and climate-induced disruptions. Critical projects such as the Diamer-Bhasha and Dassu Dams must be expedited to ensure long-term water security. However, these large-scale dams should be complemented by the development of smaller reservoirs and water bodies, particularly in rural, hilly, and drought-prone regions. Desilting existing dams to restore their original capacity, along with promoting rainwater harvesting at the community level, will further boost water availability during dry spells and reduce reliance on groundwater.

Agricultural water use, which consumes around 90% of the country's freshwater resources, must also be modernized. Traditional flood irrigation methods result in enormous water loss, and transitioning to water-efficient technologies like drip and sprinkler irrigation is imperative. In parallel, adopting techniques such as laser land leveling and lining watercourses can help minimize wastage. There must be a national push to encourage farmers to grow less water-intensive and drought-tolerant crops, particularly in water-scarce regions. Government-backed extension services should be expanded to provide hands-on training and introduce financial incentives that promote conservation-focused farming practices.

Urban water management is another pressing concern. With growing urbanization, Pakistan's cities are increasingly strained by outdated and poorly maintained water supply systems. Much of the municipal water infrastructure suffers from severe leakage and loss, with estimates suggesting that up to 30-40% of water is lost before it reaches households. The introduction of water metering, enforcement of rational pricing structures, and firm action against theft and illegal connections can significantly enhance efficiency and fairness. Simultaneously, there must be incentives for wastewater recycling, especially for industrial, construction, and landscaping purposes. Encouraging rainwater harvesting in residential and commercial buildings could provide substantial supplementary water sources.

Groundwater depletion poses another serious risk to Pakistan's water future. The widespread and largely unregulated use of tube wells has led to rapid aquifer exhaustion. To reverse this trend, the government must introduce licensing systems for groundwater extraction, ensure real-time monitoring through smart technologies like IoT, and invest in artificial groundwater recharge through retention basins and infiltration wells. Establishing a comprehensive, enforceable national groundwater management policy is urgently needed to bring this critical resource under control.

The issue of water pollution cannot be ignored either. The contamination of rivers, canals, and groundwater by untreated sewage, industrial effluents, and agricultural runoff presents grave risks to both public health and ecosystems. Pakistan must significantly expand investment in wastewater treatment infrastructure, particularly in major urban centers. Industries should be held accountable for adhering to effluent standards, and environmental monitoring agencies must be empowered to enforce regulations. Nationwide campaigns to raise public awareness about water hygiene, pollution control, and conservation can help build a collective sense of responsibility.

Good governance is at the heart of sustainable water management. Pakistan's National Water Policy (2018) must be operationalized with clear timelines and enforcement mechanisms. A central water authority should be established or strengthened to coordinate between provinces and ensure data-driven decision-making. Creating a unified, transparent, and real-time water database will help track usage patterns, monitor availability, and detect pollution, thereby guiding timely policy interventions.

As climate change accelerates, its impact on Pakistan's water systems is becoming more severe. Therefore, adapting to these changes is not optional, it is essential. Investment in flood and drought early warning systems, climate-resilient agricultural practices, and glacier monitoring programs must be scaled up. Urban planning must integrate flood mitigation strategies, including the restoration of natural floodplains and the enforcement of zoning laws to prevent construction in vulnerable areas.

Lastly, addressing the water crisis requires collective action. Communities, NGOs, and the private sector must all be engaged in designing and implementing localized solutions. Promoting water literacy in schools, leveraging social media for awareness campaigns, and recognizing community-led conservation efforts can help cultivate a culture of stewardship. In parallel, the adoption of new technologies, from satellite-based monitoring to desalination in coastal regions, must be encouraged through funding and research. Academic institutions and innovation hubs should be supported to explore localized solutions tailored to Pakistan's diverse regions.

Given that water crosses both national and regional boundaries, international cooperation is equally vital. Pakistan should maintain and deepen its engagement with global organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, and ADB for technical and financial support. Equally, bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries, particularly India, is essential for joint management of transboundary rivers, glacier monitoring, and disaster preparedness. Without such collaboration, long-term regional water security will remain elusive.

In summary, water is not just a resource, it is the foundation of life, food security, economic stability, and national security. The path forward demands urgency, innovation, and collective resolve. If Pakistan rises to the occasion, it can transform its water crisis into an opportunity for sustainable development and resilience.

Conclusion

Pakistan's water dilemma is not just a matter of scarcity; it is a crisis of governance, mismanagement, and neglect. With its economy, food security, and public health increasingly dependent on water, the country cannot afford to ignore the warning signs any longer. The reality of a water-scarce Pakistan is fast approaching, and with it, the risk of destabilizing the nation's socio-economic structure.

The solutions are clear and achievable. From improving water storage and irrigation efficiency to regulating groundwater use and tackling pollution, Pakistan has the tools at its disposal to avert disaster. However, these measures require swift, bold, and unified action at all levels of society, government, industry, and communities alike. Water must be placed at the center of national development planning, and its management must be elevated to a priority on par with national security.

What Pakistan needs now is strong political will, sustained public awareness, and international support. The time to act is now and not tomorrow. If Pakistan rises to this challenge, it can secure its future, not just for this generation, but for many more to come. Water is life. Protecting it is not just an environmental issue but an imperative for the survival and prosperity of the nation.

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is a former Pakistan Ambassador and Permanent Representative to FAO, WFP and IFAD.

Sindh's Wheat Crisis: The Question of Food Security

Explore the ongoing wheat crisis in Sindh's agricultural sector, driven by water shortages, fake seeds, climate change, and ineffective government policies. Discover the challenges faced by farmers and the impact on the region's agriculture.

Muhammad Ismail Kumbhar 1 & Aslam Memon 2

4/15/2025

Sindh's agricultural sector is in crisis due to ongoing issues, including persistent water shortages caused by unfair water distribution, the spread of fake seeds and fertilizers, recurring droughts caused by climate change, floods from unpredictable rains, contamination of underground water, and increasing threats from sea storms. These issues, combined with the anti-farmer policies implemented by our governments, have had a significant influence on the region's agricultural sector.

Because of this, Pakistan is currently ranked as one of the nation’s most at risk from climate change. Furthermore, Pakistan is experiencing dangerously high rates of hunger and malnutrition. Pakistan is placed at number 109 out of 127 nations in the 2024 Global Hunger Index. Growing food insecurity and nutritional inadequacies make the future even more bleak. Approximately 40% of children have stunted growth because of inadequate nutrition, and 18% of children under five suffer from severe malnutrition.

Pakistan is primarily an agricultural nation, and the progress of its agriculture has a direct impact on both its economic growth and food security. One of Pakistan's principal crops and the primary staple diet for its people is wheat, which is also grown alongside rice, cotton, and sugarcane. Bread prepared from wheat flour is a staple food in both urban and rural locations. Pakistan is one of the world's top users of wheat flour, with 72% of the grain being consumed to meet the population's nutritional and caloric demands. With an average yearly consumption of 120–125 kg of wheat per person, Pakistan needs 29–31 million metric tonnes of wheat to feed its 250 million people.

However, because of climate change, population growth, higher costs of input, and poor pricing policies, wheat and flour crises could get worse in future years, becoming an even greater threat to food security and hunger. The working and lower-middle classes rely heavily on wheat flour as their primary food source.

Although governments normally establish plans for wheat procurement, storage, and delivery to flour mills after harvesting, rising food costs and farmers' inability to get reasonable prices have discouraged wheat production. For example, in the 2023-24 season, the government established the support price for wheat at PKR 4,000 per 40 kg, however owing to noncompliance by Sindh's Food Department, farmers were compelled to sell their 100 kilograms wheat bags to traders at PKR 7,100, rather than the official PKR 10,000 cost. The identical bag sold for PKR 7,400 in Karachi's open market, while rural farmers in Sindh were forced to sell for PKR 2,500 to 3,000 every 40 kg, hardly covering their production expenses.

Pakistan's Economic Survey states that 31.583 million metric tonnes of wheat were intended to be sown during the Rabi season of 2024–2025; however, a 20% deficit is anticipated because of low prices from the previous season, water scarcity, and high input costs. As a result, many farmers did not cultivate wheat this year. Although wheat harvesting has started as of March 2025, the Sindh government has not yet made an official announcement on the procurement price. According to reports, the government has chosen not to buy wheat this year because of IMF requirements and 1.376 million metric tonnes of outdated inventories.

There have also been rumors of millions of rupees worth of wheat vanishing from government warehouses—an all-too-familiar scenario in Sindh. The Food Department is obligated to physically inspect stock every three months, but no such verification has been done for almost a year. There are mounting suspicions that wheat worth PKR 183 billion may have been damaged or stolen. Following the 2022 floods, PKR 3.22 billion wheat was allegedly sold and replaced with spoilt bags. Corruption throughout the supply chain, from procurement to flour mills, is no secret, and the final weight falls on the poor farmer and laborer, who pays higher rates for flour to feed their family.

Farmer organizations contend that both the federal and provincial governments lack effective and sustainable agriculture policy. The hard-working peasants who cultivate the land and produce food are unable to receive appropriate compensation for their harvests. There is no effective system in place to assure food security for the population.

In a worrying move last year, the caretaker administration bought wheat worth $1 billion despite having enough local supplies. Instead of spoiling, this wheat should have been exported to gain foreign cash. The plan to import rather than rely on local excess is creating concerns.

Wheat prices in the country have dropped after the government failed to declare a support price. The price of 40 kg (one maund) wheat has reduced to between Rs. 2,200 and Rs. 2,400. According to data, the introduction of fresh wheat harvest in the country’s markets has resulted in a significant drop in prices. The government's decision not to create a support price has further driven interest rates lower. In the open market, wheat is being sold for Rs. 2,200 and Rs. 2,400 per 40 kg, which is creating major financial

losses to farmers. Meanwhile, flour mill owners are only acquiring wheat based on immediate necessity, thus exacerbating the situation for farmers.

Wheat prices may fall even lower with the arrival of the full new wheat crop, when the government releases old stock to the market. This will harm farmers who have already invested considerably. With no official support price, wheat is presently selling for Rs. 2,200 and Rs. 2,400 per 40 kg and may go below PKR 2,000, as dealers anticipate desperate farmers being compelled to sell.

For farmers to be fairly compensated for their labor, the farmer leaders underlined that the government should safeguard their interests by buying wheat from them and keeping its word.

They went on to say that farmers are being compelled to store their harvested wheat outdoors due to inadequate storage facilities, putting it at risk of spoiling and causing irreversible financial loss. In this situation, farmers are compelled to sell their crops at throwaway prices, which is further deteriorating their economic conditions.

The government's double standards were also criticized by the farmers; while officials claim they will not purchase wheat grown locally, they are also thinking about buying wheat from elsewhere. Not only does this approach undermine farmers, but it also hurts the country's economy by wasting valuable foreign currency.

The leaders of the farmers called on the government to protect farmers' rights, buy wheat directly from farmers, and keep its promises to pay farmers fairly. To help farmers prevent additional losses, they also urged the government to provide adequate storage facilities that would shield the wheat crop from weather-related damage.

If wheat procurement objectives are missed by 20%, it will have major long-term consequences. Wheat, which is presently offered inexpensively, may become unavailable or extremely costly soon, costing up to PKR 5,000 per 40 kg. Hoarders will benefit, and flour prices will skyrocket, affecting the common person the most.

Global organizations have previously warned that if Pakistan fails to improve its food and nutrition metrics, the repercussions will be disastrous. Rising food costs will have a direct impact on the poor, deteriorating their nutritional state because of climate change and population growth.

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writers are 1 Professor at Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam, Pakistan & 2 Director at PARC-SSRI, Tandojam, Sindh Pakistan and can be reached at mikumbhar2000@yahoo.com & aslam memon@parc.gov.pk

Pakistan's Rural Economy & Global Market Integration

Explore the impact of globalization on Pakistan's rural economy, highlighting both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Discover how global market integration affects smallholders, agriculture, and the challenges posed by price volatility and climate change.

Samra Khalid

4/22/2025

Globalization has profoundly reshaped Pakistan’s rural economy, integrating it into international trade networks while simultaneously exposing it to global economic fluctuations and climate risks. On the one hand, globalization has opened new markets for agricultural exports, boosted remittances from overseas workers, and facilitated access to new technologies and information. These developments have collectively contributed to about 25% of Pakistan’s GDP (World Bank, 2024), providing vital income streams for rural households. Remittances have improved household consumption, education, and housing in rural regions. Additionally, the global spread of information and technology has led to the adoption of modern farming techniques and access to international markets through digital platforms

However, these gains are tempered by rising vulnerabilities. Over 60% of Pakistan’s population lives in rural areas, primarily dependent on agriculture (PBS, 2024). Global supply chain disruptions, currency depreciation, and rising fuel and fertilizer costs, amplified by international inflation, have significantly increased input prices. As a result, smallholder farmers struggle to maintain profitability and competitiveness in international markets. At the same time, climate change poses a growing threat, with unpredictable weather patterns, heatwaves, and floods damaging crops and livestock. Declining exports due to shifting global demand and protectionist policies in importing countries further strain the rural economy.

This article explores how globalization impacts rural livelihoods in Pakistan, analyzing trade patterns, remittance flows, and climate-linked economic shocks. It also examines policy pathways to strengthen resilience, including trade diversification, sustainable agriculture, targeted subsidies, and rural financial inclusion. Addressing these challenges through strategic planning and inclusive policies is crucial for harnessing the benefits of globalization while protecting Pakistan’s rural communities from its adverse effects. By balancing global integration with local resilience, Pakistan can ensure a more equitable and sustainable rural development trajectory in the face of evolving global dynamics.

Current State of Rural Livelihoods in Pakistan

The current state of rural livelihoods in Pakistan reflects a complex interplay of dependence on agriculture, reliance on remittances, and increasing vulnerability to climate change. Agriculture continues to serve as the backbone of the rural economy, employing 38% of the national workforce according to the Labour Force Survey (2024). Key exports such as rice, textiles, and fruits contribute significantly to the economy, with rice exports valued at $2.5 billion, fruits at $800 million, and textiles dominating at $16 billion (SBP, 2024). However, recent global disruptions have exposed the fragility of this sector. Fertilizer prices surged by 70% following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, placing a heavy burden on smallholder farmers (FAO, 2024). Moreover, cotton production, a major cash crop, declined by 34% due to widespread pest infestations, highlighting gaps in pest management and agricultural resilience (PARC, 2024).

In parallel, remittances serve as a critical financial lifeline for rural households, with overseas Pakistanis sending $28 billion in 2023, equivalent to 9% of the GDP (SBP, 2024). Around 60% of remittance-receiving households are based in rural areas (UNDP, 2024), and these funds play a vital role in household consumption, education, and investment in small enterprises. Nonetheless, fluctuations in host country economies and migration policies can affect remittance stability.

Meanwhile, climate change remains a mounting threat. The catastrophic 2022 floods inflicted $30 billion in damage and devastated 4.4 million acres of cropland (NDMA, 2024), while recurrent heatwaves have slashed wheat yields by 15% in Punjab, the country's breadbasket (PMD, 2024). These environmental shocks not only reduce income and food supply but also amplify poverty and displacement. Together, these dynamics underscore the urgent need for adaptive strategies to protect rural livelihoods and build economic resilience in the face of evolving national and global pressures.

Global Market Influences on Rural Pakistan

Global market dynamics have a profound impact on rural Pakistan, bringing both promising opportunities and significant risks. On the positive side, rising international demand has boosted exports of traditional crops and produce. Basmati rice exports to the European Union and Middle East increased by 12%, while horticulture exports, especially mangoes and citrus, surpassed $1.2 billion in 2024, according to the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan. The influx of technology has also been transformative. Innovations in precision farming, such as drone surveillance and Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, have increased agricultural yields by up to 20% (PARC, 2024). Meanwhile, e-commerce platforms like Daraz and Alibaba are enabling rural artisans and small producers to access global buyers, expanding their customer base beyond domestic borders. Foreign

investment, particularly under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has created 50,000 rural jobs through agriculture-related projects (CPEC Authority, 2024), offering much-needed employment and infrastructure development.

However, these benefits are offset by substantial challenges. Global price volatility has hit Pakistani exporters hard. For instance, sesame seed exports to China declined by 53% due to intensified competition from African producers (Reuters, 2024). IMF-imposed economic reforms, including a 45% hike in urea prices, have increased production costs and worsened farmer indebtedness. Pakistan's dependence on imports, especially for edible oil, 80% of which is sourced internationally at an annual cost of $4 billion, exposes the economy to global supply chain disruptions (PBS, 2024). Furthermore, climate-induced losses are growing. Citrus production in 2024 dropped by 35% due to extreme weather, leading to factory shutdowns and job losses (FPCCI, 2024).

A case in point is rice farmers in Punjab. While EU demand raised organic basmati prices by 25%, a shortage of U.S. dollars delayed export payments, compelling farmers to sell at lower domestic prices. Consequently, 30% of smallholders shifted to low-yield crops (PARC Survey, 2024), highlighting the fragility of rural incomes amid global market pressures.

Policy Recommendations

To enhance the resilience and prosperity of Pakistan's rural economy in a globalized world, a series of targeted policy recommendations must be implemented. First, strengthening market access is crucial. Digitalizing land records would empower smallholder farmers by enabling them to use land titles as collateral for formal credit, which remains inaccessible to a large portion of the rural population (World Bank, 2024). Establishing "Export Facilitation Centers" in rural regions of Sindh and Punjab could provide farmers with training in quality standards, packaging, and direct linkage with exporters, thereby reducing dependency on middlemen and boosting incomes.

Second, climate-resilient agriculture should be a policy priority. Drought-resistant wheat varieties developed by the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) offer a viable solution to declining yields under increasing climate stress. Likewise, expanding agricultural insurance coverage, which currently reaches only 5% of farmers, would provide a critical safety net against crop loss due to floods, droughts, or pest infestations.

Third, supporting small farmers through energy-efficient and value-added strategies is essential. Government subsidies for solar-powered tubewells could lower irrigation costs and promote sustainable farming practices. Additionally, tax incentives for agro-processing units in rural areas would encourage local value addition and job creation, keeping more income within farming communities.

Fourth, trade policy reforms must address the vulnerabilities exposed by global market shifts. Pakistan should prioritize negotiating improved trade terms with China and Gulf nations for agricultural exports, ensuring better market access and competitive pricing. Reducing dependency on imported agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers by developing local seed banks and research centers would further insulate rural producers from external shocks and currency fluctuations.

Taken together, these strategies would not only improve economic security for rural households but also position Pakistan's agricultural sector for sustainable and inclusive growth in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

Conclusion

The integration of Pakistan's rural economy into global markets has yielded both opportunities and vulnerabilities. While globalization has brought in vital remittances, technology, and export potential, it has also amplified exposure to global price volatility, input cost inflation, and climate-related disruptions. For the majority of Pakistan's rural population, who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, the promise of globalization remains unevenly distributed, benefiting larger producers while smallholders struggle with market access, rising costs, and uncertain incomes.

Case studies across Punjab and Sindh highlight the duality of these impacts, where farmers may gain from export surges but are quickly set back by delayed payments, input shortages, or extreme weather events. Therefore, the way forward requires more than participation in global trade, it demands resilience. Policies that strengthen domestic agricultural infrastructure, support small farmers through credit and insurance, promote sustainable practices, and diversify trade partnerships are essential to protect rural livelihoods. Strategic reforms must bridge global market benefits with grassroots empowerment, ensuring that rural communities not only survive but thrive in an interconnected world. With inclusive planning and adaptive strategies, Pakistan can transform globalization from a source of vulnerability into a driver of equitable rural development.

References: State Bank of Pakistan; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics; UN Development Program; Food & Agriculture Organization; World Bank; Labour Force Survey; SBP; PARC; UNDP; NDMA; PMD; CPEC Authority; Reuters; FPCCI

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Protecting Mangroves in Pakistan: A Call to Action

Discover the vital role of mangroves in Pakistan as guardians of life and climate. Learn about their importance, the threats they face from climate change, and the urgent need for replantation and community projects to ensure their survival.

Nadeem Riyaz

4/30/2025

"Where river meets sea and storm meets land, Pakistan's mangroves once stood tall. Today, they teeter on the edge of collapse."

Along Pakistan's southern coastline, where the Indus River meets the Arabian Sea, the mangrove forests stand sentinel as a strong ecosystem. These salt-tolerant trees, with their tangled roots woven deep into coastal mud, form living walls against storms, nurture fisheries, capture vast stores of carbon, and sustain the livelihoods of thousands. Unfortunately, today, these vital guardians are under siege.

Urban expansion, pollution, dwindling freshwater supplies, human negligence and climate change are threatening Pakistan's mangroves. Concentrated mainly in the Indus Delta, these forests once spanned about 600,000 hectares, forming one of the world's largest arid-climate mangrove ecosystems and a critical biodiversity hotspot. Tragically, they are fast diminishing. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and WWF-Pakistan, the country has lost about 35–40% of its mangrove coverage since the 1960s.

Satellite imagery reveals the stark transformation. The once vibrant green belts have withered into barren, muddy flats and the flourishing dense canopies look vulnerable and exposed on the coastline today. The reasons why Pakistan's mangroves are dwindling are numerous and interconnected. First, the sprawling metropolis of Karachi, now exceeding 20 million residents, has relentlessly encroached into mangrove zones. Housing projects, industrial estates, and mega-port developments like the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and Port Qasim have swallowed swathes of forest. Land developers have long viewed mangroves as "wasteland" ripe for "higher economic use," ignoring the invaluable ecosystem services they provide for free.

Second, pollution is choking the mangroves. Every day, thousands of tons of untreated industrial effluents, sewage, and solid waste are dumped into the coastal waters of Sindh and Balochistan. Mangrove roots suffocate under toxins, aquatic life dwindles, and oxygen-depleted "dead zones" expand. Plastic waste clogs the swamps, smothering young shoots and strangling marine life even further.

Third, the dwindling flow of the Indus River has left the delta parched. According to the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), freshwater flows to the delta have declined by over 90% since the 1950s. Mangroves, which require a delicate balance between saltwater and freshwater, now struggle to survive in hyper-saline soils.

Fourth, despite legal protections, locals often cut mangroves for firewood, fodder, and construction material. Grazing goats and camels trample young seedlings, disturbing forest regeneration. Weak law enforcement allows these destructive cycles to persist unchecked.

Lastly, climate change exacerbates the crisis. UNDP reports indicates sea levels rising by about 1.1 millimeters per year along Pakistan's coast. Increased salinity, coastal erosion, rising temperatures, and powerful cyclones like Cyclone Biparjoy (2023) further batter these already fragile ecosystems.

Do mangroves matter? Yes, they do as they provide extraordinary coastal protection. According to World Bank studies, dense mangrove forests can reduce the impact of tsunamis, cyclones, and tidal surges by up to 70%. They serve as critical breeding grounds for fish, crabs, shrimp, and migratory birds. In fact, over 80% of Pakistan's commercial fish catch depends on healthy mangrove ecosystems.

Moreover, mangroves are climate warriors. They sequester up to four times more carbon per hectare than tropical rainforests, making them potent tools in the fight against global warming. In Pakistan, more than 135,000 people in coastal Sindh and Balochistan rely directly on mangroves for fishing, honey collection, and small-scale industries. Without mangroves, Pakistan's coastal economy, biodiversity, and climate resilience would face escalating challenges and probable collapse.

For decades, Pakistan largely ignored its mangroves. But recent years have seen renewed efforts. Under initiatives like the Billion Tree Tsunami program, large-scale mangrove plantations have been launched. Interestingly, Pakistan is among the few countries where mangrove cover is now growing, with over 75,000 hectares of new growth recorded. In 2021, Pakistan hosted World Environment Day, showcasing its mangrove restoration efforts to a global audience.

Organizations like WWF-Pakistan, IUCN, and Indus Earth Trust are spearheading community-powered conservation projects. In villages such as Kharo Chan and Keti Bunder, locals, often women's groups, collect seeds, run nurseries, and manage forests. In return, they receive training in eco-tourism, sustainable fisheries, and mangrove honey production.

The government has also begun using drones, satellite imagery, and GIS

mapping to monitor mangrove health, enabling smarter restoration strategies and early threat detection.

Despite promising progress, daunting challenges persist. Many replantation drives suffer high mortality rates due to poor site selection, lack of freshwater, and inadequate aftercare. Upstream water mismanagement continues to starve the delta. Funding shortages, inconsistent policies, and frequent political shifts further compound the difficulties. The survival of Pakistan's mangroves demands more than just tree planting. It requires a comprehensive, long-term strategy.

Saving Pakistan's mangroves is not optional but a national imperative. Key steps must include granting legal protection by designating mangrove areas as critically protected ecosystems, with strict enforcement of penalties against illegal encroachment and deforestation. Restoring the ecological flows of the Indus River is also vital to maintain the delicate freshwater-saltwater balance essential for mangrove survival.

Pakistan must combat pollution by building wastewater treatment facilities and enforcing zero industrial discharge into coastal waters. Empowering communities in forestry programs, promoting eco-tourism, and supporting sustainable livelihoods dependent on healthy mangrove ecosystems are equally essential. The country must invest in technologies by establishing permanent coastal monitoring stations, expanding drone surveillance, and using satellite technology for threat detection and restoration planning.

Raising public awareness is crucial. National campaigns must educate citizens about the value of mangroves and mobilize public support. Securing international assistance from global environmental agencies for funding, technical expertise, and research partnerships will strengthen efforts to save and expand the mangroves.

Conclusion

Pakistan's mangroves are not merely trees rooted in coastal mud. These are guardians of life, climate, and prosperity. Today, they teeter dangerously on the brink of collapse, besieged by human negligence and a changing climate. While replantation drives, community projects, and technological innovations offer glimmers of hope, they will falter without bold, uncompromising action.

The survival of these forests demands political courage, strict legal protection, investment in sustainable livelihoods, restoration of the Indus Delta's lifeblood, and a collective national awakening to their irreplaceable value. Time is running out as every lost hectare weakens Pakistan's natural defenses against rising seas and climate disasters. Every poisoned root robs fishermen, families, and future generations of their heritage.

Pakistan has to act decisively with relentless commitment, innovation, and unity *"The question is no longer whether we can save Pakistan's mangroves, it is whether we can afford not to.*

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The writer is a former Pakistan Ambassador and Permanent Representative to FAO, WFP and IFAD.


POLICY BRIEFS
THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST
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Agricultural Policies and Macroeconomic Stability in Pakistan

Explore the crucial role of agricultural policies in ensuring macroeconomic stability in Pakistan. Discover how these policies enhance food security, stabilize farmer incomes, and promote rural development, contributing to overall economic resilience.

Maryam Shareef

4/1/2025

Agricultural policies are systematic frameworks established by governments to regulate, develop, and sustain the agricultural sector. These policies are designed to ensure food security, stabilize farmers' incomes, promote sustainable farming practices, and enhance rural development. In Pakistan, where agriculture contributes 22.7% to GDP and employs 37.4% of the labor force (Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24), well-structured agricultural policies are critical for overall economic stability, inflation control, and long-term growth.

Food security remains a top priority in agricultural policymaking. With Pakistan's population expected to reach 350 million by 2050, ensuring a steady food supply is essential. Government initiatives such as wheat procurement programs, fertilizer subsidies, and price controls aim to support farmers while keeping staple food prices affordable for consumers. However, inefficient subsidy distribution and supply chain disruptions often hinder these efforts.

Stabilizing farmers' incomes is another key objective. Fluctuations in crop yields due to climate change, water scarcity, and market volatility expose farmers to financial risks. Policies such as crop insurance schemes, minimum support prices, and interest-free loans for small farmers are crucial in mitigating these risks. The Kissan Package, introduced in 2022, provided PKR 1,800 billion in agricultural credit, helping thousands of farmers invest in better seeds, machinery, and irrigation systems.

Sustainable farming is an increasing focus of agricultural policies. The government has introduced climate-smart agriculture initiatives, including water conservation programs, solar-powered irrigation systems, and incentives for organic farming. These policies align with global sustainability goals and are crucial for mitigating the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture.

Agricultural policies also play a vital role in rural development by improving infrastructure, access to markets, and farmer education. By addressing these areas through targeted policies, Pakistan can strengthen its agricultural sector, boost productivity, and ensure long-term economic resilience.

Key Components of Agricultural Policies

Key components of agricultural policies play a crucial role in ensuring food security, stabilizing incomes, and enhancing productivity. These policies provide financial protection, encourage innovation, and safeguard local agricultural markets.

Price support policies are essential for shielding farmers from unpredictable market fluctuations. Governments set minimum support prices (MSPs) to ensure that farmers receive fair compensation for their produce, reducing the risk of income instability. Pakistan's Wheat Support Price Policy is a prime example, as it guarantees a set price for wheat farmers, ensuring income security while stabilizing the national food supply.

Subsidies lower the cost of essential agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, and fuel, directly impacting farm productivity. Pakistan's Fertilizer Subsidy (2023) successfully reduced urea prices by 25%, leading to a 15% increase in wheat yields (Ministry of National Food Security). Such initiatives enhance food production and rural livelihoods but require efficient distribution mechanisms to prevent misuse.

Trade barriers, including tariffs and import restrictions, protect domestic farmers from excessive global competition. By controlling the influx of cheaper foreign products, governments can support local agricultural industries. Pakistan recently imposed a 30% regulatory duty on soybean imports to protect local oilseed farmers and boost domestic production (SBP, 2024).

Research and development (R&D) investments in agriculture drive long-term sectoral growth and climate resilience. Innovations in high-yield seeds, mechanization, and irrigation techniques help farmers improve productivity while mitigating environmental risks. Drought-resistant wheat varieties have increased yields by 20% in Sindh, demonstrating the impact of agricultural research in addressing climate challenges (PARC, 2023).

Impact of Agricultural Policies on Macroeconomic Stability

Agricultural policies play a crucial role in ensuring macroeconomic stability by influencing inflation, economic growth, and rural development. In Pakistan, where food inflation accounts for 34.6% of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket (PBS, 2024), stable agricultural output is essential for controlling inflation. When agricultural productivity is consistent, food supply remains steady, preventing sudden price shocks that can lead to inflationary pressure. By ensuring price stability through policies such as minimum support prices and input subsidies, governments can mitigate inflationary risks and maintain economic stability.

Agriculture is also a key driver of economic growth. According to the World Bank (2023), a 1% increase in

agricultural growth results in a 0.5% increase in GDP. This correlation highlights the sector's impact on national economic performance. Pakistan's agricultural exports, including rice, cotton, and fruits, contributed $8.5 billion in FY 2023-24, strengthening foreign exchange reserves and reducing trade deficits. Policies that promote mechanization, research, and market access enhance productivity, increasing the sector's contribution to economic expansion.

Beyond economic growth, agricultural policies significantly impact rural development and employment. With 37.4% of Pakistan's workforce engaged in agriculture, policy measures such as agri-loans and rural infrastructure development are essential for sustaining livelihoods. In 2023, the State Bank of Pakistan disbursed PKR 1.2 trillion in agricultural loans, enabling smallholder farmers to invest in better inputs and equipment. These financial interventions improve rural incomes, reduce poverty, and create employment opportunities in associated industries such as food processing and logistics.

By implementing well-designed agricultural policies, Pakistan can achieve macroeconomic stability, enhance food security, and promote sustainable economic development. Effective policy interventions ensure that agriculture remains a resilient and thriving sector, benefiting both rural and national economies.

The Green Revolution in Pakistan: Successes & Challenges

The Green Revolution in Pakistan has played a pivotal role in transforming the country's agricultural sector by significantly boosting crop yields and modernizing farming techniques. Since the 1960s, Pakistan has witnessed remarkable improvements in food production, particularly in staple crops like wheat and rice. Wheat production surged from 4.6 million tons in 1960 to 27.5 million tons in 2023, ensuring greater food security for a growing population. Similarly, the introduction of high-yield rice varieties (HYVs) has led to a 250% increase in rice yields, making Pakistan one of the leading rice exporters in the region. These advancements have been largely driven by government interventions and technological innovations in farming.

To support small farmers and sustain agricultural growth, the government has introduced various initiatives. The Kissan Package (2023) allocated PKR 50 billion in subsidies for smallholder farmers, reducing input costs and improving access to modern farming techniques. Additionally, the Awami Tractor Scheme facilitated the distribution of 50,000 tractors at subsidized rates, promoting mechanization and increasing efficiency in agricultural practices. These efforts have strengthened the agricultural sector and enhanced farmers' productivity, contributing to national food security.

Despite these successes, challenges persist in ensuring equitable benefits from the Green Revolution. Unequal access to resources remains a critical issue, as many small farmers struggle to afford quality seeds, fertilizers, and machinery, limiting their ability to compete with larger commercial farms. Additionally, water scarcity poses a severe threat to agricultural sustainability. With 60% of Pakistan's agricultural land dependent on rain-fed irrigation, climate change-induced variability in rainfall patterns exacerbates the risk of drought and reduced crop yields (UNDP, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires continued policy reforms, investment in water conservation techniques, and targeted support for small-scale farmers to ensure the long-term sustainability of Pakistan's agricultural progress.

Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Growth

Sustainable agricultural growth in Pakistan requires targeted policy interventions that address financial accessibility, climate resilience, trade policies, technological innovation, and market efficiency. Expanding subsidies and credit access is crucial to supporting smallholder farmers, who form the backbone of the agricultural sector. Increasing Kissan Card coverage to 5 million farmers by 2025 will ensure that more farmers benefit from direct financial assistance, enabling them to invest in better-quality seeds, fertilizers, and modern farming equipment. Enhanced access to credit will also reduce reliance on informal lenders who charge high-interest rates, keeping farmers out of debt traps.

Investment in climate-resilient agriculture is vital for ensuring long-term productivity, given Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change. Promoting efficient irrigation methods such as drip irrigation and encouraging the cultivation of drought-resistant crops can mitigate the effects of erratic rainfall and water scarcity, safeguarding food security. Strategic trade policies are also essential. While protecting domestic farmers is necessary, a gradual reduction in trade tariffs can help expand agricultural exports, particularly for high-value crops like fruits, vegetables, and rice, while maintaining competitiveness in global markets.

Strengthening research and development in agricultural technology is another key priority. Expanding the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council's (PARC) seed development programs can enhance yields by introducing improved crop varieties that are more resistant to pests and climate stress. Finally, improving market linkages will help farmers secure better prices for their produce. Establishing e-market platforms for direct farmer-to-consumer sales can eliminate intermediaries, increasing farmers' profit margins while ensuring consumers have access to fresh and affordable agricultural products. These policy measures, if implemented effectively, can drive sustainable growth, improve rural livelihoods, and enhance Pakistan's agricultural competitiveness in both domestic and international markets.

Conclusion

The role of agricultural policies in ensuring macroeconomic stability in Pakistan is undeniable. These policies are

instrumental in maintaining food security, stabilizing farmer incomes, and fostering rural development, all of which contribute to economic resilience. Government interventions such as price support mechanisms, subsidies, and research investments have enhanced agricultural productivity and supported rural livelihoods. Additionally, initiatives like the Kissan Package and fertilizer subsidies have alleviated financial burdens on farmers, fostering greater sectoral stability.

However, challenges such as inefficient subsidy distribution, climate change impacts, and unequal resource access remain significant barriers. Addressing these requires continued reforms, particularly in promoting climate-resilient agriculture, improving financial accessibility, and enhancing market efficiency. Investments in modern irrigation techniques, drought-resistant crops, and digital market linkages can further strengthen Pakistan's agricultural sector.

Furthermore, stable agricultural output directly contributes to controlling inflation and fostering economic growth. Given agriculture's substantial share in GDP and employment, well-structured policies can drive sustainable development, increase exports, and reduce trade deficits.

By implementing forward-looking and inclusive agricultural policies, Pakistan can enhance food security, boost rural incomes, and sustain long-term economic stability. A holistic approach that integrates technological innovation, climate resilience, and efficient market access is essential for a thriving agricultural sector and a stable economy.

References: Economic Survey of Pakistan, Pakistan's Fertilizer Subsidy, SBP, PARC, PBS, World Bank, UNDP

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Cultivating Resilience in Agriculture Today

Resilience in agriculture is essential to combat climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource degradation. Explore how technological innovations like gene editing and precision farming can transform global food systems and enhance productivity in the face of environmental challenges.

Ayesha Sadiqa, Rimsha Shahid & Sidra Ghulam Muhammad

4/7/2025

Agriculture is the lifeblood of civilization, yet it faces unprecedented challenges in the 21st century. Climate change, resource depletion, and socio-economic disparities threaten global food security and the livelihoods of millions. However, through pragmatic measures, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability, viable solutions can be found to overcome these obstacles and foster long-term prosperity.

Since the dawn of civilization, agriculture has been the cornerstone of human sustenance, bridging the gap between natural resources and nourishment. It has not only fed populations but also shaped cultures, economies, and political systems. Despite significant technological progress in recent decades, the sector now finds itself under considerable pressure. Rapid industrialization, unregulated land use, climate volatility, and systemic neglect have left agricultural systems vulnerable. The World Bank (2023) warns that climate change could slash global crop yields by as much as 30% by 2050, a scenario that would hit developing nations the hardest due to their limited adaptive capacity. At the same time, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022) notes that over 33% of the Earth's arable land is already degraded, threatening food production and biodiversity.

Addressing these issues requires more than isolated fixes, it demands a comprehensive and inclusive transformation of the agricultural sector. Climate-smart agriculture, which integrates sustainable farming practices with adaptive technologies, holds promise in mitigating the impacts of environmental stress. Regenerative farming techniques, such as cover cropping, zero-till agriculture, and agroforestry, restore soil health and improve long-term productivity. Equally important are inclusive policies that empower marginalized groups, especially women and smallholder farmers, who form the backbone of rural economies. Investment in research, capacity building, and equitable market access can create resilient food systems capable of withstanding future shocks. Agriculture's survival, and by extension, human survival, depends on our collective commitment to innovation, equity, and ecological stewardship.

Current Challenges Facing the Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector today grapples with multifaceted and interlinked challenges that threaten its sustainability and capacity to meet global food demands. Climate extremes are becoming increasingly frequent and severe, disrupting traditional crop cycles and affecting food production across the globe. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and prolonged droughts are now the norm in many regions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) has issued a stark warning: for every 1°C rise in global temperature, wheat yields could drop by 6% and rice by 3.2%, posing serious risks to food security, particularly in vulnerable economies.

Simultaneously, soil and water resources are under immense strain. According to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (2022), 40% of global land is already degraded, undermining its productivity and threatening the livelihoods of millions. Water scarcity further compounds the problem. The World Resources Institute (2023) projects that by 2050, nearly 45% of the world's population will face significant water stress, severely constraining agricultural output in many regions.

Biodiversity loss adds another layer of concern. The widespread practice of monocropping, along with excessive pesticide use, has dramatically reduced ecological diversity. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF, 2022) reports a staggering 68% decline in global wildlife populations since 1970, a trend that also disrupts vital pollination and pest control functions in farming systems.

Socio-economic barriers exacerbate these environmental threats. Smallholder farmers, responsible for producing around 80% of the world's food (FAO, 2023), often operate under precarious conditions. They lack adequate access to credit, modern technology, extension services, and equitable markets, making it difficult for them to adapt and thrive. These cumulative pressures call for urgent, systemic reforms aimed at building resilience, improving resource efficiency, and creating inclusive support systems to safeguard the future of agriculture and global food security.

Defining Agricultural Resilience

Resilience in agriculture refers to the sector's capacity to endure and adapt to shocks such as climate-related disasters, market volatility, and socio-economic disruptions, all while sustaining or enhancing productivity. Strengthening resilience is crucial in an era where food systems face mounting pressure from environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and growing global demand. A comprehensive approach to resilience includes fostering technological innovation, implementing inclusive policy frameworks, and promoting sustainable resource management practices. These elements, when

integrated effectively, can transform agriculture into a more robust and adaptive system capable of withstanding both immediate and long-term challenges.

Technological innovation is one of the most transformative forces shaping modern agriculture. Breakthroughs in genetic engineering, digital platforms, and precision farming are increasing yields, conserving resources, and enhancing decision-making for farmers. For instance, CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing is being used to develop crops that are more resistant to drought and disease. A 2023 study published in *Nature Biotechnology* showed that CRISPR-edited wheat varieties achieved 50% higher yields under water-limited conditions, demonstrating the immense potential of gene editing in addressing food security under climate stress. Similarly, digital agriculture platforms such as GeoKrishi in Nepal utilize artificial intelligence to deliver localized, real-time data on weather, pest outbreaks, and market prices to smallholder farmers, leading to productivity gains of 20–30% (World Economic Forum, 2023). Precision farming, which employs drones and IoT sensors to optimize water and fertilizer use, has also shown a 30% reduction in water consumption, according to the *MIT Technology Review* (2023).

Equally important is fostering inclusivity within the agricultural landscape to empower marginalized groups and ensure equitable access to resources. Women, for example, represent 43% of the global agricultural labor force (FAO, 2023) yet own less than 15% of farmland (World Bank, 2023). Programs like India's Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have demonstrated that providing women with microloans, training, and cooperative support can boost their incomes by 40%. Financial inclusion tools such as mobile banking and blockchain technology are also making a significant impact. In Kenya, M-Pesa's Agri-Loan schemes have enabled greater access to credit, increasing smallholder farmer profits by 25% (GSMA, 2023). Additionally, integrating indigenous knowledge systems—like Mexico's Milpa intercropping method—has proven to improve biodiversity and soil fertility, as recognized by the UNEP (2022), reinforcing the value of localized and traditional wisdom in sustainable agriculture.

Sustainability remains the foundation for long-term agricultural resilience. Practices such as crop rotation, agroforestry, and organic farming are not only beneficial for soil health but also contribute to climate mitigation. According to the Rodale Institute (2023), regenerative agriculture can sequester up to 4.5 tons of CO_2 per hectare annually. Biochar, created from agricultural waste, enriches soil while reducing emissions, with a 2023 study in *Science Advances* showing crop yield increases of 12–18% in sub-Saharan Africa. Urban farming also plays a growing role in food systems, aligning with SDG 11 on sustainable cities. Projects such as vertical farming in Singapore now supply 10% of the city-state's leafy greens (FAO, 2023), illustrating how innovation can make agriculture more resilient even in densely populated urban areas.

Conclusion

Cultivating resilience in agriculture is no longer an option, it is an urgent necessity. The compounded challenges of climate change, resource degradation, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic inequality demand a holistic transformation of global food systems. Technological innovations such as gene editing, precision farming, and digital platforms are enabling more efficient and adaptive agricultural practices, offering hope for increased productivity even under environmental stress.

At the same time, inclusivity must be at the core of agricultural development, ensuring that marginalized stakeholders, especially women and smallholder farmers, are equipped with the tools, resources, and support needed to thrive. Equitable access to credit, land, and markets is essential for creating a more just and resilient agricultural landscape. Sustainability further underpins this vision by aligning ecological preservation with food production, employing regenerative practices, biochar, and urban farming to mitigate environmental harm while enhancing food security. The evidence is clear: when innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability intersect, agriculture becomes more resilient, equitable, and capable of meeting the nutritional and economic needs of a growing global population. The path forward requires a coordinated global effort, where governments, research institutions, private enterprises, and communities unite in reimagining agriculture not just as a means of survival, but as a pillar of resilience, prosperity, and planetary health.

References: FAO; IPCC; World Bank; Nature Biotechnology; UNEP; Rodale Institute; *MIT Technology Review*; GSMA; World Economic Forum; WWF; World Resources Institute

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The writers are affiliated with the National Business School, The University of Faisalabad, Pakistan. For correspondence: ayeshagm99@gmail.com

Agricultural Sustainability & Economic Resilience in Pakistan

Explore the vital link between agricultural sustainability and economic resilience in Pakistan. Discover how sustainable practices can enhance food security, support rural livelihoods, and promote environmental preservation amidst climate challenges.

Sania Sarwar

4/14/2025

Sustainable agriculture is critical for Pakistan, a country where the agricultural sector contributes significantly to the national economy, accounting for 18.9% of the GDP and employing approximately 37.4% of the labor force (GOP, 2023). This sector not only supports rural livelihoods but also plays a central role in ensuring national food security. However, the long-term viability of agriculture in Pakistan is under serious threat due to unsustainable practices and the escalating impacts of climate change. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), sustainable farming practices in Pakistan must emphasize soil conservation, water-use efficiency, and resilience to climate variability. These interventions are crucial to mitigating land degradation, which currently affects about 60% of the country's total land area (FAO, 2021).

Climate change poses a particularly urgent challenge. Pakistan is increasingly exposed to extreme weather events such as erratic monsoons, prolonged droughts, floods, and rising temperatures. These phenomena not only disrupt cropping cycles but also threaten water availability and reduce agricultural output. The World Bank (2023) warns that Pakistan could experience an 8–10% decline in agricultural productivity by 2040 if adaptive measures are not taken. In this context, sustainable agriculture becomes more than just a desirable practice, it is a national necessity.

A key aspect of sustainable agriculture is the balance between immediate productivity gains and the preservation of environmental resources for future use. This requires moving away from harmful practices like monocropping, over-irrigation, and the excessive use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. These approaches have already led to the degradation of approximately 30% of Pakistan's soils, reducing fertility and increasing vulnerability to climate shocks (UNEP, 2022). Embracing agroecological methods, crop diversification, and integrated soil and water management strategies can pave the way for a more secure and resilient agricultural future.

Advancing Sustainable Agriculture Through Integrated Practices

Sustainable agriculture in Pakistan requires the adoption of diverse, locally adapted practices that balance productivity with environmental conservation. Among these, agroforestry, the strategic integration of trees with crops and livestock, emerges as a powerful solution. It improves soil stability, enhances biodiversity, and fosters long-term land productivity. Pakistan's widely lauded *Billion Tree Tsunami* initiative demonstrated agroforestry's potential, significantly reducing soil erosion and restoring degraded ecosystems, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK Government, 2021). Moreover, agroforestry systems support vital ecosystem services such as pollination and natural pest control, reducing farmers' dependency on synthetic pesticides, which currently consume nearly 35% of their input expenditures (PARC, 2020).

Integrated crop-livestock systems also play a central role in enhancing sustainability, especially in Pakistan, where 40% of farmers rely on subsistence agriculture (BS, 2023). Livestock contributes approximately 60.5% to the agricultural GDP, yet issues like overgrazing and methane emissions pose environmental concerns. Solutions such as rotational grazing, improved pasture management, and sustainable manure handling can reduce ecological pressures while maintaining productivity.

Conservation agriculture offers another critical pathway. Key practices like reduced tillage have already shown success. Punjab's *Zero Tillage Wheat* program, for instance, has resulted in a 20% increase in wheat yields and a 30% reduction in water usage, demonstrating the potential for scalability (CIMMYT, 2019). Similarly, cover cropping can prevent erosion, enhance organic matter, and suppress weeds, yet it remains underutilized due to limited awareness and policy incentives.

Organic farming is an emerging sector in Pakistan, with about 0.5 million hectares under organic cultivation (IFOAM, 2022). While the sector holds immense export potential, particularly for high-demand crops like basmati rice and mangoes, growth is hampered by weak regulatory frameworks and the lack of standardized certification. The *Pakistan Organic Agriculture Policy (2021)* seeks to address these barriers and facilitate access to global organic markets.

Finally, climate-smart agriculture (CSA) is essential for adapting to increasing climate variability. The Ministry of Climate Change (2023) advocates the cultivation of drought-resistant crops such as millets and sorghum, alongside precision irrigation systems. These strategies are vital as 70% of Pakistan's irrigation depends on rapidly depleting groundwater reserves (World Bank, 2022), threatening the country's food and water security.

Economic Resilience in Agriculture

Economic resilience in agriculture refers to the sector's capacity to withstand shocks such as extreme weather events, price fluctuations, and market disruptions, while maintaining long-term productivity and sustainability. For a country like Pakistan, where agriculture remains a vital source of employment and food security, building economic resilience is critical to protecting rural livelihoods and national development goals.

One key strategy to enhance resilience is the diversification of income sources. Encouraging farmers to engage in supplementary activities such as agro-tourism, beekeeping, fisheries, and kitchen gardening helps reduce over-reliance on staple crops like wheat and rice. These alternative income streams not only improve household financial stability but also promote sustainable land use. Government support through the *Ehsaas Program*, which provides targeted cash transfers to smallholder farmers, further helps mitigate the impact of income shocks from crop failures or price crashes (GOP, 2023).

Improved market access and price stability are also essential. The rollout of electronic marketplaces or e-Mandi systems increases price transparency and empowers farmers with real-time data, reducing exploitation by middlemen (Punjab Agriculture Department, 2022). Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for key crops such as wheat and rice offer income stability during volatile market conditions.

Access to finance and insurance significantly enhances the ability of farmers to recover from climate or market shocks. The *State Bank of Pakistan's Agro-Loan Scheme* provides low-interest credit tailored to smallholders, while index-based crop insurance schemes are emerging as a cost-effective tool for protecting against weather-related risks (Karachi University, 2021).

Investments in research and innovation further bolster resilience. The *Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC)* is actively developing high-yield and climate-resilient seed varieties. Simultaneously, the introduction of digital agriculture tools, such as drone surveillance and AI-driven pest control, being piloted in Punjab, signals a forward-looking shift towards adaptive, data-informed farming systems.

Challenges & Policy Recommendations

Pakistan's agricultural sector, while central to its economy and food security, faces several pressing environmental and structural challenges that threaten long-term sustainability. Deforestation and land degradation are among the most critical concerns. Rapid deforestation, driven by urban expansion, fuelwood use, and agricultural encroachment, has significantly reduced forest cover, contributing to soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and declining water cycles. To address this, there is an urgent need to strengthen the enforcement of existing forest conservation laws and support community-based reforestation initiatives. Integrating agroforestry and incentivizing tree planting on farms can also restore degraded lands while enhancing rural livelihoods.

Water scarcity presents another major constraint, as Pakistan is one of the most water-stressed countries globally. Over 90% of its freshwater is used in agriculture, much of it inefficiently through outdated flood irrigation systems. Expanding subsidies for water-efficient technologies such as drip and sprinkler irrigation is essential to promote water conservation. Additionally, investing in rainwater harvesting infrastructure and promoting the use of farm-level water reservoirs can help rural communities cope with erratic rainfall and droughts, exacerbated by climate change.

Farmer education and training also require significant improvement. Many farmers lack access to updated knowledge about sustainable practices, soil health, pest management, and climate-smart techniques. Increasing the reach and quality of agricultural extension services is critical for bridging this knowledge gap. Mobile-based advisory platforms, field demonstrations, and farmer field schools can effectively deliver practical training tailored to local needs.

To overcome these challenges, policy interventions must be holistic, participatory, and science based. Collaboration between government agencies, research institutions, civil society, and farming communities is vital. With the right mix of policy support, capacity building, and resource allocation, Pakistan can transition toward a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agricultural system that benefits both people and the planet.

Conclusion

Agricultural sustainability and economic resilience are not only interlinked but also imperative for Pakistan's food security, rural livelihoods, and environmental preservation. As climate change increases and natural resources become scarcer, the country must transition from conventional, resource-intensive practices to more sustainable, inclusive, and adaptive systems. Integrated approaches such as agroforestry, conservation agriculture, organic farming, and climate-smart technologies have shown tangible success in improving productivity while preserving ecological integrity. Simultaneously, fostering economic resilience through diversified income streams, improved market access, financial inclusion, and agricultural innovation ensures that farmers can withstand external shocks and adapt effectively.

However, achieving these outcomes requires robust policy support, institutional coordination, and community engagement. Strengthening forest protection laws, promoting efficient irrigation systems, and enhancing farmer education through well-funded extension services are critical policy priorities. Public-private partnerships, digital tools, and research-driven solutions must be leveraged to scale sustainable practices across Pakistan's diverse agroecological zones.

In sum, a paradigm shift toward sustainable agriculture is not merely an environmental choice—it is a national imperative. With strategic planning, inclusive policymaking, and sustained investment, Pakistan can build a resilient agricultural sector that nourishes its people, protects its environment, and contributes to long-term economic stability and growth.

References: FAO; World Bank; GOP; PARC; Karachi University; Punjab Agriculture Department; IFOAM; CIMMYT; PBS; KPK Government

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Challenges in Pakistan's Agricultural Exports

Pakistan’s agricultural exports face mounting pressure from global protectionism, shifting trade dynamics, and strict regulations, leaving smallholders vulnerable to declining profits, unstable market access, and limited capacity to meet compliance demands.

Aisha Ghouri

4/24/2025

Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan’s economy, contributing 19% to the national GDP and employing 38% of the total workforce, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2024). The sector is not only a vital source of livelihood for millions, especially in rural areas, but also a critical pillar of the country’s exports. However, in recent years, Pakistan’s agricultural sector has come under mounting pressure from the ripple effects of global trade wars and rising protectionism. In 2023 alone, Pakistan’s agri-exports declined by 14%, falling to $4.8 billion, as per the State Bank of Pakistan (2024). This alarming contraction underscores the vulnerability of the sector to external shocks and shifting global trade dynamics.

Major export destinations are implementing increasingly stringent trade barriers. The European Union’s new carbon tax regulations are making it more expensive for Pakistani exporters to sell high-emission goods like rice and cotton. India has imposed high tariffs on basmati rice exports, further squeezing market access. Meanwhile, China’s strict phytosanitary standards have restricted shipments of citrus and mangoes due to compliance issues. These measures, though driven by national and environmental interests, have severe economic consequences for Pakistani farmers, who already face high input costs and infrastructure deficits.

To navigate this complex environment, Pakistan must adopt a multi-pronged approach. Investing in digital traceability systems can enhance transparency and compliance with international standards, making Pakistani goods more competitive. Promoting climate-smart certifications can open doors to premium global markets focused on sustainability. At the policy level, diversifying export destinations through regional trade alliances, such as with Central Asian and ASEAN countries, can help reduce overdependence on volatile markets. Without such adaptive strategies, Pakistan risks losing its agricultural competitiveness and further exacerbating rural poverty. The time to future-proof the sector is now.

The Global Tariff Landscape and Pakistan’s Agri-Exports

The global tariff landscape has increasingly turned hostile for Pakistan’s agricultural exports, with rising protectionism and environmental conditionalities creating significant hurdles in key markets. One of the most pressing challenges comes from the European Union, Pakistan’s second-largest trading partner. The EU’s introduction of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), set to be fully implemented by 2026, imposes 20–35% additional tariffs on carbon-intensive imports. Given that Pakistan’s textile sector, comprising 60% of national exports, heavily relies on coal-powered processing units, it stands to lose as much as $500 million annually due to these levies, according to the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (2024). Compounding this is the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), which mandates that imports such as palm oil and soybeans must be sourced from deforestation-free supply chains. Unfortunately, the absence of digitized land records among Pakistan’s smallholder farmers poses a serious compliance issue, threatening their access to the European market altogether.

Meanwhile, across the border, India has strategically employed agri-trade policies that adversely affect Pakistani exports. In 2023, India levied a 20% export tax on its basmati rice, flooding global markets and driving down prices. As a result, Pakistan’s own basmati rice exports declined by 18%, causing a loss of $380 million, as reported by the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan. Furthermore, India’s $1.3 billion annual subsidy to its cotton farmers continues to distort international prices, making it nearly impossible for Pakistani cotton producers to remain competitive. This unfair pricing advantage has already translated into a $200 million loss in potential trade for Pakistan (International Cotton Advisory Committee, 2023).

Ironically, even China, Pakistan’s closest strategic and economically, has imposed stringent non-tariff barriers that hinder agricultural exports. In 2022, Chinese authorities halted Pakistani mango imports citing unverified pest concerns, despite Pakistan investing $12 million in advanced fumigation technologies. This single restriction led to a 30% drop in the country’s $65 million mango export industry, as noted by the Horticulture Exports Development Company. Additionally, ongoing delays in customs clearance at Chinese ports cause spoilage of perishable goods like citrus fruits, further discouraging exporters. These multifaceted trade constraints highlight the urgent need for Pakistan to develop resilient, diversified, and standards-compliant export strategies to remain competitive in the evolving global trade environment.

Case Study: Punjab’s Rice Farmers vs. Global Tariffs

A 2023 survey of 200 basmati rice farmers in Punjab’s Sheikhupura and Gujranwala districts sheds light on the real-world consequences of global tariff policies on Pakistan’s agricultural

producers. Prior to the imposition of India's 20% export tariff on basmati rice, these farmers reported an average profit of Rs. 150,000 per acre in 2022. However, by 2023, that figure had declined sharply to Rs. 98,000 per acre, a 35% reduction in income, due to suppressed international prices and increased competition from Indian exporters. Alarmingly, only 12% of the surveyed farmers had shifted to higher-yield hybrid seed varieties, citing lack of capital and technical support as major constraints. Meanwhile, 88% of respondents reported dependence on government subsidies as a means of survival, underlining the fragile financial state of smallholder farmers and their vulnerability to external market shocks.

This case study illustrates that while policy debates around tariffs often focus on macroeconomic trends, the brunt of such decisions is borne by rural communities that lack the resources to adapt quickly. To remain competitive amid rising protectionism, Pakistan has attempted to diversify its export strategies. For instance, in response to EU environmental regulations, the country is promoting solar-powered ginning units and pursuing Geographic Indication (GI) tags to boost value-added branding. In the wake of India's tariff war, exporters have increasingly sought alternative markets in Iran and Iraq. Meanwhile, phytosanitary trade barriers imposed by China have triggered cold chain investments and efforts toward bilateral inspection agreements. However, these countermeasures are still in early stages and face structural hurdles such as weak infrastructure and policy delays. Without sustained investment and farmer-level support, market diversification alone may not be enough to shield Pakistan's agri-export sector from the growing web of global tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

Pathways to Resilience: How Pakistan Can Fight Back

To build resilience against global trade shocks and rising protectionist barriers, Pakistan must adopt a multi-pronged strategy rooted in innovation, sustainability, and regional collaboration. One promising pathway is digital traceability, which allows agricultural products to be tracked throughout the supply chain. The Hingol Mango Traceability Project in Balochistan serves as a pioneering example. By using blockchain technology, the project enables mangoes to be digitally tagged from farm to market, ensuring compliance with stringent EU phytosanitary and sustainability standards. This not only boosts transparency and quality assurance but also allows traceable produce to command up to 20% higher prices in international markets, according to a 2023 World Bank report.

Another essential strategy is the promotion of climate-smart certifications. In Punjab, the Carbon-Neutral Rice Pilot introduced eco-friendly farming techniques such as alternate wetting and drying (AWD) and laser land leveling. Farmers participating in this pilot are eligible for international eco-certifications, which attract environmentally conscious importers. As a result, participating farmers have seen up to a 15% increase in their export value, as reported by the FAO (2023). Scaling such pilots across more districts could significantly improve the export potential of Pakistan's rice and other crops.

Additionally, strengthening regional trade alliances offers an avenue for circumventing EU and Indian tariff walls. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents an underutilized platform for enhancing trade with Iran, Turkey, and Central Asian states. By harmonizing standards and reducing logistical bottlenecks, Pakistan could tap into $1 billion in new agricultural export opportunities, as projected by the ECO's 2024 trade outlook. These regional markets, less influenced by Western regulatory barriers, offer a more accessible and politically feasible space for expansion.

Policy Recommendations

To mitigate the adverse effects of global tariffs and protectionist trade practices, Pakistan must pursue a robust policy response that combines international advocacy, market diversification, and grassroots-level empowerment. At the global level, Pakistan should actively engage with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to challenge non-tariff barriers (NTBs) that unfairly target its agricultural exports. Filing disputes through the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body, particularly against phytosanitary restrictions and trade-distorting subsidies, can help level the playing field and protect national trade interests.

Domestically, the creation of an Export Diversification Fund would empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to explore non-traditional markets, such as Africa and ASEAN countries. By offering targeted subsidies, marketing support, and logistical assistance, the fund can reduce Pakistan's overdependence on EU and Indian buyers, making its agri-export sector more resilient to geopolitical shocks. Furthermore, fostering farmer-trader alliances through cooperatives can help eliminate middlemen who exploit producers by offering below-market prices. Initiatives like the Sindh Mango Growers Association demonstrate how cooperatives can pool resources, aggregate produce, and negotiate directly with buyers, both local and international, ensuring fairer prices for farmers. Collectively, these policy interventions can enhance export competitiveness, increase farmer incomes, and insulate Pakistan's agricultural sector from external vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

Pakistan's agricultural export sector stands at a critical crossroads, caught in the crosshairs of rising global protectionism, shifting trade alliances, and stringent environmental regulations. As major export destinations such as the EU, India, and China implement new tariffs and non-tariff barriers, Pakistani farmers, particularly smallholders, face mounting economic uncertainty. Declining profits, unstable market access, and limited capacity to adapt to compliance demands are eroding the competitiveness of a sector that employs over a third of the country's workforce and contributes significantly to rural

livelihoods. The case of Punjab's basmati rice farmers, whose incomes dropped 35% due to India's trade maneuvers, underscores the human cost of geopolitical trade battles.

However, this crisis also presents an opportunity for transformation. Embracing digital traceability, climate-smart certifications, and deeper regional integration can unlock new markets and improve export value. Forward-looking policy reforms, such as WTO engagement, export diversification funds, and support for farmer cooperatives, are essential to help Pakistani agriculture navigate this volatile global landscape. But these strategies must be matched by long-term investment in infrastructure, farmer education, and quality standards. By acting now with a comprehensive and adaptive trade strategy, Pakistan can not only withstand current trade shocks but also position itself as a resilient and sustainable agricultural exporter in the global economy.

References: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics; European Commission; Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan; World Bank; FAO; International Cotton Advisory Committee; SBP

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at ayeshaghouri644@gmail.com

Challenges in Agricultural Production in Türkiye

Seasonal agricultural production in Türkiye is vital for food security and the rural economy. However, it faces challenges from climate variability, resource constraints, and economic volatility, impacting livelihoods and profitability.

Mithat Direk

4/25/2025

Agricultural production remains a cornerstone of Türkiye's economy, contributing 6.5% to national GDP and employing approximately 18% of the workforce, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023). The sector is vital not only for domestic food security but also for rural livelihoods and export earnings. However, Türkiye's agriculture is deeply tied to seasonal cycles and natural resource availability, making it inherently vulnerable to climate variability, soil degradation, water scarcity, and pest outbreaks. The country experiences significant regional and seasonal disparities, with coastal areas often better suited for year-round cultivation, while central and eastern regions rely heavily on seasonal rains and traditional farming cycles.

This reliance on environmental conditions exposes farmers to a wide range of uncertainties, from unseasonal frosts and droughts to volatile commodity prices. Moreover, post-harvest losses due to inadequate storage and processing infrastructure further reduce profitability, especially for perishable crops such as tomatoes, cherries, and cucumbers.

Despite these challenges, Türkiye has seen promising developments in agricultural modernization. Innovations such as precision farming, greenhouse cultivation, and drip irrigation have enabled more efficient resource use and extended growing seasons. Additionally, vertical farming and climate-controlled greenhouses are gaining popularity in urban areas, providing alternatives to traditional land-intensive methods. The government has also introduced support schemes such as agricultural insurance, input subsidies, and rural development grants to mitigate risk and encourage sustainable practices. Nevertheless, smallholder farmers often lack the technical capacity or financial means to fully benefit from these innovations. Addressing seasonal production challenges in Türkiye requires a multifaceted strategy that includes investment in agri-tech, improved rural infrastructure, climate resilience policies, and farmer training. This comprehensive approach can help reduce seasonal vulnerabilities, stabilize food supply, and improve rural incomes, thereby securing a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector for Türkiye's future.

Agricultural Production Depends on Natural Conditions

Türkiye's agricultural production is heavily shaped by its natural environment, particularly the interplay of climate, soil, and water availability. With its diverse geography spanning seven distinct climatic regions, the country offers a range of agro-ecological zones, each suitable for different crops. The Mediterranean and Aegean coasts, for example, are ideal for cultivating citrus fruits, olives, and figs due to their mild winters and long growing seasons. In contrast, Central Anatolia, with its drier continental climate, is the hub of wheat, barley, and sugar beet production. Meanwhile, Eastern Anatolia, characterized by high altitudes and harsh winters, is limited to cold-resistant crops like lentils and potatoes. However, climate change is increasingly disrupting these established agricultural patterns. A 2023 study by Bozkurt et al. projected that a 1.5°C rise in average temperature could reduce wheat yields in key areas like Konya by 10–15%. Extreme weather events, such as the severe April 2023 frost, devastated apricot and cherry orchards, causing losses exceeding 90% in some regions, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Water scarcity adds to another layer of vulnerability. Agriculture accounts for about 70% of Türkiye's water consumption (WWF-Türkiye, 2023), and recurrent droughts, particularly in 2021–2022, have already led to significant yield reductions, such as a 30% decline in cotton production in Şanlıurfa (TÜİK, 2023). While technological solutions exist, their adoption remains uneven. Only about 25% of farms currently use drip irrigation, largely due to prohibitive installation costs (SUEN, 2023). Encouragingly, greenhouse farming has expanded to 800,000 hectares, helping farmers extend growing seasons and buffer against climate unpredictability. Additionally, innovative tools like drought-resistant genetically modified crops, soil moisture sensors, and AI-guided irrigation systems are being piloted in various regions, reducing water waste by as much as 40% (FAO-Türkiye, 2022). These adaptations highlight the urgent need for more widespread investment in climate-resilient agriculture across Türkiye.

Risks and Uncertainties in Agricultural Production

Agricultural production in Türkiye faces significant risks and uncertainties stemming from both natural and economic factors, posing considerable challenges for farmers and policymakers alike. Climate risks such as frost, hailstorms, droughts, and erratic rainfall patterns are increasingly frequent, resulting in an estimated €1.5 billion in annual crop losses (Turkish Insurers Union, 2023). These disruptions are particularly severe in sensitive crop

zones, such as the Black Sea region, where unpredictable rain hampers hazelnut harvesting and flowering. Similarly, the Mediterranean region suffers from prolonged dry spells that impact citrus and vegetable yields.

On the economic front, global market volatility further amplifies risk. The 2022 wheat price surge of 50%, driven by geopolitical instability in Eastern Europe, exposed Türkiye's dependence on external markets. Meanwhile, input costs for fertilizers, seeds, and fuel have soared, fertilizer prices alone rose by 120% following COVID-19 supply chain disruptions (Central Bank of Türkiye, 2023). Such unpredictability diminishes farmer profits and increases vulnerability, especially among smallholders.

Despite these challenges, insurance coverage remains inadequate. Only 15% of Turkish farmers are insured (Turkish Catastrophe Insurance Pool, 2023), and most policies cover limited perils like hail, frost, and fire, excluding widespread risks like drought or market price collapse. High premiums, ranging from €50–100 per hectare, often deter adoption. Pilot programs offering weather-indexed insurance in provinces like Antalya and İzmir are promising but remain in early stages. More comprehensive subsidies, modeled after South Korea's 70% premium support scheme, could encourage broader participation.

Türkiye's highly seasonal agricultural output further complicates matters. Crops like wheat and citrus follow fixed harvesting windows, while tomatoes are produced year-round in greenhouses. Yet, post-harvest losses are severe, up to 30% of fresh produce is wasted due to inadequate cold storage and limited processing infrastructure (FAO, 2023). The Ministry of Trade reports that the current cold storage capacity satisfies only 40% of national demand. Although the food processing sector—anchored by firms like Tat Konserve and Pınar—plays a stabilizing role, it handles just 25% of total production. Solutions such as solar-powered cold storage units (e.g., Afyon's apple project) and cooperative-driven export models (e.g., Uludağ Fruit Union) offer scalable models to manage seasonal gluts and improve farmer incomes.

Modernizing Turkish Agriculture

Modernizing Turkish agriculture requires a strategic, multifaceted policy approach that addresses both the evolving climate risks and the structural inefficiencies in production, storage, and market access. One critical pathway is the broader adoption of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), which aligns productivity with environmental sustainability. Expanding drip irrigation subsidies, currently allocated at €500 million annually, can reduce water waste and improve yields. Similarly, promoting agroforestry systems, such as olive and almond intercropping in Aydın, enhances soil health and diversifies income streams for farmers, especially in drought-prone regions.

To reduce the sector's vulnerability to climate shocks, robust risk mitigation mechanisms are essential. Making agricultural insurance mandatory for farmers seeking credit, like India's PMFBY scheme, can ensure widespread risk coverage. Furthermore, the establishment of a national agricultural disaster fund would provide rapid relief to farmers affected by droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events, ensuring continuity of operations.

Technology integration can revolutionize Turkish agriculture by improving efficiency and transparency. Drone-based pest monitoring, as piloted in Çukurova's cotton fields, enables precise pesticide application, reducing costs and environmental harm. Blockchain systems, such as those being tested for organic pomegranates in Antalya, enhance traceability and market access by assuring product quality and origin.

Strengthening farmer cooperatives is another pillar for modernization. By subsidizing modern storage infrastructure, modeled after Dutch agricultural cooperatives, Türkiye can reduce post-harvest losses and extend shelf life. Additionally, scaling up digital platforms like "TARIMNET" can connect farmers directly with buyers, improving pricing, reducing reliance on middlemen, and increasing competitiveness in both local and export markets. Together, these policy interventions can empower Turkish agriculture to become more resilient, technologically advanced, and economically inclusive.

Conclusion

Seasonal agricultural production in Türkiye lies at the heart of the country's rural economy, food security, and export strength. Yet, this sector faces mounting pressures from climate variability, resource constraints, and global economic volatility. Regional disparities in soil, water, and weather patterns have made agriculture increasingly unpredictable, with events like frost, drought, and input price hikes disrupting livelihoods. Post-harvest losses and inadequate cold storage further erode profitability, especially for perishable crops.

Despite these hurdles, Türkiye is making significant strides toward modernization. Climate-smart techniques, digital innovations, and public-private partnerships are beginning to address the structural inefficiencies that plague the sector. Greenhouse expansion, drip irrigation, precision farming, and farmer cooperatives are helping to buffer seasonal fluctuations and extend growing cycles. However, for these innovations to be transformative, their adoption must be scaled up and made accessible to small-holder farmers, who constitute most of the workforce. Enhanced insurance coverage, digital literacy, improved infrastructure, and inclusive policies are critical to building long-term resilience. With continued investment and adaptive governance, Türkiye has the potential to not only mitigate seasonal risks but also position its agricultural sector as a model for sustainability and innovation in the face of evolving environmental and market dynamics.

References: TÜİK; FAO; Ministry of Agriculture; WWF-Türkiye; TARSIM; Turkish Insurers Union; Central Bank of Türkiye; Turkish Catastrophe Insurance Pool

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Selcuk University, Konya-Türkiye and can be reached at mdirek@selcuk.edu.tr

Urgent Fertilizer Subsidy Reforms in Pakistan

Explore the critical need for fertilizer subsidy reforms in Pakistan. Learn how urea-centric policies have harmed soil health and crop productivity. Discover successful provincial pilots in Punjab, , Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Aisha Ghouri

4/28/2025

Pakistan's agricultural sector, which contributes 23% to GDP and employs 37.4% of the labor force (World Bank, 2024), faces a critical challenge: soil degradation due to imbalanced fertilizer use. Decades of urea-centric subsidies have encouraged the excessive application of nitrogen fertilizers, while neglecting the need for essential micronutrients like zinc, boron, and potassium. This practice has not only reduced soil fertility but also exacerbated climate vulnerabilities, threatening food security and rural livelihoods. According to the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC, 2023), nearly 68% of agricultural soils now suffer from nutrient imbalances, with zinc and boron deficiencies alone responsible for reducing average crop productivity by 20–25%.

Recent fertilizer subsidy reforms introduced in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) offer promising insights. Soil-test-based recommendations, voucher systems, and targeted subsidies have helped improve micronutrient adoption by 15–22% across pilot districts. Additionally, urea overuse has declined by 18% where farmer education programs were combined with digital advisory services. These localized successes highlight the potential for scaling reforms nationwide. However, significant challenges remain. Weak regulatory enforcement, dealer profit-maximization behaviors, low farmer awareness, and policy fragmentation between federal and provincial authorities continue to undermine consistent progress.

Moving forward, evidence-based reforms are essential. Reallocating subsidies from urea toward balanced, blended fertilizers containing micronutrients can address soil health more holistically. Scaling up mobile soil-testing labs, integrating digital extension platforms, and providing climate-resilient fertilizer safety nets for smallholders would further strengthen reform efforts. Additionally, harmonizing federal and provincial policies is critical to ensure consistency and accountability.

Sustainable fertilizer use is not just an agronomic issue, it is central to Pakistan's climate resilience, food security, and rural economic stability. By realigning incentives and empowering farmers with better tools and information, Pakistan can transition toward a healthier, more productive agricultural future.

National Soil Crisis: The Cost of Urea-Centric Policies

Pakistan's fertilizer subsidy system has historically favored urea, which accounts for 76% of total fertilizer subsidies (Ministry of National Food Security, 2023). While urea boosts short-term yields, its excessive and imbalanced use has gradually depleted soils of essential micronutrients, leading to long-term productivity losses and declining agricultural resilience. Over the decades, this urea-centric approach has disrupted the natural nutrient cycles of Pakistan's farmlands, creating conditions that undermine both food security and rural livelihoods.

Recent soil health assessments paint a grim picture. Approximately 72% of agricultural soils are zinc-deficient, resulting in wheat and rice yield reductions of 15–20% (PARC, 2023). Similarly, 58% of soils exhibit boron deficits, with devastating effects on cotton and fruit production, particularly in Sindh's cotton belt where yields have fallen by 30% (Sindh Agriculture Department, 2023). Moreover, 34% of soils in Punjab and Sindh have lost their water-holding capacity, making farmlands increasingly vulnerable to drought (Pakistan Meteorological Department, 2023). Organic matter levels, critical for soil fertility, have dropped below 0.5% on nearly 45% of farmlands, accelerating erosion and compounding these vulnerabilities (FAO, 2023).

Climate change is amplifying these challenges. The catastrophic floods of 2022, which caused Rs. 300 billion in agricultural damage (NDMA, 2023), exposed the fragility of nutrient-depleted soils. Recovery was notably slower, by nearly 20%, in flood-affected regions suffering from severe micronutrient deficiencies, prolonging food shortages and increasing rural poverty. Farmers like Aslam Khan from Swat vividly capture the ground reality, stating, "Urea gives quick yields but kills the soil's future."

Addressing Pakistan's national soil crisis requires a shift away from the short-termism of urea subsidies toward a balanced, soil-health-centered approach. Without urgent action, declining soil quality will continue to threaten Pakistan's agricultural sustainability, climate resilience, and economic security.

Reform Pilots: Lessons from Across Pakistan

Reform pilots across Pakistan offer valuable lessons on how targeted agricultural interventions can boost productivity, improve farmer incomes, and encourage sustainable practices. One notable example is Punjab's Soil Health Card Initiative (2020–2023). Under this program, farmers received personalized soil health cards based on individual farm testing, providing customized fertilizer recommendations. The results were significant: zinc adoption rose from 2% to 21% in pilot districts such as Lahore, Faisalabad, and Multan. Despite facing

erratic rainfall patterns, wheat yields improved by 12%, showcasing the potential of informed input used to stabilize production. Furthermore, the initiative helped curtail excessive fertilizer application, with urea overuse declining by 15%, ultimately saving farmers Rs. 1.2 billion in input costs (Punjab Agriculture Department, 2023).

Sindh's Post-Flood Subsidy Redistribution in 2023 demonstrated the importance of adaptive policy responses to climate disasters. After the devastating floods, the government redirected input subsidies toward critical micronutrients like boron and zinc, particularly in Badin and Thatta. Boron use rose by 18%, contributing to a 14% increase in cotton yields. Importantly, urea overuse dropped by 22% on flood-affected farms, indicating a shift toward more balanced nutrient management. Complementary farmer training programs played a crucial role, as 40% of participants reported adopting balanced fertilization techniques (Sindh Agriculture University, 2023).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) showcased an inclusive approach through its Women-Centric Subsidy Program launched in 2022. By providing 5,000 female farmers with subsidized access to micronutrients, the program achieved notable success. Maize yields increased by 25% in Dir and Swabi, and household incomes rose by 18%, significantly enhancing food security and women's empowerment in these regions (KP Women's Agriculture Wing, 2023). Together, these pilots highlight that localized, data-driven, and socially inclusive reforms can transform Pakistan's agricultural landscape and build long-term resilience.

Barriers to Nationwide Adoption and Way Forward

While provincial pilot programs have demonstrated promising outcomes, scaling these successes nationwide faces significant structural barriers that must be addressed urgently. One major hurdle lies in dealer profit incentives. Urea sales continue to offer 25% higher margins compared to micronutrients, creating a strong disincentive for fertilizer dealers to promote balanced nutrient solutions (World Bank, 2024). Additionally, the widespread black market for urea, estimated at Rs. 50 billion annually (FBR, 2023), undermines the effectiveness of subsidy reforms, making it difficult to ensure that fertilizers reach intended beneficiaries or are used appropriately.

Awareness gaps among farmers remain another critical obstacle. Only about 30% of farmers are aware of the benefits of micronutrients like zinc and boron (World Bank, 2024). In the absence of proper knowledge dissemination, farmers continue to overapply urea, which not only deteriorates soil health but also leads to declining yields over time. Misinformation and entrenched practices further delay the adoption of modern, balanced fertilization techniques.

Policy fragmentation compounds these challenges. Provincial subsidy programs often operate in isolation from federal agricultural policies, leading to duplication, inefficiencies, and confusion among farmers. Inconsistent fertilizer pricing mechanisms across provinces further distort the market, making it harder to align national objectives with local realities.

Moving forward, a comprehensive strategy is needed. Soil-test-linked subsidies should be expanded nationwide, with at least 40% of urea subsidies redirected toward micronutrients and organic fertilizers. Punjab's successful soil health card initiative should serve as a blueprint. Establishing a National Blended Fertilizer Policy could incentivize the use of NPK-Zn-B blends through tax exemptions and enhanced dealer commissions, while promoting slow-release fertilizers to minimize nutrient leaching. Digital advisory tools like Khud Kisan and Sindh Soil must be scaled up and integrated with AI-based soil analysis for precision farming. Additionally, expanding weather-indexed insurance and creating disaster-responsive subsidy programs will climate-proof Pakistan's fertilizer strategy and ensure resilient rural economies.

Conclusion

The urgent need for fertilizer subsidy reforms in Pakistan cannot be overstated. Decades of urea-centric policies have depleted soil health, reduced crop productivity, and heightened agricultural vulnerability to climate change. Recent provincial pilots in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demonstrate that balanced nutrient management, supported by targeted subsidies, soil testing, farmer education, and inclusiveness, can significantly improve yields, reduce input costs, and enhance rural livelihoods. However, scaling these successes nationwide requires dismantling entrenched barriers, including distorted dealer incentives, farmer awareness gaps, black-market urea trade, and policy fragmentation between federal and provincial levels.

A transformative pathway forward must prioritize reallocating subsidies toward blended and micronutrient fertilizers, institutionalizing soil health diagnostics, promoting climate-resilient products, and leveraging digital tools for precision farming. Harmonized national policies and climate-proof safety nets will be vital to ensuring equitable access and sustainability. Investing in soil health is investing in Pakistan's future food security, rural prosperity, and climate resilience. With the right reforms, Pakistan can rebuild its agricultural foundation, empowering farmers to achieve higher productivity while safeguarding natural resources for generations to come. Timely, coordinated, and inclusive action is essential to secure a thriving, sustainable agricultural economy.

References: FAO; IFPRI; NDMA; PARC; World Bank; Ministry of National Food Security; Sindh Agriculture Department; Pakistan Meteorological Department; Punjab Agriculture Department; Sindh Agriculture University; KP Women's Agriculture Wing

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at ayeshaghouri644@gmail.com

Water Crisis in Sindh: A Threat to Agriculture

The water crisis in Sindh poses a significant threat to Pakistan's agricultural sustainability and food security. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and competition for water resources are causing declining crop yields and increasing rural poverty.

Kashaf Kaim Khani

4/29/2025

Sindh, Pakistan's agricultural heartland, is grappling with an intensifying water crisis that poses a severe threat to food security, rural livelihoods, and the broader economic framework. With over 60% of the province's population directly or indirectly reliant on agriculture, and the sector contributing 23% to Pakistan's agricultural GDP, sustainable water access is not just an environmental concern but a national economic imperative (Sindh Bureau of Statistics, 2023). However, the province's dependence on the Indus River has become increasingly precarious.

Climate change has altered rainfall patterns and increased temperatures, accelerating glacier melt and reducing water availability in downstream regions like Sindh. At the same time, upstream diversions in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, alongside the inadequate enforcement of the 1991 Water Accord, have left Sindh receiving less than its fair share of surface water flows (World Bank, 2022). The problem is further compounded by inefficient irrigation practices, such as flood irrigation, and rampant groundwater extraction, leading to soil salinity, aquifer depletion, and reduced crop productivity. According to provincial estimates, wheat and cotton yields have dropped by 20–30% in water-stressed districts such as Badin and Thatta.

The consequences are far-reaching: rising input costs, shrinking arable land, increasing food prices, and growing rural poverty. Farmers are abandoning traditional crops, and migration from rural to urban areas is accelerating. To avert a worsening crisis, the article calls for immediate policy reforms including strict enforcement of inter-provincial water distribution, promotion of water-efficient technologies like drip and sprinkler irrigation, and support for drought-tolerant crops. Additionally, investing in water recycling, community-based water governance, and digital water monitoring systems can improve efficiency and accountability. Sindh's water crisis demands coordinated action at provincial and national levels to ensure agricultural resilience, rural well-being, and long-term economic stability.

Causes of Water Scarcity in Sindh

Water scarcity in Sindh has become a multidimensional crisis driven by both environmental changes and systemic governance failures. One of the leading causes is climate change, which has rendered rainfall patterns increasingly erratic and intensified drought conditions. Sindh has witnessed a 1.5°C rise in average temperature since 1960, which has accelerated evaporation and shortened the growing season (Pakistan Meteorological Department, 2023). The 2022 floods were followed by a severe drought in 2023, disrupting seasonal agricultural cycles and leading to a 30% decline in water storage in major reservoirs (PCRWR, 2023). These climatic shifts have made it difficult to predict and manage water supply for agriculture effectively.

Inefficient water management is another major contributor. The widespread use of flood irrigation, a method in which up to 60% of water is lost before it reaches crops, combined with aging canal infrastructure and poor maintenance, causes significant losses (FAO, 2021; Sindh Irrigation Department, 2023). Furthermore, water theft by influential landowners undermines equitable distribution, leaving smaller farmers with insufficient supply (WWF-Pakistan, 2023). As a result, only about 35% of the irrigation water in Sindh reaches farms effectively (World Bank, 2022).

Upstream water diversions further exacerbate the crisis. Sindh currently receives 30% less water than its allocated share under the 1991 Water Accord due to withdrawals by upstream provinces and large dams like Tarbela and Mangla (IRSA, 2023). New projects such as Diamer-Bhasha are projected to worsen this situation by limiting downstream flows (PCRWR, 2023). Consequently, staple crops like rice and cotton have declined by 25%, severely affecting rural livelihoods (Sindh Agriculture Department, 2023).

Groundwater resources are also under stress. In areas like Thar and Badin, excessive tube-well pumping has caused water tables to fall by up to 3 meters annually (PCRWR, 2023). At the same time, seawater intrusion and industrial extraction in Karachi have increased soil salinity, rendering 1.2 million hectares of land unproductive (FAO, 2023; Sindh Agriculture University, 2023).

Finally, urbanization is a growing challenge. Karachi consumes 1.2 billion liters of water daily, mostly from agricultural allocations, while illegal hydrants and tanker mafias divert large volumes, intensifying shortages in peri-urban and rural zones (Transparency International, 2023; Sindh Water Commission, 2023). Industrial pollution further contaminates surface and groundwater, reducing the availability of clean water for irrigation. Collectively, these factors have left farmers near cities with up to 50% less irrigation water,

deepening the agrarian crisis (World Bank, 2023).

Impact on Agriculture

The impact of water scarcity on agriculture in Sindh has been severe and multifaceted, affecting crop yields, land quality, and rural livelihoods. Drought-prone districts have witnessed a dramatic decline in productivity. Wheat production has dropped by 30%, cotton yields are 40% lower compared to Punjab due to inadequate irrigation, and rice cultivation is shrinking by 5% annually as water availability continues to deteriorate (Sindh Agriculture Department, 2023; Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association, 2023; Ministry of Food Security, 2023). These reductions in output have had a cascading effect on the province's food security and economic stability.

Land degradation and desertification have also intensified. Over 1.2 million hectares of agricultural land are now classified as waterlogged or saline, with reduced productivity and high rehabilitation costs (PCRWR, 2023). In regions like Thar, desertification is advancing at an alarming rate of 4% per year, further shrinking cultivable land (UNCCD, 2023). The overall decline in soil fertility is estimated to be costing farmers $500 million annually in lost income, underlining the economic damage caused by long-term environmental neglect and poor water management (FAO, 2023).

The socioeconomic consequences are equally troubling. Rural poverty has surged to 45% in water-stressed areas, driven by falling agricultural incomes and rising food prices (UNDP, 2023). Food inflation reached 40% in 2023, largely due to the decline in staple crop output, making basic nutrition unaffordable for millions (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023). In search of better livelihoods, over 500,000 farmers have migrated to urban centers since 2020, straining city infrastructure and further depopulating rural communities (International Labour Organization, 2023). This migration reflects the increasing desperation among smallholders who can no longer sustain themselves through traditional farming due to the worsening water crisis. The cumulative impact is a serious threat to both regional agricultural viability and national food security.

Policy Recommendations and Solutions

Addressing the water crisis and its cascading impact on Sindh's agricultural sector requires a comprehensive and multi-pronged policy approach. One of the most immediate needs is the modernization of irrigation infrastructure. Adoption of drip and sprinkler irrigation systems can reduce water usage by up to 50%, while laser land leveling can increase water efficiency by 30%, allowing more precise and equitable distribution of water across farms (FAO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Additionally, smart metering and digital water flow monitoring can significantly reduce illegal water withdrawals and ensure transparency in distribution (Sindh Irrigation Department, 2023).

Regulatory and institutional reforms are equally vital. Enforcing the 1991 Water Accord would ensure Sindh receives its equitable share of Indus River water. Establishing a provincial water regulatory authority could help oversee and enforce water allocations, while strict penalties should be introduced for illegal water extraction, particularly by influential landowners who disproportionately benefit from current inefficiencies.

Rainwater harvesting and storage solutions must also be prioritized. Investment in small dams, such as the Nai Gaj and upgrades to existing infrastructure like the Sukkur Barrage, can enhance water retention during monsoon seasons. Reviving traditional groundwater recharge systems like karez in Thar and promoting the construction of recharge wells will help restore groundwater levels.

On the farm level, transitioning to sustainable practices is critical. Cultivating drought-resistant crops like millet and sorghum, deploying soil moisture sensors, and promoting organic agriculture can all contribute to water conservation and soil health. These strategies also reduce dependency on chemical inputs, minimizing water pollution.

Finally, partnerships with international organizations like the World Bank and UNDP can support the implementation of climate-resilient agricultural projects. Government subsidies for adopting modern irrigation technologies should be expanded, targeting smallholders who often lack upfront capital. Together, these interventions can drive long-term sustainability, equity, and productivity in Sindh's agricultural sector.

Conclusion

The water crisis in Sindh represents not only an environmental emergency but also a fundamental challenge to Pakistan's agricultural sustainability and food security. With rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and increased competition for limited water resources, the productivity of Sindh's agriculture is steadily declining. Farmers are witnessing sharp drops in yields of staple crops such as wheat, cotton, and rice, while millions of hectares are becoming saline or unproductive due to over-irrigation, poor drainage, and groundwater over-extraction. The socio-economic impact is equally severe, with rising rural poverty, inflation in food prices, and large-scale migration to cities as agriculture becomes increasingly unviable.

The crisis is compounded by governance failures, including inequitable water distribution, outdated irrigation systems, illegal water extraction, and limited enforcement of the 1991 Water Accord. These systemic issues demand an urgent, coordinated, and multi-sectoral policy response. Solutions must focus on modernizing irrigation infrastructure, enforcing water rights, encouraging sustainable and climate-resilient farming, and investing in groundwater recharge and storage systems.

Furthermore, empowering smallholders with financial and technical support is essential to enable widespread adoption of water-efficient technologies.

Only through bold reforms, institutional accountability, and community-led adaptation can Sindh secure a water-smart agricultural future. Addressing water scarcity today is key to preventing tomorrow's food insecurity and rural collapse.

References: FAO; PCRWR; Sindh Agriculture Department; UNDP; World Bank; Pakistan Meteorological Department; WWF-Pakistan; IRSA; Sindh Agriculture University; Transparency International; Sindh Water Commission; Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association; Ministry of Food Security; UNCCD; State Bank of Pakistan; International Labour Organization

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at kashikaimkhani@gmail.com


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Impact of Climate Change on Pakistan's Food Security

Climate change poses a significant threat to Pakistan's food security, affecting agriculture, livestock, and fisheries. Rising temperatures and extreme weather events lead to crop failures and economic losses.

Tayaba Memon

4/4/2025

Climate change is rapidly becoming a major threat to Pakistan's food security, severely disrupting agricultural production across the country. The rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts are causing widespread damage to crops, livestock, and fisheries. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2023, Pakistan is ranked among the top five countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, highlighting the severity of the issue (Germanwatch, 2023).

The 2022 floods, which devastated large parts of the country, caused agricultural losses worth $30 billion, destroying 45% of cropland in Sindh and Balochistan alone (World Bank, 2023). This has had a significant impact on food production and rural economies, as agriculture accounts for 22.7% of Pakistan’s GDP and employs approximately 37.4% of the workforce (Ministry of National Food Security, 2023).

The disruption of agricultural systems due to climate change is resulting in crop failures, livestock losses, and the collapse of fisheries. These consequences not only threaten food availability but also undermine rural livelihoods, pushing vulnerable communities deeper into poverty. Moreover, erratic weather patterns are exacerbating the challenges faced by farmers, particularly in terms of water availability for irrigation and the increased risk of crop diseases. This article explores how climate change is destabilizing Pakistan’s food systems and examines the urgent need for adaptation strategies, such as the adoption of climate-resilient crop varieties, better water management practices, and enhanced disaster preparedness, to mitigate these adverse impacts and safeguard food security for the future.

Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture

The effects of climate change on crop production in Pakistan are becoming increasingly evident, with rising temperatures, prolonged heatwaves, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events severely disrupting agricultural output. Temperature extremes have been one of the most significant factors contributing to reduced crop yields. For instance, wheat, which is Pakistan's staple crop, faces a 10-15% decline in yields for every 1°C increase in temperature (PARC, 2023). The heatwave of 2023, where temperatures reached as high as 50°C in Sindh, resulted in a reduction of wheat production by 1.5 million tons (Pakistan Meteorological Department, 2023). Similarly, rice production in Punjab has been significantly affected, with Basmati rice yields dropping by 20% due to prolonged heat stress (University of Agriculture Faisalabad, 2023).

Droughts and erratic monsoons further exacerbate the situation. In 2023, Sindh experienced a severe drought that caused a 40% water shortage, forcing many farmers to abandon cotton and sugarcane crops (Sindh Irrigation Department, 2023). Conversely, the record monsoon rains of 2022 inundated 4 million acres of farmland, destroying 80% of crops in flood-hit districts (NDMA, 2022). In addition to these challenges, pest outbreaks, such as locust swarms between 2020 and 2022, devastated 3 million hectares of crops, leading to losses worth $2.5 billion (FAO, 2023). Similarly, pink bollworm infestations reduced Punjab's cotton output by 30% (Punjab Agriculture Department, 2023).

Beyond crop production, climate change is also threatening Pakistan's livestock and fisheries. Heat stress during the 2023 heatwaves caused a 15-20% reduction in milk production (L&DD Punjab, 2023). Water shortages in Balochistan forced nomadic herders to sell 50% of their livestock at distress prices (UNDP, 2023). Moreover, the fishing industry is facing a decline, with fish stocks in the Indus River falling by 35% due to habitat destruction and pollution (WWF-Pakistan, 2023). Mangrove deforestation in Karachi has reduced shrimp yields by 40%, putting the livelihoods of 500,000 fisherfolk at risk (IUCN, 2023).

Climate change is also severely impacting supply chains and food prices. The 2022 floods destroyed 13,000 km of roads, delaying the shipment of wheat and flour and causing a 50% spike in prices (PBS, 2023). Additionally, cold storage shortages are leading to 30% post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables (Horticulture Board, 2023). This disruption in food supply chains has led to soaring food prices, with tomato prices reaching Rs. 300 per kilogram after the 2023 floods (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023). As a result, 7.6 million Pakistanis now face acute hunger, highlighting the growing food insecurity in the country (WFP, 2023).

Solutions for Pakistan

In response to the increasingly severe impacts of climate change on agriculture, livestock, and fisheries in Pakistan, various solutions can be implemented to mitigate these challenges and help the country adapt to changing climatic conditions. Climate-smart agricultural practices are essential in improving resilience. The development of drought-resistant seeds, such as heat-tolerant wheat varieties, has been a significant step taken by the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) to ensure that crop yields remain sustainable even during periods of extreme heat (PARC, 2023). Moreover, adopting precision

irrigation techniques, such as laser land leveling, can reduce water usage by up to 25%, optimizing water resource management and enhancing crop production during droughts (ICARDA, 2023).

For livestock and fisheries, adaptation measures are crucial. Installing shade structures and misting systems can help alleviate heat stress in cattle, ensuring that milk production and livestock health are not severely affected by extreme temperatures (L&DD Punjab, 2023). Additionally, community-led mangrove restoration projects have proven effective in reviving coastal fisheries, restoring marine habitats, and boosting the livelihoods of fisherfolk (IUCN, 2023).

On the policy front, expanding crop insurance to cover climate-related risks, such as those outlined in the State Bank of Pakistan's Takaful Scheme, can provide financial protection to farmers against unexpected weather events (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023). Climate-resilient infrastructure is another critical intervention, with the need for flood-proof roads and storage facilities to mitigate the damage caused by extreme weather events. A National Early Warning System, developed through collaboration between the Pakistan Meteorological Department and UNDP, can help prepare communities for extreme weather events and reduce the associated risks (PMD-UNDP collaboration, 2023).

Lastly, global climate justice plays a vital role in addressing the climate crisis. Pakistan must actively demand loss and damage funding at international forums such as COP28 to help the country recover from climate-induced disasters. This funding is essential for restoring agricultural productivity and rebuilding infrastructure that is damaged by floods, droughts, and heatwaves, ensuring that Pakistan can continue to thrive despite the global climate crisis (Germanwatch, 2023).

Conclusion

Climate change is emerging as a critical challenge to Pakistan's food security, with severe implications for agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and rural livelihoods. The rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves have already caused substantial damage, leading to crop failures, livestock losses, and the collapse of fisheries. With agriculture being a significant contributor to Pakistan's GDP and employment, these disruptions threaten not only food availability but also the livelihoods of millions of people. The 2022 floods alone caused $30 billion in agricultural losses, highlighting the scale of the crisis.

To address these growing challenges, a multi-pronged approach is essential. Climate-smart agricultural practices, such as the use of drought-resistant seeds and precision irrigation techniques, can help mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on crop production. Adaptation measures for livestock and fisheries, such as shade structures for cattle and mangrove restoration, are crucial for safeguarding these industries. On a policy level, expanding crop insurance, improving infrastructure, and developing early warning systems are key to building resilience against climate-induced shocks. Furthermore, Pakistan must advocate for climate justice and secure international funding to support recovery and adaptation efforts.

Ultimately, addressing the impact of climate change on food systems requires urgent and coordinated action at local, national, and global levels to ensure food security and protect the livelihoods of vulnerable communities in Pakistan.

References: Ministry of Climate Change; PARC; World Bank; State Bank of Pakistan; FAO; PMD-UNDP; German Watch; University of Agriculture, Faisalabad; IUCN; ICARDS; WFP; PBF; Horticulture Board; PARC

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agri-business Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at memontayaba14@gmail.com

Addressing Rural Poverty in Pakistan Through Crop Productivity

Tackling rural poverty in Pakistan is essential for economic growth and social justice. By enhancing crop productivity for smallholder farmers, especially women, we can uplift millions from poverty and strengthen the agricultural sector.

Bakhtawar

4/10/2025

Rural poverty remains a critical challenge in Pakistan, where approximately 62% of the population resides in rural areas, and the agricultural sector contributes 22.7% to the national GDP (GOP, 2023). While urban centers continue to expand, rural communities, particularly in Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan, experience persistent poverty due to a combination of structural and environmental challenges. These include low agricultural productivity, unequal land distribution, inadequate irrigation systems, and limited access to financial services, markets, and modern technologies (World Bank, 2023). Additionally, the increasing frequency of climate-related shocks, such as floods, droughts, and erratic weather patterns, has intensified rural vulnerability and food insecurity.

Inclusive crop productivity, an approach that promotes equitable access to agricultural advancements for smallholder farmers, women, and marginalized groups, offers a sustainable path toward poverty alleviation and rural resilience. Ensuring access to high-yield and climate-resilient seeds, precision farming tools, mobile-based advisory services, and post-harvest technologies can significantly raise farm incomes and improve food security. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), yield improvements and access to extension services can boost smallholder productivity by up to 30%, especially when coupled with inclusive credit systems and women's empowerment programs.

Moreover, inclusive agricultural development contributes to broader economic and social stability. When marginalized rural populations are integrated into the agricultural value chain, they are more likely to invest in education, health, and community infrastructure, creating a ripple effect of development. Policymakers must prioritize public-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and rural infrastructure investments to scale up inclusive practices. Addressing rural poverty through inclusive crop productivity is not only a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for sustainable national development and equitable economic growth in Pakistan.

Rural Poverty and Agriculture in Pakistan

Rural poverty remains a significant issue in Pakistan, particularly within the agricultural sector, which is the backbone of the country's rural economy. Smallholder farmers, who constitute about 65% of Pakistan's agricultural workforce, face a range of challenges that hinder their productivity and economic stability. These challenges include outdated farming techniques, poor seed quality, and inefficient irrigation systems, which all contribute to low agricultural output (FAO, 2023). A stark disparity exists in land ownership in the country, where only 5% of landowners control over 64% of arable land, leaving small farmers, especially women, with limited access to land for cultivation (PIDE, 2023). This inequality exacerbates poverty and hinders the ability of marginalized groups to improve their livelihoods.

Pakistan is also highly vulnerable to climate change, ranking 8th among the countries most affected by climate-related disasters such as droughts and floods. These events have the potential to reduce crop yields by up to 40%, further deepening the rural poverty crisis (UNDP, 2023). Additionally, poor infrastructure and the dominance of exploitative middlemen in agricultural markets significantly reduce farmers' profits. Post-harvest losses alone account for 15-40% of produce, exacerbating the financial struggles of rural farmers (MNFS, 2023).

Despite agriculture employing 37.4% of Pakistan's labor force, the sector contributes disproportionately to rural poverty. The limited use of modern machinery, with only 25% of farmers employing advanced farming equipment (PBS, 2023), and the lack of access to formal credit, with 80% of small farmers unable to secure loans (SBP, 2023), further compound these issues. Furthermore, gender disparities persist, as women contribute 70% of agricultural labor but own less than 5% of agricultural land, exacerbating social and economic inequality (UN Women, 2023). Addressing these key challenges is essential to alleviating rural poverty and improving the agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers in Pakistan.

Inclusive Crop Productivity: A Pathway Out of Poverty

Inclusive crop productivity offers a promising pathway out of poverty for marginalized groups, particularly in rural areas. Key components of inclusive productivity aim to ensure equitable access to resources, technology, and financial support, enabling disadvantaged communities to benefit from agricultural growth. One of the most crucial aspects is equitable land and water access. In Punjab, pilot programs like the Land Record Management System have digitized land titles, reduced disputes and improving farmers' access to credit (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, the adoption of water-saving technologies, such as drip irrigation in Sindh, has led to a 30% increase in crop yields while cutting water usage by 50%,

showcasing the potential of efficient resource use (IWMI, 2023).

Technology and innovation also play a vital role in boosting productivity. Digital agriculture solutions, such as the "Tabeer" app by Jazz, provide weather alerts and market price updates to over 2 million farmers, improving their decision-making (GSMA, 2023). Additionally, the use of climate-smart practices, including drought-resistant wheat varieties, has increased yields by 20% in Balochistan, offering a sustainable solution to climate variability (PARC, 2023).

Financial inclusion is another essential aspect of inclusive crop productivity. Microfinance institutions like Khushhali Bank have reached 500,000 farmers in 2023, providing them with access to agricultural loans and helping them invest in their farms (SBP, 2023). Furthermore, the introduction of index-based crop insurance in Punjab has reduced losses for 35,000 flood-affected farmers, offering a safety net during disasters (IFAD, 2023).

Sustainable agricultural practices also contribute to long-term poverty reduction. Programs supporting agroecology, like organic cotton farming in South Punjab, have increased profits by 25% for farmers (WWF-Pakistan, 2023). Additionally, the "Kissan Card" program subsidized soil testing for 1 million hectares, ensuring that farmers can improve soil health for better yields (Ministry of Agriculture, 2023).

Market access and value chains have also seen improvements. The E-Mandi Punjab project, which digitized grain markets, resulted in a 15% increase in farmer incomes (PITB, 2023), while dairy cooperatives in Sindh helped smallholders increase milk prices by 20%, improving their financial stability (LDF, 2023).

Gender inclusion is a critical aspect of this approach. The Punjab Inheritance Law Helpline assisted 10,000 women in claiming land, empowering them to take ownership of agricultural resources (Aurat Foundation, 2023). Furthermore, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) trained 50,000 women in kitchen gardening, enhancing their skills and economic independence (BISP, 2023). These initiatives highlight the importance of inclusive agricultural policies and practices in tackling rural poverty in Pakistan.

Policy Recommendations

Policy interventions that address the core challenges of rural poverty and agricultural inefficiencies are crucial to improving Pakistan's agricultural sector and uplifting marginalized communities. One key recommendation is the expansion of land titling through nationwide digital land registries. Digitizing land records has the potential to reduce disputes, increase transparency, and provide farmers, especially smallholders, with better access to credit and financial services, as seen with the successful pilot projects in Punjab (World Bank, 2023). By scaling up such systems, land tenure security could be greatly enhanced, encouraging long-term investment in rural areas.

Another vital policy recommendation is the subsidization of agri-tech, such as solar-powered tubewells and precision farming tools. These technologies improve resource efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance agricultural productivity. Offering tax incentives to farmers who adopt such technologies would encourage widespread use, benefiting both the environment and farming communities. Countries that have implemented similar policies have seen significant productivity increases, especially in water-scarce regions.

Furthermore, improving access to credit is a key strategy for empowering smallholder farmers. The State Bank of Pakistan's proposal for banks to allocate 15% of loans to small farmers is an essential step toward financial inclusion (SBP, 2023). This would provide small farmers with the necessary capital to invest in improved farming techniques and technologies, ultimately leading to higher productivity and reduced poverty.

Investing in climate adaptation measures, such as developing heat-resistant crop varieties and early-warning systems, is also critical given Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change. Such measures could help mitigate the negative impacts of extreme weather events, including floods and droughts, on agricultural production.

Lastly, gender-responsive programs should be implemented to ensure that women have equal access to agricultural services. By reserving 30% of agricultural extension services for women, as recommended by the FAO, women can gain the knowledge and resources needed to become more productive participants in agriculture, thus contributing to rural economic growth. These comprehensive policies can transform Pakistan's agricultural landscape, ensuring inclusive growth and poverty alleviation.

Conclusion

Addressing rural poverty in Pakistan through inclusive crop productivity is not just an economic necessity but a moral imperative. With nearly 62% of the population living in rural areas and the agricultural sector being central to the rural economy, improving the productivity of smallholder farmers is crucial for lifting millions out of poverty. The challenges faced by these farmers, such as low productivity, climate vulnerability, unequal land distribution, and inadequate access to technology and financial services, are significant but not insurmountable. By focusing on inclusive crop productivity, which ensures that marginalized groups, especially women and smallholders, have access to necessary resources and innovations, Pakistan can begin to unlock the vast potential of its rural economy.

Investments in technology, such as mobile-based advisory services and climate-smart agricultural practices, have already shown promising results in improving yields and incomes. Likewise, initiatives aimed at improving access to land, water, and financial

resources can help rural communities withstand the pressures of climate change and economic volatility. Inclusive agricultural practices, particularly those focused on women's empowerment and financial inclusion, can stimulate social and economic stability, providing a ripple effect that benefits entire communities.

In conclusion, addressing rural poverty through inclusive crop productivity is not only about enhancing agricultural output; it is about fostering long-term sustainable development and social equity. It requires a concerted effort from both policymakers and private stakeholders to implement targeted interventions that ensure all rural populations can benefit from the advancements in agriculture and, ultimately, improve their livelihoods.

References: GOP; WorldBank; FAO; PIDE; UNDP; MNSF; PBS; SBP; UN Women; IWMI; GSMA; PARC; IFAD; Ministry of Agriculture; LDF; PITB

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Transforming Agriculture Startups in Pakistan

Discover how agriculture startups in Pakistan are revolutionizing the rural economy with innovative solutions. By leveraging IoT, AI, and fintech, these startups enhance productivity, market access, and financial inclusion for smallholder farmers, bridging gaps in the agricultural value chain.

Namra G

4/14/2025

Agriculture remains the backbone of Pakistan's economy, contributing 23% to the national GDP and employing approximately 37.4% of the labor force (GOP, 2024). Despite its central role, the sector is plagued by a range of persistent challenges, including low crop productivity, inefficient irrigation practices, water scarcity, climate-induced stress, and fragmented value chains. These issues are exacerbated by the growing impact of climate change, which has made agricultural cycles increasingly unpredictable. Moreover, post-harvest losses, limited access to modern technologies, and lack of structured market linkages continue to hinder farmers' ability to maximize output and profitability. Given that nearly 65% of Pakistan's population resides in rural areas and relies directly or indirectly on agriculture for livelihood, the transformation of this sector is essential for poverty alleviation, rural development, and long-term economic resilience (World Bank, 2023).

In recent years, agriculture startups, commonly referred to as agri-tech ventures, have emerged as pivotal agents of change. These startups are harnessing digital platforms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and fintech innovations to modernize farming systems. From drone-based crop monitoring and smart irrigation systems to mobile advisory services and digital marketplaces, agri-tech is enabling farmers to access real-time information, precision tools, and transparent pricing mechanisms. Furthermore, fintech solutions offered by these startups are improving access to microcredit, insurance, and digital payments, empowering smallholder farmers who traditionally lack access to formal financial institutions. By bridging critical gaps in input supply, market access, financial inclusion, and climate-smart practices, agriculture startups are offering a scalable pathway to sustainable food systems and inclusive rural development in Pakistan. Their growth reflects not only a technological shift but also a cultural reorientation toward entrepreneurship and innovation within the agricultural sector.

The State of Agriculture in Pakistan: Challenges & Opportunities

The agricultural sector in Pakistan, despite its vast potential, continues to face significant structural and environmental challenges that hinder its growth and resilience. In FY 2022–23, the sector grew by only 1.55%, falling short of the targeted 3.9%, underscoring persistent inefficiencies and systemic bottlenecks (Pakistan Economic Survey 2023). One of the primary issues is the widespread use of outdated farming techniques. Nearly 80% of smallholder farmers still depend on traditional methods, resulting in suboptimal crop yields and inefficient resource use (PARC, 2023). Water scarcity is another pressing concern, as Pakistan ranks as the fourth most water-stressed country in the world. With approximately 90% of its available freshwater allocated to agriculture, inefficient irrigation practices continue to exacerbate the problem (IMF, 2023).

Market inefficiencies also take a heavy toll on the sector. Each year, post-harvest losses cost the country an estimated $1.5 billion, largely due to poor storage facilities, inadequate transportation, and exploitation by middlemen who manipulate prices to the detriment of small farmers (FAO, 2023). Moreover, climate change poses a growing threat to agricultural productivity. The devastating floods of 2022, which submerged large tracts of cropland, inflicted nearly $30 billion in economic damage, with agriculture bearing a significant portion of the loss (UNDP, 2023). Compounding these issues is the limited access to agricultural finance. Only 15% of farmers have access to formal credit channels, which severely restricts their ability to invest in quality inputs, mechanization, and adaptive technologies (SBP, 2023).

Nevertheless, these challenges also present opportunities for transformative change. In recent years, agri-tech startups have begun introducing disruptive innovations such as precision agriculture, digital marketplaces, mobile advisory services, and fintech platforms that offer microloans and insurance products. These technologies are not only modernizing traditional farming systems but also fostering rural employment, enhancing productivity, and contributing to inclusive economic growth across Pakistan's agrarian landscape.

How Agri-Startups Are Transforming Rural Pakistan

gri-startups are playing a transformative role in reshaping rural Pakistan by modernizing agricultural practices, improving market linkages, enhancing financial inclusion, and promoting sustainability. By leveraging emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and digital finance, these startups are bridging long-standing gaps in the agricultural value chain. For instance, platforms like Tractors.pk and AgriSmart deploy IoT-based soil sensors, drone surveillance, and AI-driven pest control to help farmers reduce input costs by 20% and boost yields by as much as 30% (LUMS AgriTech Report, 2023). These precision agriculture tools are revolutionizing productivity, especially for smallholders with limited resources.

Market access is another area witnessing significant improvement. E-Mandi platforms such as Bazaar and Dastgyr now connect over 500,000 farmers directly with buyers, effectively reducing the role of middlemen and increasing farmers' share by 25% (Karachi School of Business, 2023). Innovations in cold chain logistics, led by companies like CoolCrop, have also reduced post-harvest losses by 40% through solar-powered storage systems, preserving perishable goods and improving farmer incomes (UNDP, 2023).

In terms of financial inclusion, fintech startups like Khushhali Bank and Easypaisa have disbursed over $200 million in microloans digitally, providing essential working capital to farmers often excluded from traditional banking (SBP, 2023). Additionally, Takaful Pakistan's index-based crop insurance protects more than 50,000 farmers against weather-related risks (IFC, 2023).

Startups are also advancing climate-smart agriculture. BioEnergy Pakistan manufactures biofertilizers that reduce chemical usage by 35% (PARC, 2023), while GrowUp promotes hydroponic farming, which uses 90% less water than traditional agriculture (WWF-Pakistan, 2023). Platforms like AgriMentor are further contributing by providing mobile-based training to over 100,000 farmers in modern practices (PITB, 2023).

However, agri-startups face critical challenges. Poor rural infrastructure limits digital adoption, with only 30% 4G coverage in rural areas (PTA, 2023). Farmer skepticism remains a barrier, with 60% hesitant to adopt digital tools (Gallup Pakistan, 2023). Moreover, the sector suffers from limited venture capital, only $50 million was invested in agri-tech in 2023 (Invest2Innovate, 2023), and regulatory bottlenecks persist due to the absence of a dedicated national agri-tech policy (Ministry of IT, 2023). Overcoming these hurdles is essential to unlock the full potential of agricultural innovation in Pakistan.

Recommendations

The synergy between government and private sector initiatives is playing a vital role in accelerating agri-tech adoption and innovation in Pakistan. Recognizing agriculture's importance for food security and economic resilience, the public sector has launched several key programs. The Punjab Agri-Revolution Program, for instance, has allocated a $100 million fund specifically to support agri-tech startups that offer innovative solutions in precision farming, water management, and supply chain digitization (Punjab Govt, 2023). Meanwhile, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has launched the "Digital Farmer Initiative," which offers 0% interest loans to smallholders investing in agri-tech solutions, facilitating the transition to modern tools and practices (SBP, 2023). Additionally, National Incubation Centers (NICs), supported by the Ignite Fund, have incubated over 50 agri-startups across the country, providing mentoring, networking, and seed funding support (Ignite Fund, 2023).

The private sector has also stepped in to fill investment and innovation gaps. In 2023, i2i Ventures and JazzCash jointly launched a $10 million AgriTech Fund to back early-stage startups with scalable models in digital agriculture. Multinational firms like Syngenta Pakistan have partnered with local startups to co-develop climate-resilient seed varieties and support extension services for small farmers.

To amplify the impact of these efforts, policy interventions must prioritize enabling infrastructure and investment facilitation. Expanding rural internet and electricity access is critical, aiming for 80% 4G penetration by 2025 would significantly enhance digital adoption. Establishing an agri-tech regulatory sandbox could fast-track approvals for novel solutions, such as drone applications and blockchain-based traceability. Encouraging venture capital investments through tax incentives and easing compliance for startups would further attract private capital into the sector. Finally, structured digital literacy and farmer training programs, implemented through government-startup partnerships, are essential to ensure inclusive, grassroots-level technology adoption. Together, these coordinated efforts can unlock the full potential of agri-tech to transform Pakistan's rural economy.

Conclusion

Agriculture startups in Pakistan are emerging as a powerful force in transforming the rural economy, offering innovative solutions to longstanding challenges faced by the agricultural sector. These startups are revolutionizing traditional farming practices by leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as IoT, AI, and fintech, which are improving productivity, market access, and financial inclusion for smallholder farmers. From precision agriculture tools that boost yields to digital platforms that connect farmers directly with buyers, these innovations are bridging critical gaps in the agricultural value chain, contributing to rural development and poverty alleviation.

However, the growth of agri-tech in Pakistan is not without its challenges. Issues such as poor rural infrastructure, limited digital adoption, and farmer skepticism towards new technologies hinder the full-scale implementation of these solutions. Furthermore, the sector faces barriers related to regulatory bottlenecks and a lack of sufficient venture capital to support scaling efforts. Addressing these obstacles will require continued collaboration between the government, private sector, and agri-tech startups.

By expanding rural infrastructure, providing financial incentives, and fostering digital literacy programs, Pakistan can create an environment conducive to agri-tech growth. If these efforts are successfully implemented, agriculture startups will play a pivotal role in shaping a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agricultural sector that can contribute to Pakistan's long-term economic stability and rural prosperity. The potential for these startups to transform Pakistan's agricultural landscape is immense, and with the right support, they can lead the charge toward a more modern, efficient, and prosperous rural economy.

References: GOP; World Bank; SBP; UNDP; Invest2Innovate; Punjab Govt; Ministry of IT; Gallup Pakistan; PITB; PTA; WWF-Pakistan; PARC; IFC; LUMS AgriTech Report; Karachi School of Business; FAO; IMF

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Automation in Rural Economy of Pakistan: Risks & Rewards

Explore the integration of automation in rural economy i.e. AI, and robotics in Pakistan. While these technologies promise to enhance agricultural yields and modernize industries, they also pose significant challenges of job replacements.

Saira Ghulam Ghouse

4/16/2025

Automation, driven by artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and machine learning, is transforming industries worldwide, redefining labor markets and economic productivity (Cugurullo, 2020). While urban economies have experienced the most visible impacts, through the rise of smart manufacturing, fintech, and service automation, the ripple effects of automation on rural economies remain less studied. In Pakistan, where approximately 62.7% of the population lives in rural areas and agriculture contributes 23% to the national GDP (PBS, 2023; World Bank, 2023), the implications of automation are profound and multifaceted.

Rural Pakistan's economy is primarily dependent on low-skilled labor in agriculture, textile manufacturing, and informal services. As automation technologies begin to enter these sectors, through mechanized harvesting, AI-based crop monitoring, and automated logistics, there is a dual potential for disruption and progress. On the one hand, the adoption of advanced technologies can boost agricultural productivity, reduce waste, and improve supply chain efficiency. For example, precision agriculture using drones and sensors can help smallholder farmers monitor soil health and crop performance in real time, leading to yield increases of up to 20% (PARC, 2022). On the other hand, automation also threatens to displace unskilled laborers who rely on seasonal farm work or factory-based employment, exacerbating rural unemployment and income inequality.

This article examines how automation is expected to alter employment patterns, productivity levels, and structural dynamics in Pakistan's rural economy. Through a review of global and local literature, and case studies from agri-tech startups the potential and the pitfalls of automation for rural communities are identified. The role of policy in mitigating risks, such as through reskilling programs, rural internet expansion, and inclusive digital literacy initiatives is also discussed. Ultimately, understanding and managing automation's impact is crucial for shaping a resilient and equitable rural economy in Pakistan.

Automation in Agriculture and Rural Industry in Pakistan

Automation is reshaping the landscape of agriculture and rural industry in Pakistan, offering both transformative opportunities and serious challenges. With 37.4% of the workforce employed in agriculture (Labour Force Survey, 2023), the sector is witnessing rapid technological advancement. AI-powered irrigation systems are boosting crop yields by 20–30% (IFPRI, 2022), drones are enabling precise crop monitoring and reducing pesticide usage by 15% (FAO, 2023), and autonomous tractors are cutting labor costs by up to 40% (Punjab Agriculture Department, 2023). While these innovations enhance productivity, they also threaten to displace the over 50% of rural workers who rely on low-skilled farm labor. PIDE (2023) estimates that, without targeted reskilling initiatives, rural unemployment could rise by 12% by 2030 due to automation.

In rural manufacturing, particularly in textile, leather, and small-scale industries, automation is also a disruptive force. Although urban factories are adopting robotics and increasing productivity by 25% (SBP, 2023), rural small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face major barriers. Only 5% can afford AI tools (SMEDA, 2023), and digital literacy among rural workers stands at a low 18% (PITB, 2023). However, with the right support, automation could enhance competitiveness. The use of 3D printing in traditional crafts and automated stitching machines could significantly reduce production time and boost exports (Trade Development Authority, 2023; LCCI, 2023).

While an OECD (2023) study warns that 45% of rural jobs in Pakistan are at high risk of automation, it also notes the potential for new employment in areas like AI maintenance, data analytics, and agri-tech services (World Economic Forum, 2023). Yet, the urban-rural divide may widen as urban tech hubs receive the bulk of investment, leaving rural communities behind (Planning Commission, 2023). Women, who constitute 70% of the rural agricultural workforce, are especially vulnerable to job loss (UN Women, 2023). Still, IFAD (2023) highlights that, if made accessible, digital farming tools could raise rural incomes by 15%, signaling the potential for inclusive growth through carefully managed automation.

Job Market Shifts and Policy Gaps in Rural Automation

The rise of automation is set to redefine Pakistan's rural job market, creating both high-risk vulnerabilities and new opportunities. Traditional roles such as farm laborers and manual factory workers are among the most threatened by automation. These occupations, which currently form the backbone of rural employment, are increasingly being replaced by machines, sensors, and AI-powered systems. However, automation also introduces emerging job categories such as drone operators, AI technicians, and precision agriculture specialists. These roles demand new skill sets, often

unavailable in rural settings without structured training programs. According to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE, 2023), automation has the potential to contribute an additional $3.5 billion to the national GDP by 2030. Yet, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) warns that without comprehensive reskilling programs, over 5 million low-skilled jobs could be lost in the same timeframe.

A key challenge lies in the absence of a coordinated national automation strategy tailored to rural contexts. Current policies lack a focused framework to guide technological transition in agriculture and cottage industries. Furthermore, weak digital infrastructure continues to hamper innovation, only 22% of rural Pakistan has access to 4G internet (PTA, 2023), limiting adoption of digital tools essential for automation. To address these gaps, several policy interventions are necessary. Collaborative reskilling initiatives between the government and NAVTTC should equip rural workers with competencies in AI, robotics, and digital literacy. Tax incentives for rural SMEs adopting automation can ease financial barriers and encourage innovation. Establishing rural tech hubs at district levels would provide hands-on training and knowledge exchange platforms. Moreover, gender-inclusive policies must be prioritized, offering targeted programs to equip rural women, who form a majority of the agricultural workforce, with skills in agri-tech and digital systems. Strategic implementation of these recommendations can ensure a just and inclusive automation transition in rural Pakistan.

Conclusion

The integration of automation into Pakistan's rural economy presents both unprecedented opportunities and serious risks. While AI, robotics, and precision farming technologies promise to boost agricultural yields, reduce costs, and modernize rural industries, the potential for widespread job displacement, particularly among low-skilled workers and women, raises critical socioeconomic concerns. With 45% of rural jobs at high risk of automation and only 22% of rural areas having reliable 4G access, a clear digital divide threatens to exacerbate inequality and marginalization.

Nonetheless, automation does not have to be a threat. If strategically managed, it can act as a catalyst for inclusive growth. Reskilling programs, digital infrastructure development, and targeted support for women and SMEs can help ensure that rural community's benefit from technological change rather than suffer from it. The creation of new job roles in AI maintenance, drone operations, and data analytics offers a viable path forward, provided rural workers are equipped with the necessary skills. Above all, a coordinated national policy tailored to rural realities is urgently needed to balance innovation with equity. With timely investment and inclusive planning, automation can become a driver of rural empowerment and long-term economic resilience in Pakistan.

References: Cugurullo; PBS; World Bank; IFPRI; OECD; PIDE; FAO; Labour Force Survey; Punjab Agriculture Department; PITB; SMEDA; Trade Development Authority; LCCI; World Economic Forum; Planning Commission; IFAD; SBP; PTA

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Sustainable Resource Management for Pakistan's Rural Economy

Explore sustainable resource management strategies essential for Pakistan's rural economy. Discover how agroecological farming, community-based forest management, and innovative practices can enhance resilience and ecological stability while boosting agricultural productivity and livelihoods.

Iqra Urooj

4/22/2025

Pakistan's rural economy, which supports nearly 62% of the national population (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023), is intricately linked to its natural resource base, land, water, and forests. These resources form the foundation of rural livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and food security. However, mounting environmental challenges pose serious risks to their sustainability. Climate change, unsustainable farming practices, and weak governance have accelerated the degradation of these vital ecosystems. According to the World Bank (2023), approximately 40% of Pakistan's agricultural land suffers from degradation due to erosion, salinity, and nutrient depletion.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR, 2023) reports that 80% of farmers face acute water shortages, exacerbated by inefficient irrigation systems and declining groundwater tables. Forest resources, which provide fuel, fodder, and biodiversity benefits, are also under threat, with deforestation occurring at an annual rate of 0.2–0.5% (FAO, 2023), far exceeding the natural regeneration rate.

These trends not only undermine environmental resilience but also deepen rural poverty and economic insecurity. Without urgent intervention, the continued exploitation of land and water will compromise Pakistan's ability to achieve sustainable development goals and adapt to climate variability. To address these challenges, it is essential to transition toward sustainable natural resource management (SNRM) strategies that integrate environmental stewardship with rural economic development. Practices such as agroforestry, water-efficient irrigation (e.g., drip and sprinkler systems), soil conservation, and afforestation must be scaled across agro-ecological zones. Community-based resource governance, supported by digital monitoring tools and public-private partnerships, can empower local stakeholders to protect and restore their environments. This article explores evidence-based approaches and successful models, both national and international, that offer pathways for enhancing rural livelihoods while conserving Pakistan's natural resources for future generations.

Challenges in Pakistan's Rural Resource Management

Pakistan's rural resource management faces a multitude of pressing challenges that threaten both ecological sustainability and the livelihoods of millions. Land degradation and soil erosion remain among the most critical issues, with 27 million hectare, nearly 60% of the country's arable land, affected by erosion, salinity, and nutrient depletion, according to the Soil Fertility Research Institute (2023). Overgrazing by livestock and widespread deforestation exacerbate the problem, resulting in the annual loss of approximately 12% of fertile topsoil (IUCN Pakistan, 2023). Water scarcity further intensifies rural vulnerability. Ranked as the third most water-stressed country globally by the IMF (2023), Pakistan uses 90% of its freshwater in agriculture, yet around 60% is wasted due to outdated and inefficient irrigation methods (PCRWR, 2023). At the same time, contamination from pesticides, untreated sewage, and industrial effluents render nearly half of rural drinking water sources unsafe (WHO, 2023), posing serious health and productivity risks.

Deforestation compounds the crisis. With forest cover reduced to just 5.7% of land area, well below the global benchmark of 25%, Pakistan's ecosystems are under severe stress (Ministry of Climate Change, 2023). Illegal logging and the unsustainable harvesting of fuelwood continue to destroy habitats and accelerate biodiversity loss. The impacts of climate change are also increasingly evident, especially in rural areas. The catastrophic floods of 2022 inflicted over $30 billion in damage, submerging 4.4 million acres of cropland and displacing thousands of farming families (NDMA, 2023). Meanwhile, rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns have led to yielding reductions of up to 20% in key crops like wheat and rice (PMD, 2023). Collectively, these challenges highlight the urgent need for integrated, sustainable approaches to rural resource management that protect natural assets while enhancing rural resilience.

Strategies for Sustainable Resource Use

Sustainable resource use in rural Pakistan requires a holistic approach that integrates ecological farming, water conservation, community engagement, and renewable energy. Promoting agroecological practices is a critical step, with methods such as crop rotation and intercropping—particularly combining maize with legumes—shown to improve yields by 25% while preserving soil fertility (PARC, 2023). Organic farming can cut down chemical fertilizer usage by 30%, contributing to long-term soil health and environmental safety (SAWIE, 2023), while conservation tillage practices help minimize erosion by up to 40% (FAO, 2023). Water scarcity, a growing threat, can be mitigated through efficient techniques like drip irrigation, which reduces water usage by half compared to traditional methods (IWMI, 2023). Small-

scale rainwater harvesting initiatives, such as those in Balochistan, have increased local water availability by 35% (UNDP, 2023), and laser land leveling has been shown to reduce water consumption by 25% (World Bank, 2023).

Community-based Forest management, including participatory reforestation and alternative income generation like beekeeping and eco-tourism, offers a path to restoring degraded forest areas while supporting livelihoods (WWF Pakistan, 2023). Renewable energy adoption is equally vital; solar-powered pumps and biogas units have significantly reduced rural dependence on fossil fuels, serving over 10,000 households with clean energy solutions (AEDB, 2023; SNGPL, 2023). A circular economic approach through crop residue management, such as converting rice straw into biochar, helps reduce harmful agricultural burning, while composting organic waste into fertilizer, addressing both waste and soil health issues (UNEP, 2023).

Moreover, empowering local governance is key. Village-level climate committees and farmer cooperatives enhance disaster preparedness and collective bargaining capacity, leading to more resilient communities (NDMA, 2023; SBP, 2023). Policy support in the form of training, subsidies, tax incentives, and decentralized resource management is essential to scaling these sustainable practices nationwide and ensuring equitable rural development.

Conclusion

Sustainable resource management is no longer a choice but a necessity for safeguarding Pakistan's rural economy and ecological stability. With mounting pressures from climate change, resource degradation, and poor governance, the country's natural resource base, land, water, and forests, face severe threats that undermine agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. However, the evidence shows that practical, locally adapted, and community-led strategies can reverse these trends. The adoption of agroecological farming, water-efficient irrigation systems, and renewable energy technologies has already demonstrated promising results in enhancing resilience and reducing environmental footprints. Similarly, community-based forest management and circular economy practices offer dual benefits for conservation and income generation.

Yet, scaling these approaches requires more than technical solutions, it demands political will, intersectoral coordination, and inclusive policymaking that centers the voices of smallholder farmers, women, and indigenous communities. Strengthening local governance structures, investing in training, and incentivizing sustainable practices through favorable policies and financial tools can unlock the full potential of Pakistan's rural economy. Moving forward, integrated planning that aligns environmental conservation with rural development must become the cornerstone of national policy. By committing to sustainability today, Pakistan can secure its natural resources for future generations while advancing its goals of food security, poverty reduction, and climate resilience.

References: World Bank ; PCRWR; FAO; UNDP; KP Government; SAWIE; PARC; UNDP; IWMI; WWF Pakistan; AEDB; SNGPL; UNEP; NDMA; SBP

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Climate Resilience in Pakistan's Agriculture Sector

Discover how Pakistan’s agriculture is building resilience to climate change impacts like floods and droughts. Innovative practices and technologies are being adopted to protect crops and secure rural livelihoods. These strategies aim to strengthen food security while supporting farmers in adapting to a changing climate.

Safia Rind

4/23/2025

Climate change has emerged as a formidable challenge to Pakistan’s agriculture sector, amplifying the risks associated with weather variability and environmental degradation. The country, with over 60% of its population dependent on agriculture for livelihood, is experiencing a growing frequency of climate-induced disasters such as floods, heatwaves, and prolonged droughts. These phenomena not only reduce crop productivity but also intensify rural poverty and food insecurity. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, Pakistan ranks among the top 10 most climate-vulnerable nations globally, with its agriculture sector disproportionately impacted (Germanwatch, 2021).

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has reported a 1.5°C increase in average temperature over the last six decades, with projections pointing toward even greater warming in the years to come (PMD, 2023). Rising temperatures have led to shorter growing seasons and increased evapotranspiration, putting strain on already limited water resources. Erratic monsoons further compound these challenges. For instance, the 2022 floods, triggered by intense monsoon rains, destroyed 4.4 million acres of cropland and displaced thousands of farming families (NDMA, 2022). On the other end of the spectrum, persistent droughts in Balochistan and Sindh have caused crop failures, water scarcity, and soil degradation, further destabilizing rural economies.

Moreover, climate variability has led to shifting pest and disease patterns, threatening both staple crops like wheat and rice, and high-value fruits and vegetables. Heatwaves have also impacted livestock health and productivity, compounding the vulnerability of rural households. The cumulative effect of these events is a decline in agricultural output, higher food prices, and reduced export competitiveness. If left unaddressed, climate change could significantly derail Pakistan’s progress toward food security and economic development. It is therefore critical to adopt climate-resilient agricultural strategies, invest in early warning systems, and promote sustainable land and water management to mitigate these escalating risks.

Climate-Resilient Crop Varieties and Adaptation Strategies in Pakistan

Pakistan’s agriculture sector, which underpins the livelihoods of over 60% of the rural population, is under immense stress due to the intensifying impacts of climate change. To address these growing vulnerabilities, the adoption of climate-resilient crop varieties has emerged as one of the most effective adaptation strategies. Research institutions such as the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and international partners like CIMMYT (International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center) have played a pivotal role in developing and introducing crop varieties tailored to Pakistan’s increasingly erratic weather patterns. These include drought-tolerant wheat and maize such as Punjab-2011 and Sahiwal-2017, which require 30% less water while maintaining productivity under dry conditions. Flood-resistant rice varieties like Swat-1 and IRRI-6 can survive submergence for up to two weeks, safeguarding harvests in flood-prone areas. Similarly, heat-tolerant cotton varieties such as FH-142 and MNH-886 continue to yield even during heatwaves exceeding 40°C. Field reports from Punjab and Sindh indicate yield increases of 20–30% using these improved varieties during extreme climate events, highlighting their potential to enhance food security and farmer resilience.

Alongside genetic improvements, smart soil and water management techniques are crucial to sustaining agricultural productivity in a water-scarce environment. Conservation tillage practices help retain soil moisture and reduce erosion, improving yields by up to 20% in arid zones. Drip irrigation systems have been especially successful in cutting water use by 60% and boosting yields by up to 40%. Rainwater harvesting through small ponds and check dams, particularly in drought-prone regions like Balochistan and Thar, has ensured consistent crop production despite erratic rainfall. Integrating trees with crops through agroforestry provides additional benefits, including reduced wind erosion, improved soil fertility, and temperature regulation. Trees like Kikar and Ber in Punjab have proven especially effective, and national initiatives like the “10 Billion Tree Tsunami” have supported sustainable land use by restoring 500,000 hectares of degraded land.

Digital tools are further transforming climate adaptation strategies. Technologies like satellite-based weather forecasting and mobile apps such as Khushhal Kissan and PARC Weather Advisory provide farmers with timely planting and irrigation guidance. Sensor-based irrigation systems in Sindh and Punjab have reduced water waste by 35%, while increasing precision in resource use. These tools help farmers make better decisions, reduce input costs, and optimize yields.

Policy interventions and financial safety nets play a vital role in scaling these solutions. The government’s Kisan Package provides subsidies for climate-

resilient seeds and efficient irrigation tools, while weather-indexed insurance schemes—implemented in collaboration with the World Bank and the State Bank of Pakistan—offer compensation for crop losses due to extreme weather. Capacity-building programs led by PARC and other institutions train farmers in climate-smart agriculture practices, promoting widespread adoption of adaptive techniques. By combining innovation, infrastructure, and institutional support, these efforts pave the way for a resilient, productive, and sustainable agricultural future in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In the face of intensifying climate change impacts, Pakistan's agriculture sector stands at a critical crossroads. The increasing frequency of floods, droughts, heatwaves, and shifting pest dynamics threatens not only crop yields but also the food security and livelihoods of millions. However, this crisis also presents an opportunity to reimagine and restructure agricultural practices through resilience-focused interventions. Climate-resilient crop varieties, smart irrigation systems, soil conservation, agroforestry, and digital technologies are proving effective in helping farmers cope with unpredictable weather patterns.

Programs such as the Kisan Package and weather-indexed insurance schemes further strengthen farmers' capacity to adapt and recover. Yet, the long-term success of these efforts hinges on robust policy support, coordinated institutional efforts, and community engagement. It is essential that public and private sectors collaborate to expand research, fund innovation, and deliver region-specific solutions at scale. Empowering farmers through training, access to resources, and timely information will be key to ensuring sustainable rural development. With decisive action and investment, Pakistan can build a climate-resilient agricultural system that not only withstands environmental shocks but also drives inclusive growth and food security for future generations.

References: Germanwatch; PMD; NDMA; PARC; World Bank

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at safiarind333@gmail.com

Boosting Agricultural Productivity in Sindh

Addressing low agricultural productivity in Sindh is crucial for ensuring food security and promoting rural development. Discover the challenges faced by smallholder farmers and the impacts of climate change on agriculture in this fertile region.

Laraib Samoon

4/29/2025

Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, contributing 19.2% to the GDP and employing 37.4% of the labor force (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2022-23). Despite its central role in national development, the province of Sindh, blessed with fertile lands and the life-sustaining waters of the Indus River, continues to face chronically low agricultural productivity. This persistent underperformance poses a serious threat to the province's food security, farmer livelihoods, and overall economic stability. It is therefore essential to understand the root causes of this productivity gap and pursue holistic, sustainable solutions.

Sindh accounts for 23% of Pakistan's total agricultural output, cultivating essential crops such as cotton, rice, wheat, and sugarcane (Sindh Bureau of Statistics, 2023). However, crop yields in Sindh remain 30-40% lower than in Punjab, the country's agricultural leader (FAO, 2023). Multiple interrelated factors contribute to this disparity. These include inefficient water use due to outdated irrigation methods, limited adoption of modern agricultural technologies, and widespread soil degradation caused by salinity and waterlogging. Financial constraints further exacerbate the problem, as smallholders often lack access to credit, quality inputs, and timely extension services. The impacts of climate change, rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and increased frequency of floods and droughts, have made farming more unpredictable and riskier.

Moreover, weak rural infrastructure and limited access to markets reduce farmers' profitability and discourage investment in productivity-enhancing practices. Women farmers, who make up a significant share of the labor force, also face institutional and cultural barriers to land ownership, finance, and training, further limiting the sector's full potential.

To overcome these obstacles, a coordinated approach is needed. This includes investment in irrigation modernization, climate-smart farming, access to financial services, land reforms, and robust agricultural extension systems. Enhancing productivity in Sindh is not just a regional issue, it is a national imperative for achieving food security, rural prosperity, and sustainable economic growth.

Key Reasons Behind Low Agricultural Productivity in Sindh

Low agricultural productivity in Sindh, despite the province's natural advantages such as fertile land and access to the Indus River, remains a critical barrier to rural development, food security, and economic growth. This productivity crisis is deeply rooted in a combination of infrastructural inefficiencies, environmental degradation, socio-economic disparities, and climate vulnerabilities, each contributing to a widening yield gap compared to other regions, especially Punjab.

Water scarcity and inefficient irrigation practices are among the most pressing issues. Sindh's agriculture is predominantly dependent on the Indus River, yet poor water management and outdated canal systems lead to substantial losses. An estimated 60% of freshwater is lost due to inefficient methods, with flood irrigation still widely practiced, resulting in wastage and soil problems. Powerful landlords often divert water illegally, leaving small farmers dry. These factors collectively reduce crop yields by 20–30%, particularly in water-intensive crops like rice and cotton.

Out-dated farming techniques further impede productivity. Only a small fraction of farmers in Sindh utilizes mechanized equipment, and tractor availability is significantly lower than in Punjab. Labor-intensive methods increase costs and delay key operations like sowing and harvesting, contributing to lower yields. As a result, Sindh's wheat productivity lags, averaging just 2.5 tons per hectare compared to 3.8 tons in Punjab.

Soil degradation, particularly salinity, affects over 40% of Sindh's arable land. Excessive chemical fertilizer use, coupled with poor drainage and minimal crop rotation, has degraded soil health. Waterlogging impacts 1.2 million hectares, and salinity alone reduces rice yields by up to 40%, leading to annual losses estimated at $500 million.

Access to affordable credit and input remains another major barrier. Only 22% of farmers can access formal credit, with many resorting to informal lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates. Simultaneously, input costs have surged, fertilizer prices, for instance, have increased by 70% since 2020, leaving many smallholders unable to invest in productivity-enhancing technologies or inputs, pushing nearly a third of them below the poverty line.

Climate change further compounds these issues. Sindh is highly exposed to extreme weather events, including heatwaves, erratic rainfall, and floods. The catastrophic 2022 floods submerged vast croplands, inflicting $4 billion in

damage. Rising temperatures are also undermining crop yields, particularly for wheat and cotton, which are highly sensitive to heat stress.

Finally, poor market access and significant post-harvest losses reduce farmer incomes. Without access to cold storage, packaging, or transport facilities, up to 30% of perishable crops spoil before reaching markets. Meanwhile, middlemen often dominate market channels, extracting a disproportionate share of profits, farmers typically receive only 30-40% of the final price. Export opportunities are also limited due to infrastructure and policy constraints, which further suppresses income potential.

Together, these challenges form a complex web that stifles productivity in Sindh. Addressing them requires a multi-pronged strategy that includes investment in irrigation modernization, promotion of mechanization, soil conservation practices, affordable credit systems, climate adaptation, and improved market infrastructure. Without such interventions, the productivity gap will continue to widen, deepening rural poverty and threatening national food security.

Solutions to Enhance Agricultural Productivity

Enhancing agricultural productivity in Sindh requires a multidimensional strategy tailored to the province's unique environmental and socio-economic challenges. The adoption of modern irrigation systems is vital to reduce water wastage and improve crop yields. Drip and sprinkler irrigation, proven effective in India's Punjab, can significantly increase water efficiency and reduce salinity. Upgrading canal infrastructure and enforcing water rights are essential to ensure equitable distribution and prevent illegal diversions, especially by influential landowners.

Promoting high-yield and climate-resilient seed varieties is another cornerstone of agricultural revival. Distributing drought-tolerant wheat and heat-resistant cotton seeds can mitigate climate impacts. Expanding seed subsidy initiatives through schemes like the Benazir Bhutto Kissan Card will ensure that even smallholder farmers have access to improved inputs.

Sustainable land management practices must also be prioritized. Techniques such as laser land leveling enhance irrigation efficiency, while bio-saline agriculture can reclaim and utilize salt-affected lands. Crop rotation, organic farming, and reduced chemical input can improve long-term soil fertility and productivity.

Capacity building through farmer training and digital agriculture platforms is equally important. Mobile-based advisory apps and precision farming workshops by institutions like Sindh Agriculture University can empower farmers with timely, data-driven decisions.

Financial inclusion remains a critical enabler. Expanding microfinance programs and introducing weather-indexed insurance will help smallholders manage risk and invest in productivity-enhancing technologies.

Lastly, strengthening market systems is key. Developing cold storage infrastructure can reduce post-harvest losses, while e-commerce platforms and direct-to-consumer models can bypass exploitative middlemen. Government regulation of intermediary practices will help ensure fair pricing for producers.

Together, these interventions, if implemented cohesively, can drive a transformation in Sindh's agricultural landscape, raising productivity, stabilizing incomes, and building resilience against future shocks. With political commitment and coordinated action, Sindh's agriculture can become both sustainable and prosperous.

Conclusion

Addressing low agricultural productivity in Sindh is essential for ensuring Pakistan's food security, rural development, and economic resilience. Despite Sindh's fertile lands and access to the Indus River, a combination of structural inefficiencies, ranging from water mismanagement and outdated farming practices to soil degradation and inadequate financial services, has severely constrained its agricultural potential. Climate change, in the form of recurrent floods, rising temperatures, and erratic rainfall, has further intensified these vulnerabilities. Smallholder farmers, who form the backbone of Sindh's rural economy, remain disproportionately affected due to their limited access to credit, inputs, training, and markets.

The path forward lies in an integrated strategy that combines modernization with inclusivity and sustainability. Upgrading irrigation systems, promoting high-yield climate-resilient seeds, improving soil health through sustainable practices, and expanding access to agri-credit and insurance can collectively uplift productivity. Digital agriculture and farmer education are also vital to facilitate timely decision-making and adoption of innovations. Moreover, developing cold storage, transport networks, and transparent market systems will reduce losses and ensure fairer returns for producers.

With strong support, coordinated investments, and community engagement, Sindh's agriculture sector can be revitalized. A productive and climate-resilient Sindh will not only secure regional prosperity but also contribute significantly to Pakistan's broader development goals.

References: Asian Development Bank; FAO; Global Climate Risk Index; International Food Policy Research Institute; Pakistan Economic Survey; State Bank of Pakistan; World Bank; Sindh Bureau of Statistics

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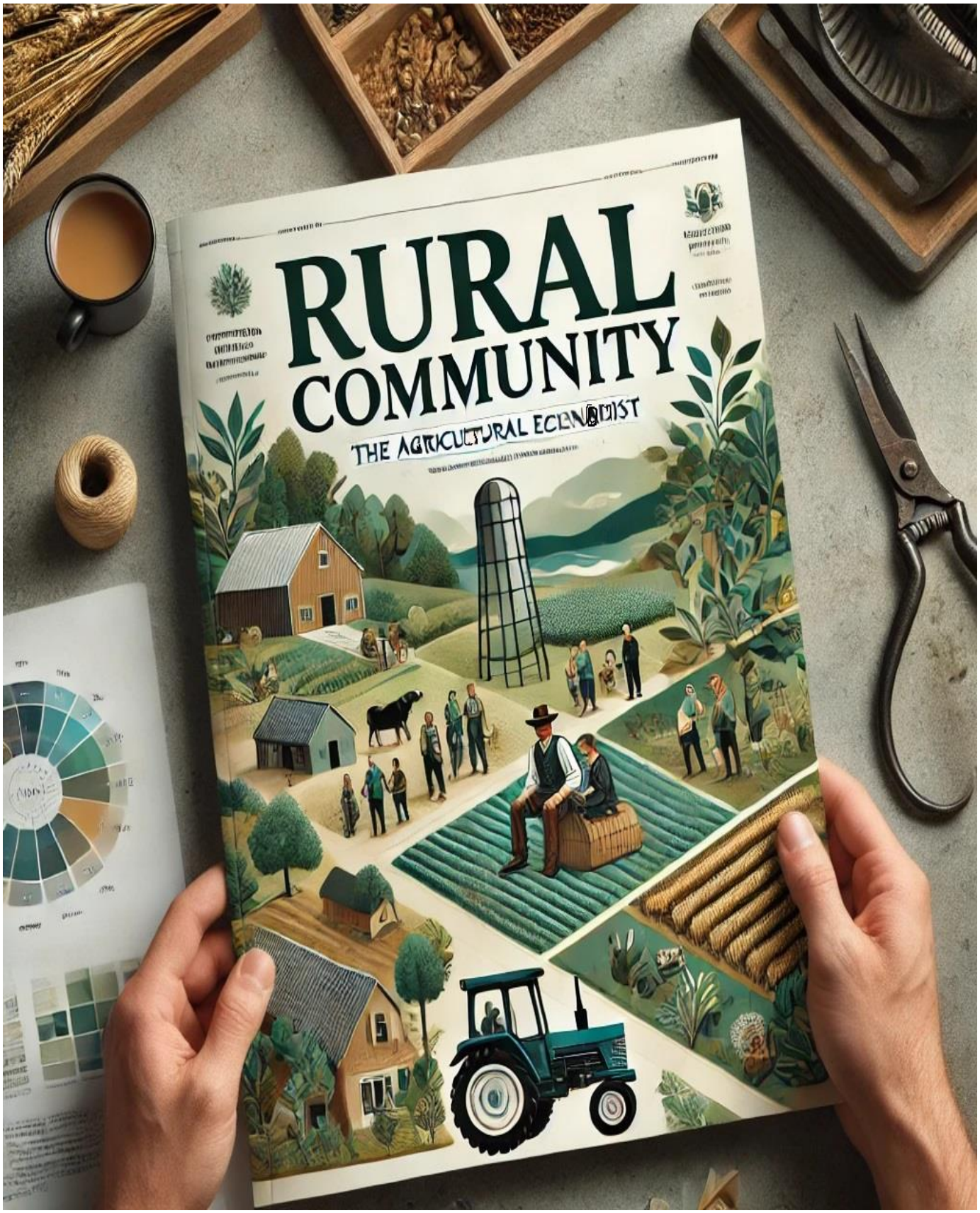
The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at samoonmahi@gmail.com


RURAL
COMMUNITY
THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST

Rural Tourism: A Path to Economic Diversification

Explore how rural tourism in Pakistan can transform the economy by providing sustainable alternatives to agriculture. With stunning landscapes and rich culture, it offers significant potential for agritourism, job creation, and poverty reduction, inspired by successful global models.

Uswa Tariq

4/2/2025

Rural tourism has become an essential strategy for economic diversification, particularly in countries like Pakistan, where rural communities depend heavily on agriculture, forestry, and fishing. These traditional sectors, while crucial, face challenges such as fluctuating market prices, climate change, and resource depletion, leaving rural economies vulnerable to instability (OECD, 2022). Rural tourism provides a sustainable alternative by fostering a service-based economy that complements existing livelihoods, preserves cultural heritage, and drives local economic growth (UNWTO, 2023).

Pakistan, with its diverse landscapes, rich cultural history, and agricultural traditions, has immense potential for rural tourism. Regions like Hunza, Skardu, and Swat attract eco-tourists and adventure travelers, while Punjab and Sindh offer agritourism experiences, showcasing traditional farming practices and handicrafts. The tourism sector contributed 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP in 2023, with rural tourism playing an increasing role (WTTC, 2023). However, unlocking the full potential of rural tourism requires targeted policies addressing infrastructure deficits, environmental sustainability, and cultural authenticity.

Poor road connectivity, inadequate lodging facilities, and limited digital access in rural areas hinder tourism expansion. Additionally, balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation is critical, as unregulated influxes of visitors can lead to habitat degradation and resource overuse. Maintaining cultural integrity is another challenge, as commercialization may dilute the authenticity of local traditions.

Investing in infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and empowering local communities through training and financial incentives can enhance Pakistan's rural tourism sector. Digital platforms promoting rural experiences, government-backed eco-tourism initiatives, and collaborations with private enterprises can further support growth. By addressing these challenges, Pakistan can harness rural tourism's potential to create jobs, reduce poverty, and stimulate sustainable rural development, making it a key driver of economic resilience.

Understanding Rural Tourism

Rural tourism encompasses a range of activities in non-urban areas, emphasizing engagement with nature, agriculture, and traditional lifestyles. Unlike urban tourism, which revolves around commercial and entertainment hubs, rural tourism promotes farm stays, cultural exchanges, eco-tourism, and adventure activities (Eurostat, 2023). The global shift toward sustainable travel has increased the demand for such experiences, with rural tourism expanding at an annual rate of 6.8% since 2020 (Statista, 2023). This trend is particularly relevant for countries like Pakistan, where vast rural landscapes, diverse cultures, and traditional agricultural practices create immense potential for rural tourism.

Economic diversification is essential for rural development, reducing dependence on single industries and enhancing resilience against economic shocks. In Pakistan, agriculture employs nearly 37.4% of the labor force and contributes 22.7% to GDP (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2023-24). However, it remains vulnerable to climate change, fluctuating global markets, and resource depletion. Rural tourism offers an alternative revenue stream, allowing communities to generate income through eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and agritourism. Countries like Costa Rica earn $1.7 billion annually from rainforest tourism (ICT, 2023), while Thailand's Chiang Mai province derives 35% of its local GDP from cultural tourism (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023). Pakistan can follow similar models to boost rural economies.

Several key factors drive rural tourism's growth. Cultural and historical attractions, such as traditional festivals, draw significant interest,Japan's Gion Matsuri, for example, attracts over one million visitors each year (JNTO, 2023). Natural landscapes also play a critical role; the Swiss Alps generate €20 billion annually through rural tourism (Switzerland Tourism, 2023). Agritourism is another major driver, with the U.S. agritourism market valued at $1.26 billion in 2022 (USDA, 2023). Government policies further boost rural tourism, such as the European Union's Rural Development Program, which allocated €8.1 billion for tourism infrastructure (European Commission, 2023). Additionally, digital connectivity is revolutionizing rural tourism, with 67% of travelers discovering rural destinations through social media (Google Travel Insights, 2023).

Rural tourism has multiple economic benefits, particularly in developing countries. It creates jobs, with the tourism sector supporting one in ten jobs globally, and rural areas experiencing a 12% employment increase due to tourism (ILO, 2023). Entrepreneurship flourishes in tourism-driven regions, with homestays and craft businesses growing by 15% annually in places like Peru's

Sacred Valley (PromPerú, 2023). Tourism-led infrastructure development is another major advantage; Kenya's Maasai Mara region, for instance, witnessed a 40% improvement in road connectivity due to tourism (Kenya Tourism Board, 2023). Women and youth benefit significantly from rural tourism, as seen in India, where 55% of rural tourism workers are women (Ministry of Tourism, India, 2023). Pakistan can leverage similar economic benefits by investing in rural tourism initiatives.

However, several challenges hinder rural tourism's expansion. Infrastructure gaps are a significant barrier, with 60% of rural destinations worldwide lacking adequate transport facilities (UNWTO, 2023). Environmental concerns are another pressing issue, as over-tourism has led to the degradation of 30% of natural sites (IUCN, 2023). Seasonality is another challenge, with 70% of rural tourism income concentrated in peak travel seasons, leading to economic instability (OECD, 2023). Additionally, the commercialization of rural tourism threatens cultural authenticity, with 25% of indigenous traditions at risk due to tourism-related modifications (UNESCO, 2023).

For Pakistan to unlock the full potential of rural tourism, a strategic approach is needed. Investing in infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and preserving cultural authenticity are essential steps. Government-backed programs, digital marketing strategies, and community-driven initiatives can further enhance Pakistan's rural tourism sector. By addressing these challenges, Pakistan can transform rural tourism into a sustainable economic driver, creating jobs, preserving heritage, and fostering rural prosperity.

Successful Rural Tourism Models and Strategies for Improvement

Successful rural tourism models worldwide demonstrate how sustainable tourism can generate economic benefits while preserving cultural and natural heritage. Bhutan's high-value, low-impact tourism model, which generates $100 million annually, prioritizes cultural preservation and environmental sustainability (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2023). Similarly, Tuscany in Italy benefits significantly from agritourism, which contributes €2 billion annually by promoting farm stays, local food experiences, and vineyard tourism (Coldiretti, 2023). In Pakistan, the Hunza Valley has emerged as a model for eco-tourism, where sustainable tourism initiatives have increased local incomes by 35%, improved infrastructure, and encouraged cultural preservation (Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, 2023). Another notable example is Rajasthan in India, where heritage tourism employs over 500,000 people, leveraging the region's historic forts, palaces, and cultural festivals to attract visitors (Rajasthan Tourism, 2023). These models provide valuable lessons for Pakistan in promoting rural tourism as an economic driver.

To maximize the benefits of rural tourism in Pakistan, several strategic measures must be implemented. Enhancing infrastructure is a key priority, requiring investments in roads, digital access, and utilities to improve connectivity and accessibility for tourists. Promoting eco-tourism is equally important, ensuring sustainability by certifying tourism businesses under global standards such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's guidelines. Empowering local communities through training in hospitality, digital marketing, and tourism management will help them actively participate in and benefit from the industry. Public-private partnerships are essential for financing and developing tourism projects, as seen in the European Union's LEADER program, which funds rural tourism initiatives through collaborative efforts. Lastly, effective marketing strategies, including the use of social media and influencer partnerships, can help showcase Pakistan's rural destinations to a global audience. By implementing these strategies, Pakistan can harness the full potential of rural tourism, driving economic growth while preserving its rich cultural and natural heritage.

Conclusion

Rural tourism presents a transformative opportunity for Pakistan's economic diversification, offering a sustainable alternative to traditional agriculture-dependent livelihoods. With its breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and agritourism potential, Pakistan can leverage rural tourism to generate employment, reduce poverty, and stimulate regional development. Successful global models—such as Bhutan's high-value tourism, Tuscany's agritourism, and Rajasthan's heritage tourism—demonstrate how strategic investments in infrastructure, sustainability, and community empowerment can drive economic resilience.

However, challenges like poor connectivity, environmental degradation, and cultural commodification must be addressed through targeted policies. By improving infrastructure, promoting eco-certified tourism, and empowering local communities with training and digital tools, Pakistan can unlock rural tourism's full potential. Public-private partnerships and innovative marketing can further enhance visibility and attract global tourists.

Ultimately, rural tourism is not just an economic lifeline but a means to preserve Pakistan's cultural identity and natural beauty. With a balanced, sustainable approach, it can become a cornerstone of inclusive and long-term rural prosperity.

References: OECD, UNWTO, WTTC, World Bank, Eurostat, Statista, European Commission, Ministry of Tourism, India, Coldiretti, Tourism Council of Bhutan, Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation.

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Impact of Urbanization on Pakistan's Economy

Explore how urbanization is reshaping Pakistan's economic and social landscape. Discover the effects of rural-urban migration, economic opportunities, and the challenges faced by rural areas in this transformative process. Learn about the need for strategic planning to ensure sustainable growth.

Ayesha Idrees

4/2/2025

Urbanization is reshaping Pakistan's economic and social landscape, with profound implications for rural areas. As of 2023, Pakistan's urban population stands at 37.4%, growing at an annual rate of 2.7%, one of the highest in South Asia (World Bank, 2023). This rapid urban expansion has led to significant rural-urban migration, altering labor dynamics, land use patterns, and agricultural productivity. While urbanization drives economic growth, its spillover effects on rural regions remain a critical area of study, particularly in a country where 38.8% of the workforce depends on agriculture (Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24).

Rural-urban migration, driven by better employment opportunities, has led to labor shortages in agriculture. A declining rural workforce affects food production, causing increased reliance on mechanization. However, smallholder farmers, who constitute 64% of Pakistan's agricultural sector, struggle to afford modern technology (FAO, 2023). Additionally, remittances from urban migrants provide rural households with income but also contribute to land abandonment and reduced on-farm labor. In Punjab, rural households receiving urban remittances decreased their agricultural engagement by 18% between 2015 and 2023 (LUMS Economic Review, 2023).

Globally, urbanization has been a double-edged sword for rural development. In China, urbanization reduced rural poverty but also intensified land fragmentation (Li et al., 2018). In contrast, countries like South Korea and Japan successfully narrowed rural-urban disparities through policies such as the "New Village Movement" (Chun-Chien & Chih-Hai, 2008). Pakistan faces similar challenges—declining agricultural yields, rural unemployment, and infrastructure gaps—yet lacks a cohesive strategy to harness urbanization for rural revitalization.

Addressing these challenges requires integrated rural-urban policies. Investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural modernization, and value chain integration can reduce disparities. Strengthening rural-urban linkages through improved transport and digital connectivity can also create non-farm employment opportunities, mitigating migration pressures while fostering balanced economic development.

Urbanization Trends in Pakistan

Urbanization in Pakistan is accelerating, reshaping rural demographics, land use, and economic structures. The country's urban population is projected to reach 50% by 2050, driven by migration from rural areas in search of better employment (62%), education (23%), and healthcare (15%) (UN-Habitat, 2023; PIDE, 2023). Punjab and Sindh experience the highest migration rates, with 1.5 million people moving annually, creating both opportunities and challenges for rural and urban economies (Labour Force Survey 2022).

One of the most significant consequences of urbanization is the conversion of agricultural land for urban expansion. Urban sprawl consumes 2.3% of arable land yearly, threatening food security and rural livelihoods (FAO, 2023). In Punjab, peri-urban farms are increasingly transformed into housing societies, reducing the availability of fertile land for crop production (LDA Report, 2023). Small farmers, who own less than five acres and make up 65% of rural households, are particularly vulnerable to displacement, forcing many to shift to non-farm livelihoods or migrate to urban centers (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

While urbanization offers economic opportunities, rural areas face stagnation due to limited diversification. Non-farm rural employment, such as agro-processing and rural tourism, accounts for only 18% of rural GDP, indicating a lack of alternative economic pathways (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023). Although remittances from urban migrants contribute $8 billion annually to rural incomes, they are insufficient to drive sustainable rural development (Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, 2023). Moreover, 70% of rural youth remain underemployed, underscoring the need for targeted policies that enhance skill development and create local employment opportunities (ILO, 2023). Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that strengthens rural economies while managing the pressures of rapid urban expansion.

Global Lessons for Pakistan

China's urban-rural integration model provides valuable lessons for Pakistan, particularly in land reforms and rural industrialization. By implementing policies that allowed rural industries to flourish, China increased rural incomes by 12% annually, significantly reducing poverty (World Bank, 2022). The establishment of e-commerce hubs, such as Taobao Villages, enabled farmers to connect directly with urban markets, enhancing their economic participation and market access (Ali et al., 2020). Similarly, South Korea's Saemaul Undong, or New Village Movement, transformed rural communities through large-scale infrastructure investments,

reducing poverty from 23% to just 2% over two decades (KOICA, 2021). The adoption of cooperatives and agri-tech solutions led to a 40% increase in agricultural productivity, demonstrating the effectiveness of a coordinated rural development strategy (RDA, 2023).

India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) further highlights the impact of targeted rural employment programs. By guaranteeing work opportunities, MGNREGA lifted 60 million people out of poverty while strengthening rural economies (NITI Aayog, 2023). Additionally, digital inclusion initiatives, such as the e-NAM (National Agricultural Market), linked farmers to wider markets, improving price transparency and reducing exploitation.

Pakistan can adopt similar strategies to address rural challenges. Implementing zoning laws to protect farmland, as seen in Vietnam's 2013 Land Law, can prevent excessive urban encroachment. Urban farming incentives, such as Lahore's Vertical Farming Project, can promote food security. Economic diversification through agro-industrial zones, modeled after Bangladesh's "One Village, One Product" initiative, could generate alternative income sources. Infrastructure expansion, including CPEC Rural Development Corridors, can strengthen market linkages, while 5G-enabled precision farming, piloted in Okara's Smart Villages, can boost productivity. Finally, social protection programs, such as land-for-jobs schemes and skill development hubs like TEVTA's Agri-Tech Programs, can support displaced farmers in transitioning to new opportunities.

Conclusion

Urbanization is an irreversible force shaping Pakistan's economic and social landscape, with profound effects on rural areas. While urban expansion generates economic opportunities and enhances national productivity, it also presents challenges such as rural labor shortages, agricultural land conversion, and socio-economic disparities. Rural-urban migration, driven by employment, education, and healthcare opportunities, has altered Pakistan's demographic and economic structures. However, without strategic planning, it risks exacerbating rural stagnation, reducing agricultural output, and increasing reliance on external remittances rather than sustainable local growth.

Global experiences from China, South Korea, and India illustrate how integrated rural-urban policies can mitigate urbanization's negative effects while fostering rural development. Key lessons include land reforms to protect agricultural resources, rural industrialization to generate non-farm employment, and digital connectivity to bridge economic gaps between urban and rural markets. By adopting similar strategies, Pakistan can ensure that urbanization does not come at the cost of rural economic decline.

A balanced approach, combining infrastructure investments, policy interventions, and social protection programs, is crucial for fostering inclusive growth. Strengthening rural economies through agro-industrial zones, digital marketplaces, and smart farming initiatives can provide sustainable income sources. If managed effectively, urbanization can become a catalyst for rural revitalization rather than a force of economic displacement.

References: World Bank, UN-Habitat, Pakistan Economic Survey, PIDE, FAO, ILO, Various Research Papers.

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Horticulture: Revitalizing Rural Economies

Horticulture plays a crucial role in the economic revitalization of rural communities by generating higher income, creating jobs, and boosting export earnings. It enhances household nutrition, promotes gender-inclusive employment, and stimulates rural entrepreneurship.

Zainab Asif

4/8/2025

Horticulture, the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and ornamental plants, has emerged as a key driver of rural economic development. With global demand for fresh and processed horticultural products on the rise, this sector presents substantial opportunities for income generation, employment creation, and the overall improvement of rural livelihoods. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), global fruit and vegetable production reached 1.9 billion metric tons in 2022, with developing countries accounting for over 80% of the total output. This highlights the growing significance of horticulture in the global agri-food system and its central role in poverty reduction and economic diversification.

Horticulture is particularly well-suited to smallholder farming systems, which dominate the rural landscapes of many developing nations. High-value horticultural crops such as tomatoes, onions, mangoes, and citrus fruits typically offer better returns per hectare compared to staple crops. Moreover, horticulture contributes to improved household nutrition by increasing access to rich micronutrient foods. According to the FAO (2023), countries investing in horticultural value chains have seen notable improvements in both income levels and dietary diversity among rural populations.

Multidimensional Role of Horticulture

Horticulture plays a vital role in promoting economic resilience, livelihood enhancement, and environmental sustainability in rural areas. It provides significant opportunities for income generation and diversification, particularly through the cultivation of high-value crops such as berries, avocados, and exotic vegetables that command premium prices in both domestic and international markets. According to the World Bank (2022), horticulture contributes 30–50% higher income per hectare compared to staple crops like wheat and rice. This income advantage is further amplified through innovations in year-round production using greenhouse and hydroponic technologies. Controlled-environment agriculture (CEA), for example, has enabled consistent production cycles and increased productivity by 40–60% even in regions facing adverse climatic conditions (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023).

In addition to fresh produce, horticulture also offers lucrative opportunities in value addition and agro-processing. Post-harvest activities such as drying, canning, juicing, and packaging not only minimize losses but also multiply revenue. A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 2022) found that processed horticultural goods can yield two to three times more income than unprocessed produce. These gains directly benefit smallholder farmers and agro-entrepreneurs, offering avenues for upward economic mobility.

Horticulture is also a powerful engine for employment creation. Being a labor-intensive sector, it generates both direct and indirect employment in activities like planting, harvesting, sorting, grading, packaging, and transportation. The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2023) estimates that horticulture employs over 100 million people globally, with women constituting around 60% of the workforce in developing countries. Additionally, rural entrepreneurship is often stimulated by small-scale agro-processing units and farmer cooperatives, contributing to vibrant local economies. In India, for instance, the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) has created five million jobs since its inception in 2015 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2023).

Export potential is another compelling dimension of horticulture's impact. The global horticultural trade reached a value of $220 billion in 2022 (ITC, 2023), and developing countries have increasingly tapped into this lucrative market. Kenya has emerged as a major exporter of cut flowers, India of spices, and Mexico of avocados. These exports generate vital foreign exchange earnings. In 2022 alone, Kenya earned $1.2 billion from horticultural exports (KNBS, 2023), while Ethiopia's flower industry contributed $550 million (EBR, 2023).

Beyond economic benefits, horticulture contributes significantly to food security and nutrition. Increased production and accessibility of fruits and vegetables diversify diets and improve health outcomes. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) emphasizes that boosting fruit and vegetable consumption could reduce malnutrition by up to 20% in low-income regions. Urban and peri-urban horticulture, including rooftop gardens and vertical farming, also enhances food access in densely populated areas. The FAO (2023) reports that such initiatives now meet 15–20% of global food demand.

Environmentally, horticulture supports sustainable agricultural practices. Techniques like agroforestry and precision irrigation help reduce water usage by 30% and enhance carbon sequestration (World Bank, 2023).

Furthermore, diverse cropping systems used in horticulture promote biodiversity. A recent study in *Nature Sustainability* (2023) found that mixed horticultural farms support 50% more biodiversity compared to monoculture systems, reinforcing the sector's contribution to ecological resilience.

Strategies to Maximize Horticulture's Potential

Maximizing the potential of horticulture in rural economies requires a multifaceted approach that addresses infrastructural, technological, institutional, and policy-level challenges. One of the foundational strategies is infrastructure development, particularly in cold storage facilities, rural roads, and market linkages. Without access to proper storage and transport, a significant portion of horticultural produce is lost, especially in developing countries. Investments in rural infrastructure can reduce spoilage, improve quality maintenance, and increase access to distant markets, thereby enhancing farmer incomes. The World Bank (2023) highlights that improving cold chain logistics can cut post-harvest losses by up to 40% and significantly raise profitability.

Equally crucial is the adoption of modern agricultural technologies. Tools such as digital farming platforms, drones, and AI-driven pest and disease management systems enable farmers to monitor crop health, optimize inputs, and make informed decisions. These innovations improve yields, lower production costs, and promote environmental sustainability. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), the integration of technology into horticultural practices has led to a 25–30% increase in productivity in many smallholder systems.

Policy supports also plays a vital role in unlocking horticulture's economic benefits. Subsidies for inputs, incentives for exports, and capacity-building programs can significantly boost sector growth. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2023) emphasizes that targeted training programs and financial incentives empower rural producers, enhance competitiveness, and facilitate global market integration.

Finally, the promotion of farmer cooperatives strengthens collective bargaining power and helps reduce post-harvest losses through shared resources and knowledge. Cooperatives facilitate access to credit, training, and markets, making them essential tools for rural empowerment. As noted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2023), cooperative models have improved income stability and market access for thousands of horticultural producers across Africa and Asia.

Conclusion

Horticulture stands out as a transformative force in the economic revitalization of rural communities. Its ability to generate higher income per hectare, create extensive employment opportunities, and contribute significantly to export earnings underscores its strategic importance for sustainable development. As demonstrated by global trends and country-specific successes, horticulture not only boosts farm incomes but also enhances household nutrition, supports gender-inclusive employment, and stimulates rural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, its contributions to food security, biodiversity conservation, and climate-smart agricultural practices make it an essential component of future-proof rural economies. However, to fully harness this potential, targeted investments are required in infrastructure, technology adoption, policy support, and cooperative development. Cold chain logistics, digital farming tools, and AI-driven innovations must be scaled up to reduce losses and improve productivity. Simultaneously, enabling policies and grassroots institutional frameworks, such as farmer cooperatives, can empower smallholders and ensure more equitable access to markets and resources. With strategic support from governments, international organizations, and private stakeholders, horticulture can serve as a resilient and inclusive pathway toward rural prosperity. As global demand for diverse, high-quality horticultural products continues to grow, rural communities equipped with the right tools and support are well-positioned to become vital players in the global agri-food economy.

References: FAO; World Bank; IFAD; UNDP**;** IFPRI; ILO; ITC; Ministry of Agriculture; KNBS; EBR; Nature Sustainability; UNDP

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Enhancing Agricultural Extension Services in Pakistan

Agricultural extension services are vital for rural development and transformation in Pakistan. They empower farmers with crucial knowledge, boosting productivity and sustainability. However, various challenges continue to hamper their full potential.

Usman Tariq

4/8/2025

Agricultural extension services play a pivotal role in modernizing farming practices, increasing productivity, and fostering rural development in Pakistan. These services, delivered by government agencies, NGOs, and private institutions, provide critical support to farmers by equipping them with up-to-date knowledge, innovative technologies, and improved farming techniques tailored to local conditions. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2023), agriculture contributes 22.7% to Pakistan's GDP and employs 37.4% of the labor force, highlighting its central role in the national economy and rural livelihoods.

Despite its importance, the sector struggles with stagnating productivity, largely due to the inadequate reach and effectiveness of extension services. Many smallholder farmers lack timely access to technical guidance on crop selection, pest management, soil fertility, water conservation, and climate-resilient practices. As a result, yields per hectare for major crops such as wheat, rice, and cotton remain significantly below international benchmarks.

Furthermore, climate variability and environmental degradation exacerbate the challenges faced by rural farmers. In this context, effective extension services can serve as a lifeline—disseminating climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practices and building farmer resilience. Studies by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 2022) show that farmers who regularly engage with extension agents are more likely to adopt improved seed varieties, precision farming, and sustainable land management practices. Moreover, extension programs that integrate digital tools—such as mobile apps and SMS-based advisories—have shown promise in bridging information gaps, especially in remote areas. Strengthening agricultural extension in Pakistan through increased investment, capacity building, and public-private partnerships is essential for transforming the sector. Such improvements will not only enhance productivity and food security but also contribute to poverty reduction, youth employment, and inclusive rural development in the long run (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023).

Understanding agricultural extension services in Pakistan is essential to grasp the broader context of rural agricultural development. These services aim to bridge the gap between scientific research and on-ground farming practices by translating complex agricultural knowledge into actionable guidance for farmers. The most common extension methods include field training programs that cover areas such as crop management, pest control, soil health, and water conservation. Additionally, demonstration plots are used to practically illustrate the benefits of improved seed varieties, fertilizers, and farming techniques, giving farmers the opportunity to observe results firsthand before adopting new practices themselves. With the increasing penetration of mobile technology, digital platforms such as SMS alerts, mobile applications, and agricultural radio programs have also become effective tools for reaching dispersed rural populations with timely and location-specific advice. Another impactful model is the Farmer Field School (FFS), which emphasizes participatory learning and collective problem-solving among smallholder farmers to promote sustainable agriculture.

According to the Ministry of National Food Security & Research (MNFSR, 2023), Pakistan currently employs around 18,000 agricultural extension workers who serve an estimated 8 million farming households. Despite these efforts, the extension service coverage remains limited, with a farmer-to-extension-worker ratio of 1:450—more than double the 1:200 ratio recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022). This significant gap limits the effectiveness of information dissemination and the adoption of best practices, particularly in remote and under-resourced areas. As a result, many farmers continue to rely on outdated techniques that hinder productivity and reduce their resilience to climate change. Addressing this challenge requires not only hiring more extension workers but also enhancing their training, leveraging digital technologies, and fostering stronger collaboration between public institutions, research bodies, and private sector actors to ensure comprehensive, inclusive, and responsive extension service delivery.

Impact of Agricultural Extension Services on Rural Farming in Pakistan

Agricultural extension services have significantly influenced rural farming in Pakistan by facilitating knowledge transfer, improving productivity, promoting sustainable practices, and enhancing food security and gender inclusivity. These services effectively bridge the knowledge gap between research institutions and farmers by promoting high-yielding crop varieties such as hybrid wheat and drought-resistant cotton, along with climate-smart techniques like laser land leveling and drip irrigation. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) methods, which

reduce the overuse of chemical pesticides, are also actively promoted. According to a World Bank (2023) study, wheat yields among farmers receiving extension support in Punjab increased by 20–25% compared to those without such support, underscoring the tangible benefits of these services.

Extension services have also been instrumental in improving agricultural productivity and contributing to economic growth. Punjab's "Kissan Package" (2022), which combined input subsidies with technical training, resulted in a 15% increase in maize production (Punjab Agriculture Department, 2023). Similarly, in Sindh, horticulture extension initiatives enabled mango farmers to adopt better post-harvest handling techniques, cutting losses by 30% (Sindh Agriculture University, 2023). These outcomes highlight the importance of coordinated policies and farmer outreach in driving sectoral growth.

In promoting sustainable agriculture, conservation practices such as zero-tillage farming now cover approximately 2.5 million hectares, contributing to improved water use efficiency (ICARDA, 2023). The Prime Minister's Agriculture Emergency Program (2019–2024) trained 500,000 farmers in water-saving irrigation technologies, demonstrating the state's commitment to climate-resilient agriculture (MNFSR, 2023). Moreover, the National Food Security Policy (2022) integrates extension services with nutrition education, aiming to reduce malnutrition by 10% by 2025.

Gender inclusivity remains a pressing issue, as 74% of rural women participate in agriculture, yet only 5% receive formal extension support (UN Women, 2023). Initiatives like the "Women Agriculture Extension Workers" (WAEW) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have begun addressing this gap by training 2,000 women in 2022, resulting in an 18% increase in household incomes (KP Agriculture Extension Directorate, 2023). Additionally, digital literacy programs such as "Telenor Khushaal Zindagi" offer mobile-based advisories, empowering women with timely and relevant agricultural information.

Challenges Facing Agricultural Extension in Pakistan and Way Forward

Agricultural extension services in Pakistan face a multitude of structural, financial, and operational challenges that hinder their ability to support rural farming communities effectively. One of the most pressing issues is limited funding, as Pakistan allocates less than 0.5% of its agricultural GDP to extension services, in stark contrast to countries like India and China, which invest between 1% and 2% (IFPRI, 2023). This underinvestment results in inadequate staffing, training, and operational resources. Compounding the issue is poor infrastructure, which severely restricts farmer access to extension services. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2023), only 40% of rural farmers can reach extension agents due to underdeveloped road networks. Additionally, digital outreach is constrained by low internet penetration, which stands at just 25% in rural regions (PTA, 2023).

Another significant challenge is the resistance to change among smallholder farmers. The Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (2023) reports that 70% of these farmers continue to rely on outdated, traditional farming practices, limiting the adoption of improved technologies. Climate change further complicates the situation. In 2022, catastrophic floods damaged 4.4 million acres of cropland, yet only 15% of affected farmers had received training in climate adaptation (NDMA, 2023). Moreover, fragmented coordination among over 50 NGOs and government bodies providing overlapping services leads to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts (Asian Development Bank, 2023).

To overcome these barriers, several key recommendations are essential. Increasing budget allocation to 1% of agricultural GDP, in line with FAO recommendations, would significantly strengthen the extension system. Expanding digital extension through SMS, WhatsApp, and AI-driven platforms like the "Crop2Cash" app could improve outreach and information dissemination. Empowering women by training 10,000 female extension workers by 2030, as proposed by UN Women, would enhance inclusivity and effectiveness. Encouraging public-private partnerships with agri-tech firms such as Bayer and Engro can bring innovation and scalability. Lastly, integrating climate adaptation training, emphasizing drought-resistant crops and water-smart practices, will build resilience among farming communities and ensure long-term agricultural sustainability.

Conclusion

Agricultural extension services are a cornerstone of rural development and agricultural transformation in Pakistan. By equipping farmers with timely, localized, and research-backed knowledge, these services have demonstrated clear benefits in boosting productivity, improving livelihoods, and promoting sustainability. However, challenges such as underfunding, poor infrastructure, limited digital reach, climate vulnerabilities, and gender exclusion continue to hamper their full potential.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, scaling up investment, fostering digital innovation, enhancing gender inclusivity, and forging robust public-private partnerships. Strengthening coordination among stakeholders and aligning extension efforts with climate resilience and food security goals will be vital. With strategic reforms and commitment from both government and private actors, agricultural extension services can become a powerful vehicle for inclusive and sustainable rural growth in Pakistan.

References: FAO; PBS; World Bank; MNFSR; IFPRI; IFAD; MNFSR; Punjab Agriculture Department; Sindh Agriculture University; ICARDA; UN Women; PTA; NDMA; Asian Development Bank

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Green Energy Driving Rural Development in Pakistan

Discover how green energy, including solar, wind, and biomass, is transforming rural economic development in Pakistan. With over 60% of the population in rural areas, renewable energy is addressing energy poverty and creating jobs, while also offering cleaner alternatives to fossil fuels.

Jawad Raza

4/18/2025

In recent years, Pakistan has increasingly turned to green energy projects as a sustainable solution to energy poverty, environmental degradation, and rural economic stagnation. With over 60% of Pakistan's population living in rural areas (World Bank, 2023), renewable energy presents a viable pathway to economic empowerment, job creation, and energy security. The transition toward solar, wind, hydro, and biomass energy sources has brought about measurable improvements in rural livelihoods. Solar energy has gained momentum, with off-grid solar home systems and mini-grids providing electricity to remote villages, reducing reliance on expensive diesel generators and unreliable grid connections. This has significantly lowered energy costs for rural households and businesses, while extending productive hours and improving quality of life.

Furthermore, green energy projects have spurred employment opportunities in rural areas, from solar panel installation and maintenance to training and entrepreneurial ventures. Local job creation in renewable energy sectors has not only reduced migration to urban centers but also promoted inclusive development. In agriculture, access to clean energy has improved water pumping and irrigation systems, boosting crop yields and enabling farmers to increase production and income. Renewable energy has also attracted investment in rural areas, fostering small-scale industries and enabling digital connectivity that was previously hindered by lack of electricity.

Government initiatives such as the Alternative and Renewable Energy Policy (2019) and support from international donors have enhanced the feasibility of rural green energy programs. Moreover, green energy has led to improvements in rural infrastructure, such as roads and communication networks, by enabling construction and service delivery powered by clean energy. Case studies from Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan demonstrate how community-owned solar and hydro projects have transformed isolated villages into self-reliant hubs. As green energy adoption continues to grow, it holds the promise of not only environmental sustainability but also long-term socio-economic upliftment for Pakistan's rural population.

Economic Benefits of Green Energy in Rural Pakistan

Green energy development in rural Pakistan offers wide-ranging economic benefits, with impacts felt at the household, farm, and regional levels. One of the most significant advantages is cost savings and improved energy efficiency. Over 50 million people in rural Pakistan lack reliable electricity access (UNDP, 2022), often relying on costly diesel generators. Renewable energy solutions such as solar microgrids, home systems, and biogas plants provide decentralized and affordable alternatives. According to the Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB, 2023), solar systems have reduced electricity expenses by 30–50% in many rural households. Similarly, biogas plants save farmers between PKR 10,000–15,000 monthly by replacing LPG and firewood use (PCRET, 2022).

The green energy sector is also becoming a significant source of employment. In 2023, over 50,000 jobs were created in Pakistan's solar industry alone, primarily in installation and maintenance (Pakistan Solar Association). The wind energy sector employed more than 5,000 workers in Sindh's Jhimpir Wind Corridor, where technical training programs now equip rural youth with specialized skills in turbine operations. Biomass and biogas projects in Punjab and KPK have generated over 20,000 jobs (PCRET). Such employment opportunities are essential in diversifying local economies and reducing rural-urban migration.

Green energy also introduces new revenue models for farmers. In Bahawalpur, for instance, land leased for the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park brings in PKR 50 million annually for local landowners. Agro-voltaic models, where crops are grown under solar panels, offer the dual benefit of increased agricultural output and energy generation. Rural industries, especially dairy and textile SMEs, benefit from energy independence as solar and biogas solutions reduce dependence on volatile fossil fuel prices. In Punjab's dairy sector, biogas usage has cut energy costs by 40%, while solar-powered cold storage has minimized milk spoilage.

Lastly, green energy infrastructure brings broader rural development. Projects in Gilgit-Baltistan have delivered electricity 24/7 to remote villages via 150+ micro-hydropower units, encouraging new businesses like e-commerce and digital services. These integrated economic benefits make green energy a cornerstone of sustainable rural transformation in Pakistan.

Challenges & Solutions

Despite the growing potential of green energy in rural Pakistan, several challenges hinder its widespread adoption. One of the most significant barriers is financing. The high upfront costs of installing solar panels, biogas digesters, or wind turbines often deter rural households and small farmers who

lack disposable income or access to credit. In response, the State Bank of Pakistan has launched a Solar Financing Scheme that offers low-interest loans specifically tailored for farmers and rural entrepreneurs. This initiative aims to ease financial constraints and make renewable energy systems more accessible.

Grid integration is another pressing issue. In many rural areas, the existing electrical infrastructure is outdated or insufficient to accommodate decentralized energy generation from renewable sources. Fluctuating power supply and the absence of storage solutions limit the reliability of solar or wind energy. To address this, hybrid solar-wind systems equipped with battery storage are being promoted. These systems ensure continuous energy supply and reduce dependence on unstable national grids, making them especially effective for off-grid or semi-grid rural zones.

Policy and regulatory bottlenecks also slow progress. Previously, a lack of incentives and restrictive licensing discouraged rural communities from investing in renewable energy. However, the introduction of net metering policies now allows individuals and businesses to sell excess solar power back to the grid, turning energy consumers into producers and creating financial incentives for adoption.

Looking ahead, Pakistan's Alternative Energy Policy envisions 60% of the country's energy mix to come from renewables by 2030. With strategic investments under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) focused on wind and solar projects, rural Pakistan is on the cusp of a green economic transformation. Effective implementation of financing schemes, infrastructure upgrades, and enabling policies will be crucial to ensure that renewable energy becomes a driving force for inclusive rural development.

Conclusion

Green energy has emerged as a powerful catalyst for rural economic development in Pakistan. With over 60% of the population living in rural areas, the expansion of renewable energy sources—solar, wind, hydro, and biomass—has begun to address long-standing challenges of energy poverty, economic marginalization, and environmental degradation. These technologies not only offer cleaner and more affordable alternatives to fossil fuels but also open avenues for income generation, job creation, and agricultural modernization. From reducing electricity costs in rural households to powering cold storage systems that minimize food spoilage, green energy has brought tangible improvements to everyday life.

Additionally, renewable energy projects have fostered local employment, reduced rural-urban migration, and encouraged digital entrepreneurship. Community-owned energy systems in regions like Gilgit-Baltistan and Sindh are already showcasing how decentralized power can transform isolated areas into thriving economic zones. While barriers such as high initial investment costs, limited infrastructure, and policy gaps remain, recent initiatives like low-interest loans and net metering policies signal progress.

Looking ahead, Pakistan's ambitious goal of achieving 60% renewable energy by 2030, backed by CPEC investments, offers a historic opportunity to reshape its rural landscape. Ensuring equitable access to clean energy will be vital for building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable rural economy.

References: World Bank;UNDP; AEDB; PCRET

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Rural-Urban Migration in Pakistan: Opportunities & Challenges

Explore the impact of rural-urban migration in Pakistan, highlighting its role in urban labor markets and the challenges it poses to infrastructure, public services, and rural development. Understand how these trends affect socio-economic disparities and national food security.

Mubeen Sohail

4/23/2025

Rural-urban migration, the movement of people from villages to cities, is a defining socio-economic trend in Pakistan, driven by both push factors such as rural poverty, underemployment, water scarcity, and climate-induced crop failures, and pull factors like access to better-paying jobs, improved healthcare, and quality education. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2023), 40% of Pakistan's population now lives in urban areas, up from 32% in 1998, with major cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad receiving a significant share of the rural migrant population each year. This demographic shift has reshaped the social and economic landscape of both urban and rural Pakistan.

In urban areas, migration has contributed to economic dynamism by supplying a young, mobile labor force essential for industrial, construction, and service sectors. However, this rapid influx also creates immense pressure on housing, transportation, sanitation, and public services, particularly in informal settlements where most low-income migrants reside. Overcrowded cities are increasingly unable to meet the basic needs of their growing populations, leading to social marginalization and urban poverty.

Conversely, rural areas face a depletion of labor, particularly among youth, weakening agricultural productivity and leaving behind a vulnerable population of women, children, and the elderly. Remittances sent back home can help reduce rural poverty, but they often fail to compensate for the loss of manpower and community cohesion. The migration of skilled labor also results in a "brain drain" from rural regions.

To mitigate these challenges, balanced regional development policies are critical. Investments in rural infrastructure, job creation, climate adaptation, and digital connectivity can reduce migration pressures, while urban planning reforms are needed to accommodate growing populations sustainably. Recognizing rural-urban migration as both a symptom and driver of development can guide policies that support inclusive, equitable growth across Pakistan.

Urban Economic Growth and Development

Urban economic growth and development in Pakistan has been significantly shaped by the influx of rural migrants who fuel labor-intensive sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and services. The construction industry, contributing around 9% to Pakistan's GDP (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023), relies heavily on migrant workers for both skilled and unskilled labor. Similarly, manufacturing hubs like Sialkot and Gujranwala attract rural labor for their textile and sports goods sectors. Migrants also take up employment in urban services such as transport, domestic work, and retail. However, despite their contributions, many face limited upward mobility due to low wages and the prevalence of informal employment, which comprises 68% of urban jobs according to the ILO (2023).

Migration also expands urban consumer markets, with increased demand for food, housing, transportation, and other services. This has led to the growth of local businesses and real estate development. In Karachi alone, the informal economy, driven by small-scale, often migrant-run enterprises, is valued at an estimated $50 billion annually (Karachi Chamber of Commerce, 2023). Urban innovation and productivity are further enhanced by skilled migrants who gravitate towards tech hubs like Lahore's Arfa Karim Technology Park, contributing to startup growth. Additionally, remittances from urban migrants, amounting to $5 billion annually (SBP, 2023), support rural households and stimulate agricultural and small business investment.

Despite these economic gains, rapid urbanization has also brought considerable strain to infrastructure. Karachi's population has swelled to over 20 million, far outpacing the city's capacity to provide basic services like water, sanitation, and housing. Traffic congestion, waste mismanagement, and proliferation of informal settlements (katchi abadis) have become chronic issues. Urban development projects like Lahore's Metro Bus System and the Ravi Urban Development Project aim to address these pressures but face delays and governance challenges. Addressing infrastructure needs remains essential for sustaining the economic benefits of urban migration.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Rural-Urban Migration on Pakistan's Development

Urban economies in Pakistan are increasingly burdened by multiple challenges stemming from rapid rural-to-urban migration and poor urban planning. Overcrowding in major cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad has led to the unchecked expansion of informal settlements. In Karachi alone, nearly 40% of the population lives in slums or katchi abadis, where access to clean water, sanitation, and secure housing is limited (UN-Habitat, 2023).

The lack of affordable housing options pushes many migrants into unsafe and overcrowded environments. Informal employment dominates the urban labor market, with most migrants earning as little as PKR 300–500 per day without job security, legal contracts, or benefits (Labour Force Survey, 2023). The exploitation of child labor remains rampant in sectors such as domestic work and brick kilns. Environmental degradation further compounds these issues, with Lahore being ranked the most polluted city globally in 2023 by IQAir. Urban air pollution and water scarcity, now affecting 70% of urban dwellers (WWF, 2023), have made life in cities increasingly unsustainable.

The economic consequences of migration are also deeply felt in rural areas. As young men and women leave villages in search of better opportunities, agricultural communities experience severe labor shortages. In parts of Sindh and Punjab, there is a reported 20% decline in farm labor availability, threatening crop yields and national food security (FAO, 2023; Ministry of National Food Security, 2023). While remittances from urban migrants, totaling $5 billion annually (SBP, 2023), help fund education, healthcare, and consumption, they also foster a culture of dependency that discourages local entrepreneurship and innovation. The migration of skilled workers, including teachers, doctors, and engineers, has also caused a brain drain in rural regions. With only 30% of rural youth enrolled in vocational programs (NAVTEC, 2023), the skill gap continues to widen.

At the national level, rural-urban migration has contributed to economic diversification, with the labor force shifting from agriculture, which now contributes 19% to GDP, to industry (28%) and services (53%) (PBS, 2023). However, this growth is unevenly distributed. Punjab's per capita income is twice that of Balochistan ($1,800 vs. $900), highlighting persistent urban-rural disparities (World Bank, 2023). Unequal resource distribution, particularly water, has sparked interprovincial tensions, as seen in Sindh's frequent disputes with upstream provinces. Moreover, the urban youth bulge, 64% of the urban population is under 30 (UNDP, 2023), demands urgent attention in job creation, education, and civic engagement. Simultaneously, rural areas are increasingly home to an aging population, straining traditional social and economic support systems. These trends underscore the urgent need for balanced, inclusive development strategies.

Policy Recommendations

To address the complex challenges arising from rural-urban migration in Pakistan, a holistic and inclusive policy approach is essential. Strengthening rural economies is critical to reducing migration pressure on urban centers. This can be achieved through investment in agri-tech solutions such as drip irrigation, solar-powered farms, and climate-smart practices, which enhance agricultural productivity and resilience. Expanding vocational training through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Vocational Institutes can equip rural youth with market-relevant skills, reducing the need to migrate for employment.

On the urban side, sustainable planning must prioritize affordable housing and efficient transport systems. Projects like the Naya Pakistan Housing Program and the expansion of public transport networks, including the Islamabad Metro and the proposed Karachi Circular Railway, can help absorb migrant populations while reducing congestion and informal settlements. Furthermore, formalizing migrant labor is crucial for improving livelihoods and reducing exploitation. Enforcing minimum wage laws and registering informal workers for social security benefits can protect workers' rights. Strict enforcement of anti-child labor laws with legal penalties is needed to eliminate exploitative practices in sectors such as domestic work and brick kilns.

Remittances, which currently total around $5 billion annually, should be harnessed for long-term development. Promoting microfinance initiatives can enable rural households to invest in businesses, education, and infrastructure. Expanding access to digital banking platforms like JazzCash and Easypaisa can streamline remittance flows and improve financial inclusion in underserved areas. Together, these policy measures can help balance development between rural and urban Pakistan, reduce poverty, and foster inclusive economic growth.

Conclusion

Rural-urban migration in Pakistan presents both opportunities and challenges that shape the country's economic trajectory and social fabric. While migration contributes significantly to urban labor markets, consumer demand, and remittance flows, it also exerts immense pressure on urban infrastructure, public services, and the environment. Simultaneously, rural areas suffer from labor shortages, skill drain, and growing socio-economic disparities. If left unaddressed, these trends could undermine national food security, rural development, and social cohesion.

However, migration can be a powerful driver of inclusive growth if managed through balanced and strategic policymaking. Strengthening rural economies through agri-tech investments, vocational training, and climate adaptation can reduce distress migration while revitalizing rural livelihoods. In urban areas, integrated planning for housing, transport, and public services is vital to accommodate expanding populations sustainably. Formalizing informal labor, safeguarding workers' rights, and channeling remittances into productive rural investments can further enhance the benefits of migration.

Ultimately, Pakistan must view rural-urban migration not as a problem to be contained but as a structural shift to be managed. By aligning development

strategies across rural and urban divides, the country can transform migration into a tool for equity, resilience, and economic progress. A well-coordinated approach is key to ensuring that migration supports, not hinders, Pakistan's sustainable development goals.

References: PBS; World Bank; SBP; UN-Habitat; ILO; Karachi Chamber of Commerce; Labour Force Survey; WWF; IQAir; FAO; Ministry of National Food Security; NAVTEC; UNDP

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Climate-Smart Agriculture: A Sustainable Solution

Discover how climate-smart agriculture (CSA) can transform Pakistan's farming sector. Learn about sustainable practices like drip irrigation that enhance productivity, mitigate climate risks, and secure livelihoods for resource-poor farmers while contributing to economic growth.

Sanna Rind

4/25/2025

Climate change poses one of the most significant threats to agricultural sustainability and food security, particularly for resource-poor farmers in developing countries like Pakistan. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), global temperatures have risen by approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, leading to increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall. These climatic shifts disproportionately affect smallholder farmers, who often cultivate less than 2 hectares of land and lack the financial and technical resources to adapt. The vulnerability of these farmers is compounded by limited access to weather forecasts, insurance, adaptive technologies, and institutional support.

In Pakistan, where agriculture contributes 22.7% of GDP and employs 37.4% of the labor force (Pakistan Economic Survey 2022-23), climate-induced vulnerabilities threaten the livelihoods of millions. Rising temperatures, water scarcity, and soil degradation are already reducing crop yields, with wheat and rice production projected to decline by 8–10% by 2050 (World Bank, 2023). Flash floods like those in 2022 and prolonged dry spells in Balochistan and Sindh further destabilize farming systems.

To combat these challenges, Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) has emerged as a transformative approach that enhances productivity, builds resilience, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. CSA promotes the use of drought-tolerant seeds, efficient irrigation systems like drip and sprinkler methods, improved soil fertility management, and agroforestry. It also involves strengthening early warning systems, insurance schemes, and capacity-building for farmers. Adoption of CSA practices can lead to a 20–30% increase in productivity and help stabilize incomes for rural households. Additionally, CSA supports mitigation by reducing methane emissions from rice cultivation and livestock, and by increasing carbon sequestration through sustainable land use. For Pakistan to build a resilient and food-secure future, mainstreaming CSA into national policies and extension services is imperative.

Understanding Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)

Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) is a comprehensive and adaptive approach that seeks to address the interlinked challenges of climate change, food security, and sustainable development. By aligning agricultural practices with environmental, social, and economic goals, CSA offers a pathway to ensure long-term agricultural productivity while minimizing environmental harm. At its core, CSA is built on three interconnected pillars: increasing productivity and incomes, enhancing climate resilience, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This means not only growing more food but doing so in a way that sustains the natural resource base and enables farmers, particularly smallholders, to withstand climate-induced shocks.

Productivity is enhanced through the adoption of high-yielding, drought-resistant crop varieties, precision agriculture technologies, and improved agronomic practices. These measures help optimize resource use, increase efficiency, and ultimately raise farm incomes. At the same time, CSA strengthens resilience by promoting techniques such as agroforestry, conservation tillage, and water-saving irrigation systems, which improve soil health, maintain biodiversity, and buffer against climatic extremes like droughts and floods. Equally important is the focus on mitigation—CSA supports the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging practices like reduced use of chemical fertilizers, carbon sequestration through reforestation, and the integration of renewable energy sources in farming operations.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022), adopting CSA practices can increase crop yields by 15–40% while reducing agricultural emissions by up to 30%. These outcomes are particularly crucial for countries like Pakistan, where climate change is already compromising agricultural output and rural livelihoods. By mainstreaming CSA into national policy frameworks, investment programs, and agricultural extension systems, Pakistan can not only safeguard its food security but also contribute to global climate action goals. CSA, therefore, represents a forward-looking, evidence-based strategy essential for building a more sustainable and resilient agricultural future.

Economic Benefits of CSA for Pakistani Farmers

The adoption of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) offers substantial economic benefits for Pakistani farmers, particularly in enhancing productivity, improving climate resilience, and reducing operational costs. Evidence from multiple regions of the country underscores that CSA is not only environmentally sustainable but also economically viable. For instance, a

2021 study conducted in Sindh and published in *Sustainability* (MDPI) found that farmers who integrated CSA techniques—such as crop diversification, mulching, and drip irrigation—experienced an average increase of PKR 16,125 per acre in net returns, marking a 31% improvement over traditional farming methods. In Punjab, the use of laser land leveling and zero tillage has led to a 20–25% increase in wheat yields while reducing water consumption by 30% (Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, 2022). Similarly, in rain-fed areas, a World Bank (2023) study reported that CSA adoption can raise maize, and sorghum yields by up to 35%, with input cost savings of around 40% due to reduced reliance on synthetic fertilizers.

CSA also plays a critical role in mitigating risks associated with climate change, a pressing concern for Pakistan, which ranks among the top 10 most climate-vulnerable countries (Global Climate Risk Index, 2024). Farmers frequently lose 30–50% of their crops due to climate shocks such as droughts and floods. CSA practices like the use of drought-tolerant seed varieties, developed by institutions like CIMMYT, alongside early warning systems from the Pakistan Meteorological Department, enable farmers to make informed decisions and better prepare for adverse weather. A 2023 UNDP-funded pilot in Tharparkar demonstrated that weather-based advisories improved planting schedules and increased crop income by 24%.

CSA also contributes to significant cost savings through improved resource efficiency. Drip irrigation can cut water use by up to 60%, which is vital in a country where 90% of freshwater is consumed by agriculture (IMF, 2023). Integrated Pest Management (IPM) reduces pesticide costs by up to 50% while maintaining yield quality. Furthermore, solar-powered tube wells reduce diesel reliance, saving farmers PKR 50,000–70,000 annually per acre (Alternative Energy Development Board, 2023). These combined benefits make CSA an essential strategy for enhancing agricultural sustainability and rural economic well-being in Pakistan.

Challenges to CSA Adoption in Pakistan

Despite the proven benefits of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), its adoption across Pakistan remains significantly limited due to several structural, financial, and institutional barriers. One of the foremost obstacles is the high initial investment required for CSA technologies. For example, drip irrigation systems—one of the cornerstones of CSA—cost between PKR 150,000 to 250,000 per acre, a prohibitive amount for the average smallholder farmer who owns less than two hectares of land. Compounding this issue is limited access to financial resources; less than 25% of Pakistani farmers can access formal credit channels (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023), making it nearly impossible to invest in advanced, climate-resilient infrastructure.

Another key challenge is the widespread lack of awareness and technical knowledge about CSA practices. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2022), only 18% of farmers are even aware of CSA techniques. The existing agricultural extension services are under-resourced and often unable to provide timely or relevant information to farmers. As a result, new technologies and practices fail to reach those who need them most. Additionally, digital tools such as mobile advisory platforms remain underutilized due to connectivity issues and low digital literacy among rural populations.

Gender disparities further inhibit CSA's scalability. While women constitute a substantial share of the agricultural workforce, only 5% of female farmers have access to CSA training opportunities (UN Women, 2023). Restrictive landownership laws and cultural norms limit women's control over resources, reducing their capacity to invest in or adopt new farming methods. Addressing gender inequality is critical to ensuring broad-based CSA adoption.

Market and policy-level barriers also play a role. The lack of price stability for crops deters farmers from making long-term investments in sustainable practices. Moreover, there are limited subsidies or insurance schemes tailored specifically to climate-resilient farming, leaving farmers exposed to weather-related risks without financial protection.

To address these challenges, Pakistan needs targeted policy interventions. Financial incentives like expanding the Kissan Card program to include CSA technologies and introducing weather-indexed insurance schemes, like India's Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, would reduce investment risks. Revitalizing agricultural extension services through digital platforms and establishing CSA demonstration farms in each district can enhance awareness and practical training. Gender-inclusive policies must prioritize microloans, training for women, and reforms in land tenure laws. Finally, partnerships with private sector companies and NGOs like FAO and IFAD can help mobilize affordable CSA tools and fund pilot initiatives, setting the stage for broader national adoption.

Conclusion

Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) presents a transformative solution to the escalating climate threats faced by Pakistan's resource-poor farmers. With agriculture forming the backbone of the rural economy and a significant contributor to national GDP and employment, building resilience in this sector is both a developmental and economic imperative. CSA offers a comprehensive pathway to mitigate climate risks, enhance productivity, reduce emissions, and secure farmer livelihoods through sustainable practices such as drip irrigation, drought-tolerant crops, integrated pest management, and renewable energy adoption. Evidence from national and international studies demonstrates that CSA adoption leads to

increased yields, reduced input costs, and greater climate adaptability.

Despite these gains, widespread implementation remains hindered by high upfront costs, limited access to credit, weak extension services, gender inequality, and inadequate market and policy support. Addressing these challenges requires an enabling policy environment that includes subsidies for CSA technologies, accessible farmer financing, gender-responsive training, and investment in infrastructure like cold chains and advisory systems. Strengthening partnerships between government, private sector, and civil society will be essential to scale adoption.

Mainstreaming CSA across Pakistan's agricultural landscape not only enhances food security and economic resilience but also contributes to global climate action goals. The time to act is now—through bold, inclusive, and sustained investment in climate-smart solutions.

References: IPCC; FAO; World Bank; State Bank of Pakistan; UNDP; Pakistan Economic Survey; Global Climate Risk Index; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics; UN Women

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at sanarind992@gmail.com

Urban-Rural Food Linkages & Informal Markets for Food Security

Explore the vital role of urban-rural food linkages and informal food markets in global food security. These systems provide food accessibility, support smallholder farmers, and sustain livelihoods amidst challenges posed by urbanization, climate change, and economic uncertainty.

Zameer Ahmed

4/25/2025

The global food system is under immense pressure due to rapid urbanization, climate disruptions, and economic volatility. With over half the world's population now living in cities, the relationships between rural food producers and urban consumers are becoming increasingly vital for sustainable food security. Urban-rural food linkages serve as conduits for the movement of not only food, but also labor, capital, and information. These interactions form the backbone of resilient food systems, influencing everything from farm-level productivity to consumer nutrition and affordability. As urban demand continues to rise, particularly among low-income populations, these linkages determine how effectively cities can access safe, nutritious, and affordable food.

Informal food markets play a central role in sustaining these connections. Often overlooked in official policy and investment frameworks, they are in fact the primary food source for over 2 billion people globally. In many low- and middle-income countries, informal vendors deliver fresh produce, dairy, and meat to urban neighborhoods that lack access to modern supermarkets. These markets also support millions of rural and urban livelihoods, from farmers and transporters to traders and processors, fostering economic inclusion and reducing rural poverty. Socially, they maintain dietary diversity by offering culturally preferred foods. Environmentally, their short supply chains can minimize carbon emissions and food waste.

However, informal food systems face significant constraints. Poor infrastructure, lack of food safety oversight, inadequate financing, and exposure to shocks like pandemics and climate events leave them vulnerable. Policy neglect often exacerbates these challenges, as urban planning and food regulation tend to favor formal investments. Strengthening urban-rural food linkages requires integrated policy investing in infrastructure, protecting vendor rights, formalizing without overregulating, and improving rural-urban transport and communication networks. Supporting informal markets can ultimately bridge the urban-rural divide, improve resilience, and build equitable food systems for the future.

The Critical Role of Informal Food Markets

Informal food markets play a pivotal role in feeding urban populations and sustaining rural economies, particularly across the Global South. In regions where formal retail systems often fail to reach marginalized communities, informal markets bridge critical gaps in accessibility and affordability. These markets dominate urban food supply chains, accounting for 70–90% of food distribution in sub-Saharan Africa, 60–80% in South and Southeast Asia, and around 50% in Latin America's urban centers (World Bank, IFPRI, ECLAC, 2022–2023). Unlike formal supermarkets, which are typically concentrated in affluent areas, informal vendors are embedded in slums, peri-urban settlements, and transit corridors, ensuring that even the poorest households can access fresh and culturally relevant foods. In cities like Nairobi, 85% of residents depend on these vendors (KNBS, 2023), while in India, over 50 million street vendors form an essential part of the urban food economy (NSSO, 2022).

These markets are equally crucial for rural producers, particularly smallholder farmers who grow 80% of the food in Africa and Asia (IFAD, 2023). Informal trade networks allow them to bypass costly intermediaries, increasing their income by up to 40% and reducing post-harvest losses from 30% to as low as 15% (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2023). They also help maintain agrobiodiversity by promoting indigenous crops often excluded from formal supply chains (Bioversity International, 2022). In Nigeria, vibrant informal systems like the "Mai Shai" tea stalls and "Yam Markets" enable rural producers to access Lagos' vast consumer base of 20 million, contributing over $3 billion annually to the economy (NBS, 2023). Far from being peripheral, informal food markets are the backbone of inclusive and resilient food systems, linking the countryside to the city while supporting nutrition, income, and cultural heritage.

Benefits of Urban-Rural Food Linkages

Urban-rural food linkages generate substantial benefits across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, making them vital for inclusive and sustainable development. Economically, these linkages provide a critical source of employment, particularly in urban informal sectors. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) estimates that 10-30% of urban jobs in Africa are tied to informal food trade. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, approximately 2 million individuals are engaged as street food vendors, playing an essential role in the city's daily food supply and economy. Moreover, these linkages contribute to poverty reduction. In Vietnam, integrated rural-urban vegetable supply chains lifted 500,000

farmers out of poverty by enhancing market access and reducing intermediary exploitation (UNDP, 2023).

Socially and culturally, urban-rural food systems empower marginalized groups, especially women. In many developing countries, women constitute between 60–80% of informal food vendors (UN Women, 2023). In Ghana, the "Kayayei" (female porters) generate essential income by transporting food from rural farms to urban markets, supporting both their families and local economies. Additionally, these markets preserve cultural food traditions Mexico's tianguis markets, for example, promote the sale of native maize varieties and traditional herbs, helping to maintain local food heritage.

From an environmental perspective, short and direct supply chains characteristic of informal markets significantly reduce the carbon footprint associated with food transport, by an estimated 30–50% compared to formal supermarket supply chains (WRI, 2023). These systems also reduce food waste, with direct farm-to-market sales lowering post-harvest losses by 20% (FAO, 2023), thanks to quicker turnover and minimal packaging.

However, informal markets face critical challenges. Many vendors operate without legal recognition, making them vulnerable to harassment and eviction. In Kenya alone, over 6,000 vendors were forcibly removed in 2020 (Amnesty International, 2023), while in India, only 10% of vendors have formal permits (NSSO, 2023). Poor infrastructure leads to high post-harvest losses, 40% of food in Africa spoils due to inadequate storage and roads (AfDB, 2023), and limited food safety enforcement, as fewer than 5% of vendors in Lagos have refrigeration (NAFDAC, 2023). Furthermore, external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic devastated incomes for 60% of African vendors (IFPRI, 2023), and climate events like Pakistan's 2022 floods halved vegetable supplies to Karachi, exposing the fragility of these crucial food systems.

Policy Recommendations for Resilient Food Systems

To build resilient and inclusive food systems, targeted policy interventions are essential to strengthen urban-rural food linkages and support the millions who depend on informal markets for their livelihoods and food security. Legal recognition is the first step. Governments should issue vending permits to integrate informal vendors into the formal economy, as demonstrated by the Philippines' "Presidential Decree on Street Vendors," which provides a legal framework for vendor rights and responsibilities. Similarly, urban municipalities can designate permanent market spaces, such as Bogotá's "Plazas de Mercado," offering vendors secure locations and improving market access for consumers.

Infrastructure development is equally critical. Establishing cold storage hubs, such as Ethiopia's "Rural Cooling Centers," can significantly reduce post-harvest losses and enhance food quality, while upgrading feeder roads, as seen in Rwanda's agricultural corridors, improves transportation efficiency and reduces spoilage during transit. Integrating digital and financial technologies also enhances system resilience. Mobile payment platforms like Kenya's M-Pesa allow secure and efficient transactions between farmers and vendors, improving cash flow and reducing transaction costs. India's "eNAM" platform (Electronic National Agriculture Market) exemplifies how e-commerce can connect farmers directly to urban buyers, bypassing exploitative intermediaries.

Climate-smart policies must also be prioritized. Weather-indexed insurance schemes, such as those pioneered in Senegal, provide farmers with compensation based on climatic conditions, rather than traditional damage assessments, enabling faster and more predictable payouts. Subsidizing drought-resistant crop varieties, as practiced under Zimbabwe's Pfumvudza program, encourages climate-resilient agriculture, reducing the vulnerability of both farmers and food supply chains.

Together, these strategies can help formalize and stabilize informal food markets while fostering equitable access, sustainability, and resilience across the food system. Policymakers, NGOs, and international partners must collaborate to implement these reforms on a scale, ensuring that urban-rural food linkages continue to serve as lifelines for both producers and consumers amid evolving global challenges.

Conclusion

Urban-rural food linkages and informal food markets are vital pillars of global food security, especially in the face of urbanization, climate change, and economic uncertainty. These systems ensure food accessibility for millions, support smallholder farmers, and sustain livelihoods across both rural and urban communities. Despite their central role, informal markets remain under-recognized and under-supported by formal policy frameworks. They face numerous challenges, including legal marginalization, infrastructural inadequacies, and exposure to external shocks, from pandemics to climate disasters.

Strengthening these linkages requires integrated, inclusive policy responses that protect vendor rights, improve infrastructure, and expand access to financial tools and climate-resilient technologies. Legal recognition of informal vendors, investments in cold storage and feeder roads, and digital platforms for market access can significantly enhance the resilience and efficiency of these networks. Climate adaptation strategies such as weather-indexed insurance and drought-tolerant seeds further safeguard both producers and supply chains.

By embracing the full potential of urban-rural food systems and informal markets, policymakers can build more equitable, inclusive, and resilient food systems. Such efforts are not just a pathway to food security, they are a foundation for sustainable development, poverty

reduction, and economic empowerment. The future of food lies in bridging the gap between the rural farm and the urban fork.

References: FAO: World Bank: ILO; AfDB; IFPRI; ECLAC; KNBS; NSSO; Bioversity International; IFAD; NBS; WRI; Amnesty International; NAFDAC

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at zameerchachar223@gmail.com

Land Tenure Security in Sindh: Boosting Agriculture

Explore how land tenure security is crucial for enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting rural development, and ensuring environmental sustainability in Sindh, Pakistan. Learn about the impacts of informal arrangements on farmers and the economy.

Sadia Brohi

4/29/2025

Agriculture remains the backbone of Pakistan's economy, contributing approximately 18.9% to the national GDP and employing nearly 42% of the labor force, according to the Pakistan Economic Survey (2022–23). Within this national framework, Sindh plays a pivotal role, producing around 25% of the country's total agricultural output. Agriculture is not only a key economic sector in Sindh but also a vital source of livelihood, with nearly 60% of the province's rural population dependent on it for employment and sustenance (Sindh Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Despite this centrality, the agricultural sector in Sindh continues to face multiple structural constraints, chief among them is land tenure insecurity.

Land tenure insecurity in Sindh stems from outdated land records, informal tenancy arrangements, and an inequitable distribution of land ownership. Many farmers, particularly smallholders and tenants, lack formal land titles or lease agreements, leaving them vulnerable to eviction and exploitation. Without secure rights to land, farmers are discouraged from making long-term investments in soil fertility, irrigation infrastructure, or mechanization, which in turn inhibits productivity gains. Furthermore, insecure land tenure prevents farmers from using land as collateral to access institutional credit, thereby limiting their ability to purchase quality inputs or adopt modern farming practices.

This paper explores the structure of the land tenure system in Sindh, its economic ramifications for agricultural productivity, and the policy interventions necessary to promote tenure security. By drawing on empirical studies and case examples, it highlights how reforms in land documentation, legal protection for tenants, and improved access to formal credit can catalyze rural economic development. Strengthening land tenure rights is essential not only for boosting agricultural output but also for enhancing farmer welfare, reducing poverty, and supporting broader goals of sustainable rural development. Addressing tenure insecurity could serve as a transformative lever in revitalizing Sindh's agricultural economy.

Land Tenure System in Sindh

The land tenure system in Sindh is deeply rooted in historical and socio-political inequalities that continue to constrain agricultural productivity and rural development. The province's agrarian structure is dominated by a small class of large landowners, or *waderas*, who control extensive estates. In contrast, a vast majority of farmers are tenant cultivators, commonly referred to as *haris*, who farm under insecure and often exploitative arrangements. According to the World Bank (2021), approximately 35% of agricultural land in Sindh is tenanted, with around two-thirds of these tenancies operating under informal sharecropping arrangements, widely known as the *batai* system.

A defining feature of Sindh's land tenure regime is the prevalence of informal and unwritten agreements. Most tenant farmers do not possess formal lease documents, making them highly susceptible to arbitrary eviction, sudden rent increases, and lack of bargaining power. While the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950 was intended to protect the rights of tenant farmers, its implementation remains weak due to limited administrative capacity and entrenched landlord influence. As a result, tenant farmers often lack legal recourse when disputes arise.

Additionally, fragmented landholdings pose a significant barrier to efficient farming. Many smallholders operate non-contiguous plots, which hinders mechanization, increases production costs, and reduces overall productivity. This fragmentation is further compounded by the absence of land consolidation programs and modern cadastral mapping.

Another critical concern is the stark gender disparity in landownership. Despite women making up a substantial portion of the agricultural labor force, they own less than 5% of agricultural land in Sindh (FAO, 2022). Without formal ownership or inheritance rights, women are largely excluded from decision-making and credit access, limiting their contributions to agricultural development.

Economic Impacts of Insecure Land Tenure

Insecure land tenure in Sindh significantly undermines agricultural productivity, rural development, and environmental sustainability. One of the most critical economic consequences is the restricted access to formal credit. Without clear land ownership or secure lease agreements, farmers are unable to use land as collateral, effectively barring them from institutional lending. According to the State Bank of Pakistan (2023), only 15% of farmers in the country can access formal credit. The situation is even more dire in rural Sindh, where less than 20% of households utilize formal financial services (IFAD, 2022). Consequently, tenant farmers are forced to turn to informal lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates, often between 30% and 50% annually, leading to cycles of debt and dependency (ADB, 2021).

The lack of secure tenure also disincentivizes long-term investment in agricultural inputs. Farmers are reluctant to invest in soil fertility improvements, efficient irrigation systems like drip or laser leveling, and climate-resilient seed varieties, especially when their tenure is unstable. A study by IFPRI (2022) revealed that farmers with secure tenure are 40% more likely to adopt modern agricultural technologies.

This hesitation results in significantly reduced agricultural productivity. Wheat and cotton yields in Sindh are estimated to be 20–30% below their potential, primarily due to low input use and outdated farming methods (PARC, 2023). The productivity gap is evident when comparing rice yields: Sindh averages 2.5 tons per hectare, while Punjab, where tenure systems are comparatively more secure, achieves 4.5 tons per hectare (FAO, 2023).

In addition, insecure tenure promotes unsustainable land use practices. Farmers, uncertain about long-term land access, tend to overexploit resources, leading to widespread soil salinity, waterlogging, and deforestation. These environmental consequences degrade 40% of Sindh's arable land (Sindh Irrigation Department, 2023), further threatening the province's food security and climate resilience. Addressing tenure insecurity is thus vital for economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Policy Recommendations

To address the deep-rooted challenges posed by insecure land tenure in Sindh and promote equitable agricultural growth, a multi-pronged policy approach is essential. The first step is reforming land titling and registration systems. Digitizing land records, as successfully demonstrated by Punjab's Land Record Management System, can significantly reduce land disputes, minimize corruption, and enhance transparency. Expanding similar systems to Sindh, under the National Land Reform Program, could enable formal land titling for tenant farmers, offering them legal recognition and a stronger foundation for accessing credit and support services.

Strengthening tenancy laws is equally important. The Sindh Tenancy Act (1950) should be rigorously enforced to safeguard tenant rights, ensuring protections against arbitrary evictions and unfair rent hikes. Policymakers should consider introducing rent ceilings to limit exploitative practices and promote fair landlord-tenant relations. Promoting long-term leasing models, such as 10-year contract farming arrangements, would further incentivize land improvements and provide stability for tenant farmers. Tax incentives for landowners who formalize tenancy agreements could help accelerate adoption of such models.

Enhancing financial inclusion is also key. Developing tailored microfinance products, such as leasehold mortgage loans, would empower landless farmers to invest in productivity-enhancing inputs. Expanding social safety nets like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) to include agricultural input subsidies would ease financial burdens on smallholders.

Farmer education and capacity building are crucial for effective policy implementation. Strengthening agricultural extension services to deliver training in climate-smart agriculture and sustainable practices can boost productivity and resilience. In parallel, NGO-led legal aid initiatives can help raise awareness among farmers about their land rights and legal protections, fostering greater confidence and assertiveness in land negotiations.

Together, these reforms can transform Sindh's land tenure landscape, unlocking productivity gains, empowering marginalized farmers, and laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and resilient agricultural economy.

Conclusion

Land tenure security plays a pivotal role in enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting rural development, and ensuring environmental sustainability in Sindh, Pakistan. The province's current land tenure system, dominated by informal arrangements and unequal ownership patterns, has perpetuated economic inefficiencies and social inequalities, especially for tenant farmers and women. Without formal rights to land, farmers face barriers to accessing credit, investing in sustainable practices, and adopting modern technologies, resulting in suboptimal yields, environmental degradation, and persistent rural poverty. The case of Sindh vividly illustrates how tenure insecurity undermines not only individual farmer welfare but also the broader agricultural economy and climate resilience of the region.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive policy approach. Reforms in land registration, stronger enforcement of tenancy laws, long-term leasing models, improved financial access, and farmer capacity building are essential for creating an enabling environment. Digital land titling and targeted subsidies can further catalyze positive change by reducing disputes and encouraging productive investments. Empowering marginalized groups, particularly women and tenant farmers, through legal rights and training can unlock untapped potential across Sindh's agricultural sector.

References: Asian Development Bank; World Bank; FAO; IFAD; Pakistan Economic Survey; State Bank of Pakistan; Sindh Bureau of Statistics; IFPRI; ADB; PARC; Sindh Irrigation Department

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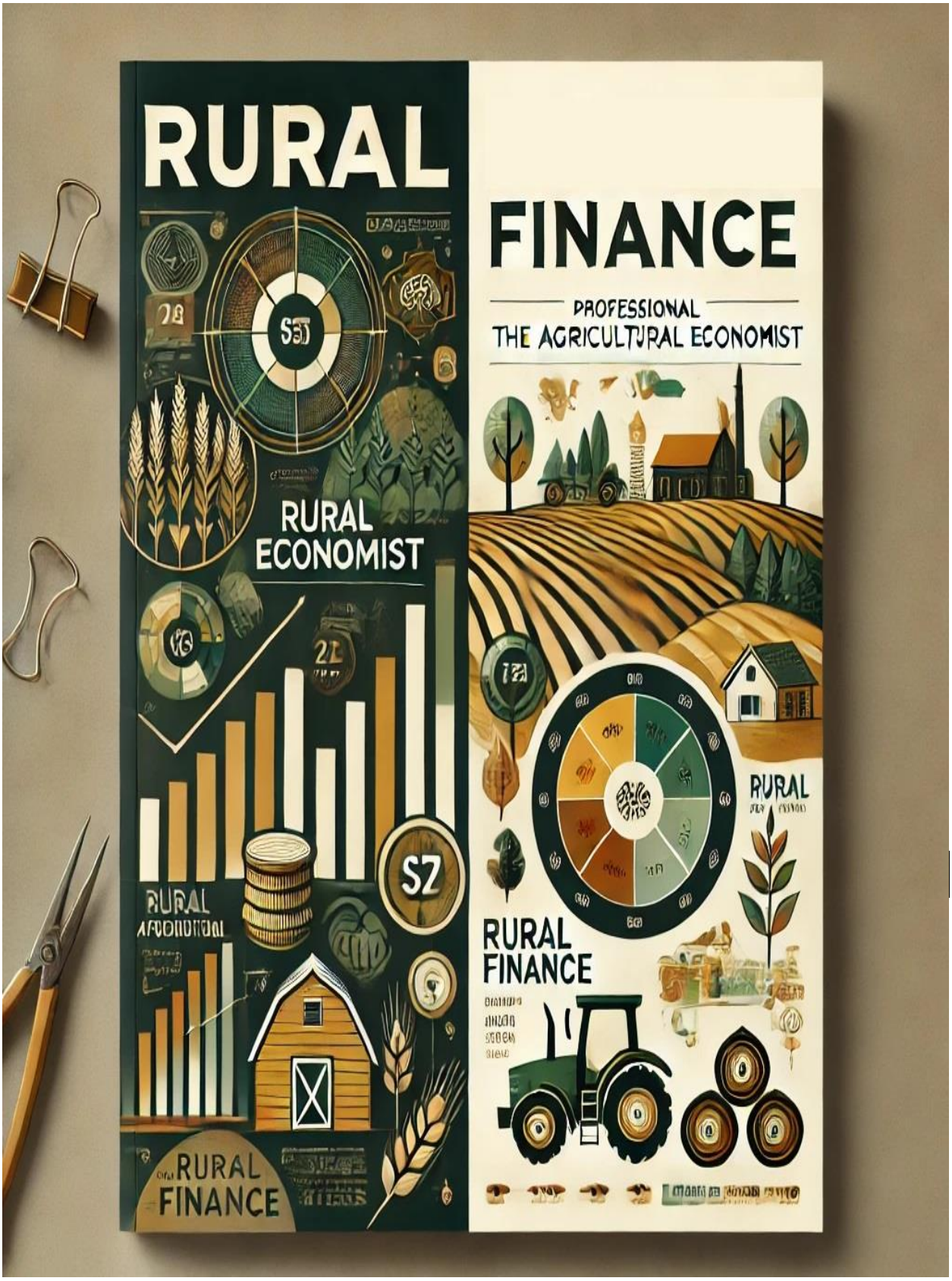
The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at sadiabrohi2@gmail.com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THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST
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RURAL FINANCE

Empowering Rural Women in Sindh: Access to Finance

Enhancing rural women's access to finance in Sindh is essential for economic growth and social transformation. Financial inclusion and microcredit programs can empower women to break poverty cycles, , contribute to household stability, and drive local economic growth.

Abdul Baseer

4/1/2025

Financial inclusion is pivotal for economic growth and poverty alleviation. Yet, in regions like Sindh, Pakistan, rural women remain significantly marginalized within formal financial systems, exacerbating gender disparities and sustaining poverty cycles. As of 2020, only 7% of adult women in Pakistan were financially included, a figure that has stagnated since 2017, while male inclusion rose from 20% to 36% in the same period. This widening gender gap, now at 30 percent, underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions.

Several barriers contribute to this exclusion. Limited access to formal financial institutions, low financial literacy, sociocultural constraints, and a lack of awareness hinder rural women's participation in the financial sector. Moreover, mobile phone ownership, a critical tool for digital financial services, is disproportionately low among women, with only 26% owning a cell phone compared to significantly higher rates among men.

Microcredit programs have emerged as effective tools to bridge this financial divide. Initiatives like the Community Investment Funds (CIFs), supported by the National Rural Support Program (NRSP) and the Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS), have provided approximately $3 million to 121 Local Support Organizations in Sindh. These funds have benefited around 350,000 households, enabling women to engage in income-generating activities such as livestock rearing and establishing small businesses.

The socioeconomic benefits of financial inclusion are profound. Empowered women contribute to household income, invest in children's education, and drive community development. Recognizing this, the State Bank of Pakistan introduced the "Banking on Equality" policy in 2020, aiming to increase women's financial inclusion through gender diversity in financial institutions, women-centric products, and enhanced financial literacy.

Barriers to Financial Inclusion

Barriers to financial inclusion for rural women in Sindh remain deeply entrenched, limiting their ability to participate in the formal economy and achieve financial independence. Cultural norms and patriarchal structures play a significant role in this exclusion. In rural Sindh, 82% of women require male consent to open bank accounts, making independent financial decision-making nearly impossible. Additionally, only 12% of women hold land titles, significantly restricting their ability to secure loans, as land ownership is a key form of collateral. Without access to formal credit, many women turn to informal lenders who impose exorbitant interest rates of 30-40%, trapping them in cycles of debt and financial vulnerability.

Low financial literacy further exacerbates the problem. Only 14% of rural women in Sindh understand basic banking concepts such as interest rates, savings mechanisms, or loan repayment terms. This lack of awareness makes them more susceptible to financial exploitation and prevents them from leveraging available financial products. Even when financial services are available, women are often unaware of how to use them, reinforcing their dependence on male family members for financial decisions.

Infrastructural challenges also play a major role in restricting access to financial services. Geographic isolation, combined with a lack of banking infrastructure, means that 60% of Sindh's villages do not have banking facilities. The absence of physical bank branches forces women to travel long distances—often requiring male accompaniment—to access financial services. This additional logistical barrier further discourages them from engaging with formal financial institutions.

Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that includes policy reforms, targeted financial literacy programs, and the expansion of digital banking services to make financial inclusion more accessible for rural women in Sindh. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for empowering women and fostering economic growth in the region.

The Role of Microcredit in Empowering Rural Women

Microfinance has emerged as a transformative tool for financial inclusion, providing small loans to rural women entrepreneurs and enabling them to participate in economic activities. Since 2020, microfinance institutions have disbursed PKR 15 billion to female borrowers in Sindh, helping them establish and expand small businesses. Women-led microenterprises have reported an average increase of PKR 6,000 in monthly profits after securing microloans. These businesses often align with local economic opportunities, including livestock rearing, tailoring, and handicrafts, allowing women to leverage their existing skills and market knowledge.

Beyond individual economic gains, microcredit programs contribute to broader household and community benefits. Families with access to microloans allocate 25% more of their

budgets to essential services such as education and healthcare, improving overall living standards. Women's financial empowerment also stimulates local economies, with 30% of female borrowers hiring other women for support, creating a ripple effect of employment generation within rural communities.

Financial literacy and skill development are crucial components of many microcredit programs, ensuring that women make informed financial decisions. Women who undergo financial literacy training are 60% more likely to reinvest their profits into business expansion, strengthening long-term economic stability. Additionally, digital literacy programs are increasing mobile banking adoption, allowing rural women to access financial services without physical banking constraints.

Despite these successes, challenges persist. High interest rates of up to 24% from some microfinance institutions place a financial burden on borrowers, reducing their ability to scale operations. Cultural resistance remains a significant obstacle, as some communities continue to oppose women's financial independence. Furthermore, the lack of follow-up support and business development services limits the sustainability of many microenterprises. Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions, community engagement, and continued investment in financial education to maximize the potential of microcredit in empowering rural women.

Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Financial Inclusion

Sustainable financial inclusion for rural women in Sindh requires targeted policy interventions that address cultural, infrastructural, and economic barriers. Expanding financial literacy programs is a crucial first step. Government and NGO partnerships should introduce mobile-based financial education tailored to rural women, ensuring accessibility despite geographical constraints. Integrating basic banking and digital finance training into existing community programs can empower women to manage finances independently and make informed financial decisions.

Improving financial infrastructure is equally important to ensure accessibility. Expanding branchless banking and mobile money services in remote areas can bridge the gap created by the lack of physical banking institutions. Establishing women-only banking desks can provide a safe space for women to seek financial services independently, reducing their dependence on male intermediaries.

Legal and policy reforms are necessary to remove structural barriers. Reforming land ownership laws to allow women to hold property titles independently can significantly enhance their ability to access formal credit. Additionally, simplifying Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements for women opening bank accounts can increase financial inclusion rates, as many rural women lack formal identification documents.

Strengthening microcredit programs can further support economic empowerment. Subsidizing interest rates for female borrowers can make loans more affordable, while integrating business mentorship and market access initiatives can enhance the sustainability of women-led enterprises. Providing post-loan support, such as business training and access to financial networks, can help women expand their ventures beyond subsistence-level income generation.

Community engagement and awareness campaigns are essential to changing societal attitudes toward women's financial independence. Involving local leaders and male family members in sensitization programs can foster a more supportive environment. Showcasing success stories of women entrepreneurs through radio broadcasts and community workshops can inspire others to pursue financial empowerment, driving broader social and economic transformation.

Conclusion

Enhancing rural women's access to finance in Sindh is not just an economic necessity but a catalyst for social transformation. Financial inclusion empowers women to break free from poverty cycles, contribute to household stability, and drive local economic growth. While microcredit programs have played a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship among women, persistent challenges such as cultural restrictions, high interest rates, and limited financial literacy continue to hinder widespread progress. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that combines policy reforms, infrastructure development, and targeted educational initiatives.

Sustainable financial inclusion must be built on a foundation of accessibility, affordability, and awareness. Expanding digital financial services, reforming land ownership laws, and establishing women-focused banking services are key steps in removing institutional barriers. Furthermore, financial literacy programs tailored to rural women can bridge knowledge gaps, enabling them to make informed financial decisions and maximize the benefits of available financial resources.

Ultimately, inclusive financial policies must be supported by broader societal efforts to challenge gender norms and promote women's economic participation. By investing in financial empowerment, Pakistan can unlock the potential of rural women as drivers of economic resilience and social progress, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future.

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at jamalibaseer40@gmail.com

Investment Opportunities in Rural Pakistan

Explore the untapped investment opportunities in rural Pakistan, focusing on agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, and financial services. With over 60% of the population in these regions, targeted investments can drive growth, reduce poverty, and enhance economic resilience.

Hifza Riaz

4/10/2025

Historically, rural areas in Pakistan have received less investment compared to urban centers, largely due to perceptions of limited infrastructure, dispersed populations, and slower economic returns. However, this trend is beginning to shift as rural regions are increasingly recognized for their untapped economic potential. Approximately 63% of Pakistan's population lives in rural areas, and these regions contribute significantly to national output, particularly through agriculture, which alone accounts for 22.7% of GDP and employs 37.4% of the labor force (PBS, 2023). Rural Pakistan is rich in natural resources, fertile land, and provides a growing market for goods, services, and technology-driven solutions.

Despite these advantages, rural communities face unique economic challenges, especially in the form of inflation, which operates differently from urban inflation. Rural inflation in Pakistan is often driven by agricultural price volatility, seasonal labor costs, fuel price hikes affecting transport, and disruptions in food supply chains (SBP, 2023). For instance, food inflation in rural areas surged to 38.9% in early 2023 compared to 32.8% in urban areas, disproportionately impacting rural households reliant on agriculture for both income and sustenance (PBS, 2023).

These inflationary pressures also influence investment behavior, increasing input costs for agriculture and reducing disposable income for consumption. However, shifts in rural consumption patterns, driven by mobile connectivity, remittance inflows, and youth engagement with digital platforms, are opening new investment avenues in sectors such as mobile banking, clean energy, rural health services, and education (World Bank, 2023).

Investment Opportunities in Rural Areas

Rural regions in Pakistan present substantial yet often overlooked economic potential, with approximately 63% of the population residing in these areas and a majority dependent on agriculture for their livelihood (PBS, 2023). Historically underfunded, these communities offer diverse investment opportunities that can generate strong returns while supporting inclusive growth and poverty reduction. Agriculture remains the dominant economic activity, contributing 22.7% to the national GDP and employing over 37% of the labor force (PBS, 2023). However, traditional farming faces challenges such as outdated techniques, water scarcity, and climate variability. Investment in agri-tech, including precision farming, mobile advisory apps, and smart irrigation, offers transformative possibilities. For example, mobile platforms like "Bakhabar Kissan" are helping farmers access real-time weather updates and crop management tips. According to McKinsey (2023), digital agriculture solutions could raise yields by up to 30%, while the World Economic Forum (2023) suggests such tools can boost rural incomes significantly.

Rural energy shortages also present opportunities. Many villages lack reliable electricity, relying instead on expensive and polluting alternatives. Pakistan’s wind corridors in Sindh and solar potential in Balochistan and Punjab provide an ideal landscape for renewable energy projects. The Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park and wind projects in Jhimpir are prime examples of the shift toward clean energy. The International Renewable Energy Agency (2023) and the International Energy Agency (2023) emphasize that renewable investments in rural regions can lift millions out of energy poverty while offering investors stable returns and policy incentives, such as net metering and tax exemptions under Pakistan’s Alternate and Renewable Energy Policy.

Tourism is another high-growth sector. Pakistan’s rich cultural diversity, scenic landscapes, and heritage sites in rural areas—from Hunza to Cholistan—attract both local and international tourists. Rural tourism is growing faster than its urban counterpart globally, with OECD (2023) noting a 12% annual increase in emerging markets. The PTDC (2023) reports increased demand for eco-tourism and community-based experiences, offering investors opportunities in hospitality, tour operations, and cultural preservation.

Infrastructure development remains critical. Limited access to clean water, roads, healthcare, and internet restricts economic activity in rural districts. A McKinsey report (2023) found that every dollar invested in rural infrastructure yields up to four dollars in long-term economic benefit. In Pakistan, government programs like the Kamyab Pakistan Program and Ehsaas infrastructure initiatives are enhancing rural connectivity and creating spaces for private investment in transport, health services, and education facilities.

Financial inclusion is another area ripe for expansion. Nearly 80% of rural Pakistanis lack access to formal banking services (SBP, 2023). Fintech

innovations like Easypaisa and JazzCash are bridging this gap, offering digital wallets, microloans, and insurance to underserved populations. According to the World Bank (2023), expanding financial services can stimulate local economies by enabling savings, investment, and entrepreneurship, particularly for women and youth. By investing in rural sectors—agriculture, energy, tourism, infrastructure, and finance—stakeholders can unlock sustainable economic growth while contributing to national development and resilience.

The Challenge of Rural Inflation

Rural inflation in Pakistan poses a significant challenge to sustaining investment momentum in non-urban regions, despite the untapped economic potential these areas offer. Unlike urban inflation, rural inflation is primarily driven by agricultural price volatility, rising labor costs, and increasing living expenses. In Pakistan, where over 60% of the population resides in rural areas, food price inflation has a disproportionate impact due to the higher share of food in rural household consumption (PBS, 2023). Climate-related disruptions, such as the 2022 floods that damaged over 4.4 million acres of crops, significantly increased prices for essential agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and diesel (NDMA, 2022; FAO, 2023). These fluctuations not only reduce household purchasing power but also diminish farm profitability, affecting returns on agri-based investments.

Labor costs are also on the rise. As rural development projects and infrastructure expansion increase demand for skilled and semi-skilled labor, wages in sectors like agriculture, construction, and transport have grown steadily. While this is a positive indicator for rural livelihoods, it places upward pressure on operational expenses for investors in labor-intensive industries. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023), rural wage rates in Pakistan increased by an average of 8.5% in 2022, outpacing inflation in some regions.

Meanwhile, the cost of living in rural areas is steadily climbing due to greater access to modern services and rising expectations. Costs related to housing, private healthcare, and education are catching up with urban standards. A report by the SBP (2023) highlights that rural inflation has averaged 27% over the past year, often exceeding urban rates. As a result, rural households are reallocating spending toward basic needs, reducing demand for non-essential goods. For investors, this means that businesses offering affordable, essential solutions, especially in food, health, and energy, are more likely to remain resilient amidst inflationary pressures.

Conclusion

Rural areas in Pakistan represent a dynamic and largely untapped landscape for investment, offering significant opportunities in agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, infrastructure, and financial services. With over 60% of the population residing in rural regions, targeted investments have the potential to drive inclusive growth, reduce poverty, and enhance national economic resilience. However, rural inflation remains a critical consideration for investors, shaped by volatile agricultural prices, rising labor costs, and increasing living expenses.

Events such as climate-induced crop failures and supply chain disruptions can dramatically impact input prices and consumer spending patterns, influencing the profitability of rural ventures. Despite these challenges, the evolving rural economy—fueled by digital connectivity, financial innovation, and youth engagement—is creating new avenues for sustainable investment. The expansion of mobile banking, solar energy, and community-based tourism illustrates the resilience and adaptability of rural markets. By understanding the unique inflationary dynamics and aligning investments with essential needs and technological solutions, investors can not only mitigate risks but also catalyze long-term development. Strategic, inclusive, and inflation-aware rural investments hold the key to unlocking Pakistan's broader economic potential, fostering equitable progress, and ensuring that rural communities are not left behind in the pursuit of national prosperity.

References: PBS; SBP; World Bank; McKensey; World Economic Forum; Jhimpir; International Energy Agency; OECD; PTDC; NDMA; FAO; ILO

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Microfinance Driving Pakistan's Rural Economy

Discover how microfinance is transforming Pakistan's rural economy by providing essential financial services to underserved populations. Learn about its impact on women and small-scale entrepreneurs, and the urgent need for economic inclusion in rural areas.

Amna Ilyas

4/17/2025

Microfinance, a transformative financial innovation, aims to provide access to credit, savings, insurance, and other financial services to the underbanked and financially marginalized populations. In Pakistan, where approximately 63% of the population resides in rural areas (World Bank, 2023), traditional banking systems often fail to reach those living in remote communities. Here, microfinance has emerged as a powerful tool to address poverty, empower small-scale entrepreneurs, and promote inclusive economic development.

Rural households in Pakistan frequently depend on informal loans or unreliable sources of credit, which often come with exploitative interest rates. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) such as Khushhali Bank, Akhuwat, and Kashf Foundation have bridged this gap by offering accessible and low-interest credit to women, small farmers, artisans, and micro-entrepreneurs. These financial services enable rural families to invest in income-generating activities, such as livestock, handicrafts, or small-scale agriculture, leading to improved household incomes and economic resilience.

Moreover, studies by the Pakistan Microfinance Network (PMN, 2022) show that microfinance has contributed to job creation, especially for women, who make up nearly 50% of microloan recipients. However, challenges such as high operational costs, low financial literacy, and limited regulatory oversight persist, which can hinder the long-term impact of microfinance initiatives.

Microfinance: An Overview and Its Importance in Pakistan

Microfinance refers to a range of financial services, including microloans, savings accounts, insurance, and money transfers, specifically designed to serve low-income individuals and small-scale entrepreneurs who are traditionally excluded from the formal banking sector. The central philosophy of microfinance revolves around promoting financial inclusion, empowering marginalized communities, and enabling income generation without the need for collateral. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) often utilize group lending models, where small groups of borrowers share collective responsibility for repayments, fostering accountability and community support.

In Pakistan, microfinance has evolved considerably since its informal beginnings in the 1980s. The Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) was among the earliest initiatives, focusing on community-led financial solutions in Gilgit-Baltistan. A major milestone was the establishment of Khushhali Bank in 2000 as the country’s first licensed microfinance bank. The Microfinance Institutions Ordinance of 2001 further formalized the sector, leading to the growth of prominent players such as NRSP Microfinance Bank, Tameer Bank (now part of Bank Alfalah), and Kashf Foundation. The State Bank of Pakistan has since promoted a supportive regulatory environment that encourages innovation and financial outreach to underserved populations.

Microfinance is particularly significant in rural Pakistan, where over 63% of the population resides and formal banking services are often inaccessible. With agriculture contributing nearly 24% to Pakistan’s GDP, and a large portion of rural livelihoods depending on informal enterprises, access to credit becomes essential for stimulating economic activity. Yet only 21% of rural adults have access to formal financial services (PBS, 2023). Microfinance helps bridge this gap by enabling farmers to buy inputs, small traders to expand businesses, and women to engage in income-generating ventures.

Furthermore, microfinance plays a critical role in reducing reliance on exploitative informal moneylenders who often charge interest rates as high as 50% per annum. According to the Pakistan Microfinance Network (PMN), as of 2023, 8.3 million individuals were active microfinance borrowers, with 65% of loans disbursed in rural areas. This data underscores the importance of microfinance as a lifeline for rural economic resilience and inclusive growth in Pakistan.

Benefits of Microfinance for Rural Pakistan

Microfinance continues to serve as a powerful catalyst for rural development in Pakistan, offering a range of socioeconomic benefits that extend far beyond simple access to credit. At the forefront is its role in poverty alleviation. According to a 2023 study by the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), microfinance borrowers experienced a 30% increase in household income within two years, with poverty levels declining by 12% in districts of Punjab and Sindh. This suggests that access to small-scale credit enables rural households to invest in livestock, agriculture, and home-based enterprises, creating a sustainable pathway out of poverty.

Women’s empowerment is another transformative aspect of microfinance. Women now account for 52% of Pakistan’s microfinance clients (PMN, 2023), thanks to targeted efforts by institutions like the Kashf Foundation. Its gender-focused lending model has enabled 1.2 million women to establish

small businesses, increasing female participation in financial decision-making by 40% (UNDP Pakistan, 2022). These shifts contribute not only to family income but also to greater gender equity and social empowerment.

Additionally, microfinance drives entrepreneurship and job creation. The State Bank of Pakistan (2023) reported that microenterprises supported by MFIs created approximately 1.5 million jobs in 2022 alone. Agricultural loans, particularly in underserved regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, led to a 25% boost in crop yields. Yet, challenges persist. Only 16% of rural Pakistanis understand basic financial principles (Karachi School of Business & Leadership, 2023), leading to loan misuse and default rates between 8–12% (PMN, 2023). High operational costs in remote areas, coupled with limited infrastructure, result in interest rates of 22–30% (SBP, 2023), limiting access for the poorest. Security issues in conflict-prone areas further hinder outreach.

Nonetheless, innovative solutions have emerged. Khushhali Bank's agricultural lending program disbursed PKR 15 billion in 2023, with a 90% repayment rate due to flexible terms. NRSP's women-centric initiatives have helped launch over 1 million women-led ventures in Sindh. Meanwhile, JazzCash and Easypaisa have expanded digital microfinance, serving 12 million rural users and cutting loan approval times from weeks to hours.

To deepen impact, Pakistan must expand digital financial services, subsidize mobile technology, and integrate financial education into rural outreach. Public-private partnerships and regulatory flexibility are vital to scaling these solutions and ensuring microfinance reaches its full potential in transforming rural Pakistan.

Conclusion

Microfinance has emerged as a transformative force in Pakistan's rural economy, offering practical and inclusive solutions to some of the country's most entrenched socioeconomic challenges. By bridging the gap between traditional banking and underserved populations, microfinance has enabled millions of rural Pakistanis, particularly women and small-scale entrepreneurs, to participate more actively in the economy. With 63% of the population residing in rural areas and only 21% having access to formal financial services, the role of microfinance in promoting economic inclusion is both urgent and indispensable.

Evidence demonstrates that microfinance contributes directly to poverty reduction, income growth, job creation, and women's empowerment. Institutions like Kashf Foundation, Khushhali Bank, and NRSP have created scalable models that empower communities through access to credit, financial training, and digital tools. However, challenges such as limited financial literacy, high operational costs, and regional insecurity continue to hamper the sector's full potential. Tackling these barriers through public-private partnerships, digital innovation, and regulatory support can enhance the sector's reach and sustainability.

To secure long-term rural development, Pakistan must prioritize microfinance as a pillar of its economic strategy. With the right policy support and technological infrastructure, microfinance can serve not only as a tool for economic empowerment but as a foundation for resilient, inclusive, and equitable rural growth.

References: SBP; Pakistan Microfinance Network; World Bank; UNDP Pakistan; AKRSP; PBS

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The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Breaking the Credit Barrier in Pakistan's Rural Economy

Unlock the potential of Pakistan's rural economy by breaking the credit barrier. Financial exclusion hinders smallholder farmers, affecting productivity and food security. Discover how financial inclusion can empower communities, boost yields, and improve household incomes.

Abdul Hameed Mari

4/17/2025

Financial inclusion is a critical driver of economic growth, poverty alleviation, and rural development, yet a significant portion of Pakistan's rural population remains outside the formal financial system. According to the SBP (2023), nearly 65% of the rural population is unbanked, lacking access to even the most basic banking services such as savings accounts, credit, or insurance. This financial exclusion disproportionately affects small-scale farmers, who are the backbone of Pakistan's agricultural sector, contributing approximately 24% to the national GDP and employing over 37% of the labor force (PBS, 2023).

These farmers face severe credit constraints that hinder their ability to invest in essential agricultural inputs such as high-quality seeds, fertilizers, modern tools, and irrigation infrastructure. In the absence of formal lending institutions, many resort to informal moneylenders who often charge exorbitant interest rates, sometimes exceeding 40% per annum, further entrenching cycles of debt and poverty. This lack of financial access stifles agricultural productivity, reduces income potential, and makes it difficult for farmers to withstand economic shocks such as price fluctuations or crop failures.

Moreover, without formal credit histories or collateral, rural farmers are typically considered high-risk by commercial banks. Gender disparities exacerbate the problem, as rural women, who form a significant part of the agricultural workforce, are even less likely to have access to financial services. Addressing these barriers requires targeted interventions, including mobile banking platforms, microfinance schemes, and farmer-centric credit programs that simplify loan procedures and reduce collateral requirements. Enhancing rural financial inclusion not only empowers farmers economically but also contributes to broader national goals such as food security, employment generation, and inclusive economic growth. Strategic financial outreach can transform rural livelihoods and foster resilience across Pakistan's agricultural landscape.

Importance of Financial Inclusion and Barriers to Credit Access for Rural Farmers in Pakistan

Financial inclusion plays a transformative role in empowering rural farmers in Pakistan by enabling them to access affordable credit, invest in modern farming technologies, and build resilience against economic shocks. Unlike informal lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates ranging from 50% to even 100%, formal credit mechanisms offer fairer, regulated options. Access to finance allows farmers to invest in high-yield seeds, drip irrigation systems, and precision tools that significantly enhance productivity and efficiency. According to IFAD (2022), farmers with access to credit experience up to 30% higher yields. When women in rural households gain access to microloans, household income can increase by 25% (Karandaaz Pakistan, 2023), demonstrating the economic ripple effects of financial empowerment. Moreover, microinsurance and formal savings accounts serve as safety nets during crop failures or health emergencies, reducing vulnerability and promoting long-term financial stability. World Bank (2023) reports that improved financial inclusion can boost Pakistan's agricultural GDP by 1.5% annually.

Despite its benefits, several barriers hinder rural credit access. Structurally, around 70% of small farmers lack formal land titles, disqualifying them from collateral-based loans (SBP, 2023). Additionally, just 18% of Pakistan's villages have a bank branch, restricting physical access to financial institutions (PMN, 2023). Banks also reject nearly 60% of loan applications from small farmers due to stringent requirements (NRSP, 2022). Socioeconomic and cultural barriers further complicate matters. Only 16% of rural Pakistanis are financially literate enough to understand loan terms (KSBL, 2023), and women face even greater exclusion, with just 12% accessing formal credit (UNDP Pakistan, 2023). Consequently, 45% of farmers turn to arihtias, local moneylenders, who provide immediate cash but at exploitative rates (PPAF, 2022). Overcoming these obstacles is essential to unlock rural Pakistan's full agricultural potential.

Consequences of Financial Exclusion and Policy Recommendations for Rural Pakistan

Financial exclusion has far-reaching consequences for rural Pakistan, especially among smallholder farmers who lack access to affordable and formal financial services. Without credit, agricultural productivity remains severely constrained. Wheat yields, for instance, remain 30% below potential due to the inability of farmers to invest in quality inputs like certified seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation systems (FAO, 2023). The reliance on informal lenders—who charge interest rates as high as 50% annually—traps farmers in cycles of debt, sometimes resulting in

the loss of land and assets. Moreover, financial instability contributes to rural-urban migration, with 2 million youth leaving farming annually in search of better opportunities (PIDE, 2023). This exodus further undermines the rural labor force and food security. Underinvestment in agriculture threatens Pakistan's wheat and rice supply, placing added pressure on national food security (Ministry of National Food Security, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged strategy. Expanding digital financial services (DFS) is crucial; platforms like JazzCash and Easypaisa should develop agriculture-specific microloans, as currently, only 5% of loans are directed toward agricultural needs. Mobile banking agents can cut transaction costs by 40% (Karandaaz, 2023). Land reforms and the digitization of land records can allow farmers to use land as collateral, while warehouse receipt financing provides an innovative alternative by allowing stored crops to be used for securing loans. Gender-inclusive lending must also be prioritized. Scaling successful models like Kashf Foundation's, which has supported 1.2 million women, and reserving 30% of agricultural credit for women, as proposed by SBP, would promote inclusive growth. Financial literacy initiatives such as the National Financial Literacy Program should be expanded to reach 500,000 farmers by 2025, complemented by Farmer Field Schools teaching loan and digital banking management.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can help reduce high interest rates (currently 22–30%) through collaborations between SBP, PMN, and fintech providers. Case studies from Pakistan demonstrate success: Khushhali Bank's PKR 15 billion in agri-loans showed a 90% repayment rate; NRSP's women-focused loans improved incomes by 50%; and Punjab's interest-free loans to smallholders resulted in a default rate below 5%. Together, these interventions offer a viable roadmap for inclusive rural financial empowerment.

Conclusion

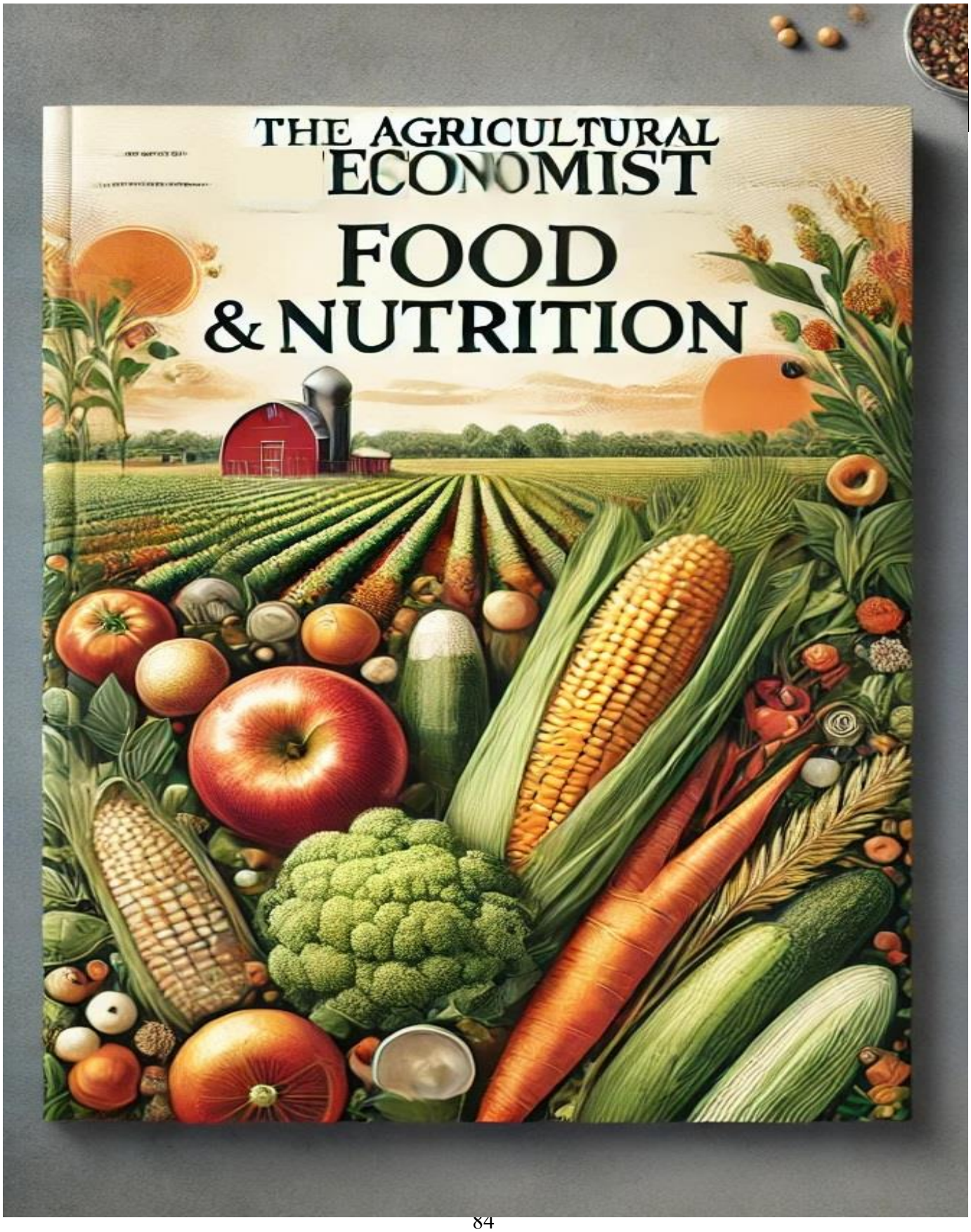
Breaking the credit barrier is essential for unlocking the full potential of Pakistan's rural economy. Financial exclusion continues to hinder the productivity, profitability, and resilience of millions of smallholder farmers who contribute significantly to national food security and GDP. The inability to access affordable, formal credit forces rural communities into exploitative debt cycles, stifling innovation, increasing migration, and weakening food systems. However, as the evidence suggests, financial inclusion offers a transformative pathway, boosting yields, empowering women, improving household incomes, and reducing vulnerability to shocks.

To realize this potential, Pakistan must prioritize inclusive financial ecosystems. Expanding digital financial services, reforming land ownership systems, offering gender-sensitive financial products, and scaling financial literacy are crucial steps. Strategic policy action, bolstered by public-private partnerships and successful models like Khushhali Bank, NRSP, and Kashf Foundation, demonstrates that financial access can be both equitable and sustainable. Investment in rural financial inclusion is not merely a social imperative—it is an economic necessity. Empowering rural farmers through inclusive finance will not only lift communities out of poverty but also contribute meaningfully to Pakistan's broader goals of sustainable development, food security, and inclusive economic growth. The future of Pakistan's rural economy depends on bridging the financial gap today.

References: SBP; UNDP Pakistan; Karandaaz Pakistan; World Bank; PMN; NRSP; KSBL; PPAF; FAO; Ministry of National Food Security

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at abdulhameedmari50@gmail.com


THE AGRICULTURAL
ECONOMIST
FOOD
& NUTRITION

Addressing Malnutrition in Rural Pakistan

Malnutrition and preventable diseases in rural Pakistan severely impact public health and economic productivity. Targeted interventions are critical to combat stunting, wasting, and limited access to clean water and healthcare, offering promising solutions for a healthier future.

Saba Ramzan

4/3/2025

Malnutrition and preventable diseases continue to plague rural Pakistan, posing significant health and economic challenges. According to the National Nutrition Survey 2023, 40.2% of children under five suffer from stunting, while 18.1% are wasted, indicating chronic and acute undernutrition, respectively. These alarming statistics reflect the persistent lack of access to adequate nutrition, clean water, and healthcare services in rural communities. Malnutrition not only affects individual health outcomes but also has far-reaching economic consequences.

The World Bank (2023) estimates that malnutrition costs Pakistan approximately 3.7% of its GDP annually, amounting to $12.4 billion. These economic losses stem from reduced labor productivity, increased healthcare expenditures, and diminished cognitive potential in malnourished children who struggle with learning and future earning capacity. Adults who experienced malnutrition in childhood often face lifelong health complications, reducing their ability to contribute effectively to the workforce.

Economic evaluations demonstrate that investing in nutrition and healthcare interventions can yield substantial long-term benefits. For instance, nutrition programs such as fortification of staple foods, maternal supplementation, and early childhood feeding initiatives have shown benefit-cost ratios exceeding 12:1 in various developing countries, including Pakistan. These programs not only reduce malnutrition but also enhance economic productivity, lower healthcare costs, and improve overall well-being.

To break this cycle, a multifaceted approach is necessary. Expanding agricultural diversity, improving rural healthcare infrastructure, enhancing public health awareness, and implementing targeted financial support programs can significantly mitigate malnutrition and disease burdens. A coordinated effort between the government, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies is crucial to implementing cost-effective, evidence-based strategies that will foster sustainable economic growth and improved public health in Pakistan's rural communities.

Prevalence and Economic Impact

Malnutrition and disease remain persistent challenges in rural Pakistan, significantly affecting both individual well-being and the national economy. Child undernutrition continues to be a severe issue, with stunting rates exceeding 50% in 15 rural districts (UNICEF 2023). Stunted children face lifelong disadvantages, including 12% lower adult earnings, which further perpetuates intergenerational poverty (Haque et al. 2022). Without targeted interventions, these children are likely to experience limited economic opportunities, reduced productivity, and higher healthcare costs in adulthood.

The disease burden in rural areas further compounds economic challenges. Diarrheal diseases account for 14% of under-five mortality (PDHS 2022-23), underscoring the dire consequences of poor sanitation, contaminated water, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, malaria reduces agricultural productivity by 30% in endemic regions, disproportionately affecting rural livelihoods and food security (Punjab Health Department 2023). The economic consequences of such diseases extend beyond individual suffering, as lost workdays and medical expenses create financial strain on households and the broader economy.

At the macroeconomic level, malnutrition and disease impose substantial costs on Pakistan's economy. Lost productivity due to undernutrition and disease results in an annual economic loss of $7.6 billion (State Bank of Pakistan 2023). The burden on the healthcare system is equally significant, with health-related expenditures reaching $3.1 billion annually (WHO Country Report 2023). Furthermore, undernutrition-related cognitive deficits in children contribute to education losses amounting to $1.7 billion each year (UNESCO 2023). These figures highlight the urgency of investing in cost-effective interventions that enhance nutritional outcomes, improve healthcare access, and strengthen disease prevention strategies. Addressing these challenges through evidence-based policies can break the cycle of poverty, enhance productivity, and foster sustainable economic growth in rural Pakistan.

Key Contributing Factors

Malnutrition and preventable diseases in rural Pakistan are driven by several interrelated factors, including food insecurity, limited healthcare access, and poor water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) conditions. Dietary diversity remains alarmingly low, with 72% of caloric intake derived solely from wheat (PASS 2022), leaving rural populations vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies. Only 28% of households consume adequate protein (HIES 2021-22), exacerbating malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women. These dietary limitations result in weakened immune systems, increased

susceptibility to infections, and long-term developmental deficits, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and poor health.

Healthcare access remains a significant challenge, especially in remote and underserved areas. The doctor-to-patient ratio in rural Balochistan is an alarming 1:6,500 (PMDC 2023), reflecting a severe shortage of trained medical professionals. Additionally, 41% of villages lack vaccine cold chains (EPI 2023), impeding immunization efforts against preventable diseases such as measles and hepatitis. Without adequate healthcare infrastructure, rural communities continue to suffer from high disease burdens, preventable deaths, and escalating medical costs that strain already fragile household incomes.

WASH deficiencies further contribute to the high prevalence of malnutrition and disease. Nearly one-third (32%) of the rural population lacks access to clean drinking water (PSLM 2022-23), increasing the risk of waterborne illnesses such as diarrhea and cholera. Additionally, open defecation persists in 15% of rural communities (WASH Cluster 2023), leading to widespread contamination of water sources and exacerbating public health risks. These environmental conditions create a breeding ground for infectious diseases, which, when coupled with food insecurity and inadequate healthcare, result in devastating health and economic consequences for rural populations. Addressing these systemic challenges through targeted interventions is crucial to breaking the cycle of malnutrition, disease, and economic stagnation in rural Pakistan.

Cost-Effective Interventions and Way Forward

Cost-effective interventions play a crucial role in addressing malnutrition and preventable diseases in rural Pakistan, demonstrating high returns on investment (ROI) while significantly improving public health outcomes. Micronutrient powders, which cost approximately $18 per Disability-Adjusted Life Year (DALY) averted, have a benefit-cost ratio of 16:1, showcasing their potential in reducing micronutrient deficiencies. An example of successful implementation is the SUN Pakistan Program, which has demonstrated the effectiveness of such interventions in improving the health of vulnerable populations. Similarly, therapeutic feeding programs, with a cost of $42 per DALY averted and a 9:1 benefit-cost ratio, have proven to be highly cost-effective in treating malnutrition. The BISP Nashonuma Scheme is an excellent example of this intervention in action, targeting malnourished children and pregnant women. Community health workers have also proven to be an essential component of cost-effective interventions, costing just $2.10 per person and delivering a 11:1 benefit-cost ratio. The expansion of the Lady Health Worker (LHW) Program has been successful in improving access to basic healthcare services, particularly in rural areas.

To address the root causes of malnutrition and disease, several policy recommendations can be implemented. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture, such as scaling biofortified crops like zinc-enriched wheat, has been shown to reduce stunting by 15% (PARC Trials). Homestead gardening, which increases dietary diversity by 37% (FAO Pakistan 2022), is another promising solution to improve nutrition. Strengthening the health system through expanding telemedicine, which increased access by 63% in the Thar pilot project (Sindh Health 2023), and training community midwives, which could prevent 28% of maternal deaths (Population Council 2023), are also crucial steps forward. Additionally, integrated WASH-nutrition programs combining hygiene education with nutrition initiatives have been shown to reduce diarrhea by 44% (UNICEF WASH 2023), and subsidizing latrines provides a ROI of 5.20 for every 1 spent (WaterAid Pakistan 2023).

An effective implementation framework involves leveraging existing platforms, such as integrating nutrition into the Benazir Income Support Program and utilizing Lady Health Workers for last-mile delivery. Public-private partnerships are also essential, with agri-businesses engaged in food fortification and telecoms playing a role in mHealth solutions. Monitoring and evaluation should be robust, with district-level nutrition surveillance and real-time data dashboards modeled on successful systems like Punjab's Nutrition Information System.

Conclusion

Malnutrition and preventable diseases continue to severely affect rural Pakistan, both in terms of public health and economic productivity. The evidence underscores the critical need for targeted interventions to address the root causes of these issues. High rates of stunting and wasting among children, coupled with limited access to clean water, adequate nutrition, and healthcare, create a vicious cycle of poverty, poor health, and low productivity. The economic burden of these conditions is immense, costing the country billions annually through lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and educational deficits. However, cost-effective interventions, such as micronutrient supplementation, therapeutic feeding programs, and the expansion of community health workers, offer promising solutions with high returns on investment.

To break this cycle, a comprehensive approach is required, focusing on improving food security, healthcare access, and sanitation. Scaling nutrition-sensitive agriculture, expanding health services through telemedicine, and strengthening WASH programs can all make a significant impact. Furthermore, leveraging existing platforms, fostering public-private partnerships, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems will be crucial in ensuring the success of these interventions. With coordinated efforts from the government, NGOs, and

international agencies, Pakistan can make substantial progress in improving the health and economic well-being of its rural populations, ultimately fostering sustainable development and breaking the cycle of malnutrition and disease.

References: National Nutrition Survey Pakistan 2023; World Bank Pakistan Development Update 2023; Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2022-23; SUN Movement Investment Case for Pakistan 2023; State Bank of Pakistan Agriculture-Health Nexus Report 2023; UNICEF Pakistan WASH Program Evaluation 2023

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Demand for Agricultural Products in Türkiye

Explore the complex factors shaping the demand for agricultural products in Türkiye, including economic dynamics, urbanization, and evolving consumer preferences. Understand how rising incomes and lifestyle changes impact food choices and market trends.

Mithat Direk

4/4/2025

The fundamental principle of demand asserts that as the price of a good rises, the quantity demanded generally falls, and as the price decreases, the quantity demanded increases. This inverse relationship is referred to as the law of demand and typically holds true under stable market conditions (Mankiw, 2023). It assumes that all other factors influencing demand remain constant, a condition known as ceteris paribus.

However, in real-world markets, this relationship can be influenced by factors such as consumer expectations and external economic conditions. For example, if consumers expect prices to rise further in the future due to inflation, they may choose to increase current purchases, even at higher prices, to avoid paying more later. This behavior temporarily disrupts the law of demand by causing an increase in quantity demanded despite rising prices (TUIK, 2023). Similarly, if consumers anticipate a future price drop, they may postpone purchases, leading to a decrease in demand regardless of the lower current prices.

The demand curve is a graphical representation of this relationship, typically sloping downward from left to right, illustrating how quantity demanded changes in response to price fluctuations. Two primary economic concepts help explain this downward slope. The income effect suggests that when the price of a good falls, the consumer's real income effectively increases, allowing them to purchase more of that good (OECD, 2022). The substitution effect, on the other hand, explains that as a good becomes cheaper relative to its alternatives, consumers tend to substitute it in place of more expensive options, thereby increasing its demand (FAO, 2023). Together, these effects reinforce the law of demand and provide a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in response to price changes.

Factors Shifting Demand in Türkiye's Agricultural Sector

The demand curve in Türkiye's agricultural sector is dynamic and subject to shifts driven by various external factors, even when prices remain constant. One of the most influential determinants is a change in consumer income. As incomes rise, especially in urban areas, there is a noticeable increase in demand for higher-value agricultural goods. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK, 2023) reports that recent per capita income growth has led to greater consumption of protein-rich foods such as meat and dairy, along with fresh fruits and vegetables, while demand for traditional starchy staples like bread and potatoes has declined. This shift reflects a broader transition in dietary patterns linked to economic development and urban lifestyles.

Changes in the prices of substitute goods also affect demand. For example, if lamb becomes more affordable in a region like Konya, consumers may switch their preference from beef to lamb, thereby decreasing the demand for beef without any change in its own price (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023). In addition, evolving consumer preferences significantly shape market demand. Urbanization has fueled an increase in the consumption of processed and packaged foods, catering to faster-paced lifestyles (Euromonitor, 2023). Simultaneously, health-conscious trends have spurred a rise in organic food consumption, which has grown by 15% annually since 2020 (ITC, 2023).

Seasonal and demographic factors also play a critical role. For instance, tourism causes demand surges in Türkiye's coastal regions during peak travel seasons, significantly influencing the local agricultural markets (TUIK, 2023). Moreover, religious and cultural events such as Ramadan cause a temporary but predictable spike in the consumption of certain products, including dates, dairy, and meat (OECD, 2022). These multidimensional drivers demonstrate how non-price factors continuously reshape agricultural demand in Türkiye's evolving economic and social landscape.

Unique Characteristics of Agricultural Product Demand in Türkiye

Agricultural product demand in Türkiye exhibits unique characteristics shaped by evolving consumer behavior, economic growth, and urbanization. One key trait is the frequent yet stable nature of food demand. While the overall need for food remains consistent, specific consumption patterns have shifted over time. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK, 2023), per capita fruit consumption increased by 22% between 2010 and 2023, reflecting growing awareness of health and nutrition. Conversely, bread consumption has steadily declined, suggesting a move away from traditional, carbohydrate-heavy diets toward more varied and health-conscious eating habits.

Another notable feature is the increasing diversification in product forms. As lifestyles become busier, particularly in urban centers, demand for canned, frozen, and ready-to-eat agricultural products has grown significantly (FAO, 2023). These convenience-focused options cater to time-constrained households and younger populations seeking quick meal solutions without sacrificing quality or nutrition.

Moreover, rising incomes have fueled emerging demand for goods that were once considered luxury items. This includes exotic fruits, organic produce, and imported specialty foods. Consumers are increasingly seeking diversity and novelty in their diets, creating new market niches for producers willing to innovate.

These trends carry important implications for Turkish agricultural producers and policymakers. To stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market, producers must closely monitor consumer trends, especially the rising demand for health-focused and convenience-based products. Relying solely on traditional, supply-driven production models is no longer sufficient. Instead, a shift toward demand-responsive strategies is necessary. Producers should also invest in value-added processing and targeted marketing that aligns with consumer preferences, especially when pursuing export opportunities in the EU and Middle Eastern markets. Policies supporting market intelligence, innovation, and producer capacity building will be essential to fully capitalize on these evolving demand dynamics and maintain Türkiye's agricultural competitiveness in both domestic and international arenas.

Conclusion

The demand for agricultural products in Türkiye is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, social, and demographic factors that go beyond simple price fluctuations. While the law of demand remains a foundational principle, real-world dynamics such as inflation expectations, income growth, urbanization, and shifting consumer preferences frequently alter demand patterns. Rising incomes have led to a dietary transition toward protein-rich and health-conscious foods, while convenience-oriented lifestyles are fueling increased demand for processed and ready-to-eat products. Seasonal tourism and cultural events like Ramadan also contribute to temporary yet significant spikes in demand for specific agricultural items. Additionally, the growing interest in organic and exotic foods highlights consumers' desire for variety and wellness, creating opportunities for product innovation and diversification. These evolving trends underscore the need for Turkish agricultural producers to move beyond traditional, supply-focused strategies. Embracing a demand-driven approach, supported by robust market intelligence and responsive production planning, will be essential to stay competitive. Furthermore, targeted policies that enhance producer capacity, incentivize value-added processing, and promote strategic marketing, particularly for exports, can help unlock new growth avenues. Understanding and adapting to the unique characteristics of agricultural demand is key to ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience in Türkiye's agricultural sector.

References: FAO; ITC; Mankiw, N.G. (2023); Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Türkiye; OECD; TUIK.

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Selcuk University, Konya-Türkiye and can be reached at mdirek@selcuk.edu.tr

Food Policy Impact on Rural Pakistan's Health

Explore how food policy influences public health and economic outcomes in rural Pakistan. Learn about challenges like malnutrition and food insecurity, and the need for integrated solutions to tackle climate change and infrastructure issues.

Iqra

4/11/2025

Food policy is a critical determinant of public health and economic stability, especially in rural regions where communities are heavily dependent on agriculture and face systemic socio-economic vulnerabilities. In Pakistan, approximately 62% of the population resides in rural areas (World Bank, 2023), making rural food security a central concern for national development. Food policies influence not only the production and distribution of agricultural commodities but also access to affordable, nutritious food essential for public health outcomes.

Rural Pakistan continues to face a high prevalence of malnutrition. According to the National Nutrition Survey (NNS) 2018, 40.2% of children under five are stunted, and 17.7% suffer from wasting, conditions more pronounced in rural districts. The food supply chain in these areas is often disrupted by poor infrastructure, limited market access, and climate-induced agricultural shocks, such as droughts and floods. These issues are compounded by higher poverty rates in rural areas (37.3%) compared to urban counterparts (24.6%) (PBS, 2022).

Furthermore, inadequate healthcare services in rural districts exacerbate the impact of poor nutrition, leading to increased disease burden and reduced labor productivity. The cost of undernutrition in Pakistan is estimated at 3% of GDP annually due to lost economic potential and increased healthcare costs (WFP, 2022).

Recent government interventions like the Ehsaas Nashonuma Program aim to provide nutrition-focused conditional cash transfers to vulnerable mothers and children in rural areas. Meanwhile, the Kissan Card initiative is designed to subsidize agricultural inputs and enhance food production. However, stronger policy integration between health, agriculture, and economic planning is essential for sustainable rural development.

The Role of Food Policy in Rural Pakistan

Food policy encompasses the laws, subsidies, and institutional frameworks that regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of food. In rural Pakistan, where agriculture remains the backbone of the economy, contributing 22.7% to the national GDP and employing 37.4% of the labor force (GOP, 2023–24), the importance of sound food policy cannot be overstated. Rural communities are not only the primary producers of food but also among the most vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition due to systemic inequalities and environmental challenges.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), 36% of Pakistan’s rural population experiences moderate to severe food insecurity. Despite being food producers, many rural households lack access to diverse and nutritious diets, with only 28% consuming adequate dietary variety, as reported in the National Nutrition Survey (2023). This is largely due to limited market access, underdeveloped rural infrastructure, and the high cost of nutrient-rich foods. Dietary patterns are heavily dependent on staple crops like wheat and rice, leading to widespread micronutrient deficiencies, especially iron, vitamin A, and zinc, which contribute to child stunting and maternal anemia (UNICEF Pakistan, 2023).

Climate change presents an additional threat, with erratic rainfall, heatwaves, and floods affecting nearly 40% of the country's agricultural productivity (IMF, 2023). These climatic shocks not only reduce crop yields but also disrupt food supply chains and inflate rural food prices. Policy interventions such as crop diversification incentives, fortified food distribution through the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), and community-based nutrition programs are being piloted in some provinces. However, a more integrated approach, linking food security with climate adaptation, public health, and economic planning, is essential to strengthen rural resilience. Effective food policy must prioritize equitable access, sustainability, and nutrition to uplift Pakistan’s rural population and safeguard national food systems.

Public Health Implications of Food Policy

Food policy in Pakistan plays a pivotal role in shaping public health outcomes and driving rural economic development. In rural areas, where access to healthcare and nutritious food is limited, the health implications of inadequate food policies are particularly severe. According to the National Nutrition Survey (2023), 40.2% of children under five in rural Pakistan are stunted, while 17.7% suffer from wasting, reflecting chronic undernutrition and repeated infections. At the same time, a shift toward cheap, calorie-dense processed foods has contributed to a rising obesity epidemic, with 23% of rural adults now classified as overweight (WHO Pakistan, 2023). This nutritional dual burden exacerbates chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which affect 26% of the

rural population (Pakistan Endocrine Society, 2023).

Mental health is another emerging concern linked to food insecurity. An Aga Khan University study (2023) reports that 42% of food-insecure rural households experience anxiety or depression, yet only 10% of rural areas have access to mental health services (Ministry of National Health Services, 2023), creating a major service gap. From an economic standpoint, improved food policy offers significant benefits. The World Food Program (2023) estimates that every $1 invested in nutrition interventions can save up to $16 in future healthcare costs. Enhanced nutrition also boosts labor productivity, with well-nourished agricultural workers achieving 15–20% higher yields (IFPRI, 2023). Strengthening local food systems through farmers' markets and cooperatives has been shown to raise rural incomes by up to 30% (SBP, 2023). Additionally, school meal programs improve educational outcomes, increasing attendance by 25% (UNESCO Pakistan, 2023). Strategic investments in agro-processing and cold storage infrastructure could further generate up to 2 million jobs across rural regions (ILO Pakistan, 2023). These statistics underscore the urgent need for integrated, nutrition-sensitive food policy reform in Pakistan's rural landscape.

Way Forward

The way forward for food policy in rural Pakistan requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that addresses the interconnections between agriculture, nutrition, healthcare, and economic development. First and foremost, food policy needs to be more inclusive of climate change adaptation strategies. With climate-induced shocks threatening 40% of Pakistan's agricultural output (IMF, 2023), crop diversification incentives and climate-resilient farming techniques should be promoted to safeguard food security. Policies that support sustainable agriculture, such as water-efficient irrigation systems, drought-resistant crops, and agroforestry, must be integrated into the food policy framework to reduce vulnerability and improve food supply chain resilience.

Furthermore, improving rural infrastructure is essential for enhancing food access and availability. With only 28% of rural households consuming diverse diets (National Nutrition Survey, 2023), policies should focus on strengthening market linkages, improving rural transportation networks, and establishing local food processing units to ensure that nutritious foods reach remote areas. Investment in food fortification programs, coupled with education on healthy diets, is vital to address micronutrient deficiencies prevalent among rural populations (UNICEF Pakistan, 2023).

Health interventions must go hand-in-hand with food policy reforms. Strengthening rural healthcare facilities and integrating nutrition-sensitive health programs will help reduce the dual burden of undernutrition and non-communicable diseases. Mental health services, particularly for food-insecure households, must be expanded, considering the reported anxiety and depression rates (Aga Khan University, 2023). Moreover, there is a need for more equitable access to healthcare and mental health services, which remain scarce in rural areas (Ministry of National Health Services, 2023).

Finally, economic incentives such as subsidies for nutrient-rich foods, support for rural cooperatives, and job creation in agro-processing industries should be prioritized to ensure the long-term sustainability of food policies. Together, these measures can pave the way for improved public health outcomes, economic stability, and food security in rural Pakistan.

Conclusion

Food policy plays a pivotal role in shaping both the public health and economic outcomes of rural Pakistan. The country's rural population faces significant challenges in accessing nutritious food, with high rates of malnutrition, food insecurity, and healthcare deficiencies. While interventions such as the Ehsaas Nashonuma Program and Kissan Card initiative show promise, there is an urgent need for a more integrated and comprehensive approach to food policy. This includes addressing the intertwined issues of climate change, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic vulnerabilities that exacerbate food insecurity in rural areas. Furthermore, it is essential to invest in nutrition-sensitive healthcare programs, improve rural infrastructure, and promote local food systems to enhance food access and livelihoods.

Incorporating climate-resilient farming practices, promoting crop diversification, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare and mental health services are crucial for improving both public health and economic stability. With strong policy reform that integrates agriculture, nutrition, healthcare, and economic planning, Pakistan can strengthen its rural food systems, reduce malnutrition, and foster sustainable development. These efforts will not only alleviate the current public health burden but also contribute to long-term economic prosperity, particularly for the rural population that forms the backbone of the country's economy.

References: World Bank; NNS; FAO. PBS; WFP; GOP; UNICEF; FAO; IMF; Ministry of National Health Services; UNESCO; ILO; SBP; IFPRI; Agha Khan University

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Integrating Agriculture and Health in Rural Pakistan

Explore the vital integration of agriculture and health in rural Pakistan to tackle food security, malnutrition, and disease prevention. Learn how current practices and structural deficiencies affect health outcomes and community well-being.

Shabnum Soomro

4/15/2025

The interconnection between agriculture and health is particularly pronounced in rural Pakistan, where agricultural practices directly influence nutrition, food security, and overall well-being. Despite this, agricultural and health sectors often operate in isolation, missing opportunities for synergistic impact. Integrating agricultural development with health-focused interventions can address critical challenges such as malnutrition, food insecurity, and disease spread in rural communities.

Rural Pakistan faces alarming nutrition and food security challenges. Over 42.3% of the population is moderately or severely food insecure, with 82.9% unable to afford a healthy diet. Malnutrition remains widespread, with 40% of children under five stunted, 17.7% wasted, and 29% underweight. Micronutrient deficiencies are prevalent: 49.1% of children are iron deficient, 51.5% lack vitamin A, and 62.7% are deficient in vitamin D (Nation; Dawn; PID).

Agricultural practices significantly impact these health outcomes. Limited crop diversity and reliance on staple grains reduce dietary variety, contributing to micronutrient deficiencies. Inadequate post-harvest storage leads to food losses, diminishing availability and increasing prices. Climate change exacerbates these issues by affecting crop yields and food security.

Addressing these challenges requires integrated strategies. The National Multisectoral Nutrition Program, launched in 2023 with an allocation of Rs. 8.5 billion, aims to reduce stunting and malnutrition through a multisectoral approach. This includes promoting healthy dietary practices, providing micronutrient supplements, and enhancing early childhood development (PID).

Collaborative efforts between agriculture and health sectors can amplify impact. For instance, promoting the cultivation of nutrient-rich crops, improving food storage infrastructure, and educating communities on nutrition can collectively enhance health outcomes. Such integrated approaches are vital for improving nutrition, ensuring food security, and fostering overall well-being in rural Pakistan.

Agriculture as a Pillar of Food Security in Pakistan

Agriculture serves as the backbone of food security in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas where most of the population relies on farming for both income and sustenance. Ensuring consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is critically dependent on the performance and sustainability of the agricultural sector. However, various interlinked challenges continue to hinder progress toward food security. Smallholder farmers, who represent around 65% of Pakistan's agricultural workforce, often lack access to key resources such as certified seeds, fertilizers, and modern farming technologies. According to the PBS (2023), only 30% of farmers use certified seeds, and limited irrigation affects nearly 60% of cropland, resulting in low productivity and inconsistent yields. Bridging these gaps through improved access to inputs, mechanization, and adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices is essential for enhancing food production and availability.

Furthermore, weak infrastructure significantly disrupts food distribution and market access. The FAO (2021) estimates that post-harvest losses in fruits and vegetables reach up to 40%, largely due to inadequate storage facilities and inefficient transportation networks in rural areas. These inefficiencies inflate food prices, limit farmers' income, and reduce food availability for consumers. Strategic investments in cold storage systems, rural road development, and supply chain management could reduce waste and improve food access across the country.

Climate change compounds these vulnerabilities. Pakistan ranks among the top ten countries most affected by climate change, with the Global Climate Risk Index (2023) highlighting the country's exposure to erratic weather patterns. The 2022 floods submerged 4.4 million acres of farmland, illustrating the devastating impact of extreme climate events on food production (NDMA, 2022). Strengthening resilience through

the promotion of drought-resistant crops, agroforestry, and water-efficient irrigation systems is vital. Without such adaptive measures, food security in Pakistan will remain at significant risk.

Agriculture and Nutrition: Enhancing Dietary Quality in Pakistan

Malnutrition continues to pose a significant public health challenge in Pakistan, with 40.2% of children under five suffering from stunted growth and 17.7% classified as wasted, according to the National Nutrition Survey (2018). These alarming figures point to the urgent need for a multisectoral approach, where agriculture is leveraged not just for food production, but also to improve dietary quality. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture offers a promising pathway to combat these deficiencies by reshaping farming practices to support better health outcomes. One critical strategy is crop diversification. Pakistan's heavy reliance on staple crops like wheat and rice has contributed to widespread micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in iron, zinc, and vitamin A. Promoting the cultivation and consumption of nutrient-rich crops such as pulses, leafy vegetables, and biofortified varieties of wheat can significantly enhance dietary intake. Projects like "Tackling Hidden Hunger with Biofortification" in Punjab have already demonstrated measurable improvements in reducing iron and zinc deficiencies (HarvestPlus, 2023).

Animal-sourced foods are another important component of a balanced diet. Although livestock contributes 60.5% of agricultural GDP (Ministry of National Food Security, 2023), access and consumption remain uneven, especially in rural areas, where only 35% of households meet recommended intake levels (NNS, 2018). Expanding small-scale poultry and dairy initiatives could offer accessible sources of protein and essential micronutrients. Home and community gardens also hold substantial potential. Initiatives like the Aga Khan Rural Support Program's "Kitchen Gardening for Nutrition" have improved dietary diversity in regions like Gilgit-Baltistan, increasing vegetable consumption by 27% (AKRSP, 2022).

Lastly, nutritional education is essential to ensure these efforts translate into improved health outcomes. Misconceptions around child feeding practices persist, and integrating nutrition messaging into agricultural extension services can empower communities. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has trained over 15,000 community health workers to promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture (SUN Pakistan, 2023), creating crucial links between food production and improved nutrition.

Agricultural Practices and Disease Prevention in Rural Pakistan

Unsafe agricultural practices in rural Pakistan significantly contribute to the overall burden of disease, highlighting the need for integrated health and farming interventions. Contaminated irrigation water, often used due to the lack of access to clean sources, has become a major vector for waterborne illnesses. According to UNICEF (2022), diarrheal diseases affect approximately 53,000 children annually, largely due to unsafe water use in farming. Improving water quality and promoting safe irrigation methods can substantially reduce infection rates and improve community health outcomes. Additionally, zoonotic diseases remain a critical issue. Brucellosis, a bacterial infection transmitted through unpasteurized dairy products and direct contact with infected animals, leads to over 5,000 reported cases each year in Pakistan (NIH, 2023). Strengthening veterinary infrastructure, vaccination programs, and safe livestock handling practices can help mitigate such risks. Pesticide misuse is another pressing concern. The Pesticide Action Network (2022) reports that over half of Pakistani farmers do not follow safety guidelines, leading to widespread cases of acute pesticide poisoning. Training in integrated pest management (IPM) and the distribution of protective gear are essential to address this issue.

Mental health, often overlooked, is increasingly affected by the stresses of farming, including debt, extreme weather, and market instability. Rising suicide rates among farmers, particularly in Sindh, have prompted initiatives like farmer-focused mental health helplines that offer critical psychosocial support (Sindh Agriculture Department, 2023). Beyond these health challenges, integrated strategies can build resilience and promote well-being. Climate-smart agriculture, such as the "Climate-Resilient Agriculture Project" in Punjab, has improved yields by 20% (PCRWR, 2023), while school feeding programs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have enhanced both nutrition and attendance (WFP, 2021). Women, who represent 70% of agricultural labor but own just 5% of the land (Pakistan Gender Parity Report, 2023), must be empowered through access to land and credit. Initiatives like Balochistan's "One Health Initiative" demonstrate how combining health and agriculture extension services can deliver better outcomes across sectors.

Conclusion

The integration of agriculture and health is vital to addressing the complex and interlinked challenges of food security,

malnutrition, and disease prevention in rural Pakistan. The data clearly illustrates that current agricultural practices and structural deficiencies contribute significantly to poor health outcomes. Limited access to nutritious food, inadequate farming inputs, poor infrastructure, and climate-related disruptions continue to undermine the well-being of rural communities.

However, with targeted, multisectoral strategies, there is substantial potential for improvement. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture, including crop diversification, livestock promotion, and home gardening, can enhance dietary quality and reduce micronutrient deficiencies. Equally important are health-conscious farming practices, such as safe water use, responsible pesticide handling, and prevention of zoonotic diseases, which can significantly lower the disease burden. Programs like the National Multisectoral Nutrition Program, Climate-Resilient Agriculture Project, and One Health Initiative highlight the value of integrated approaches in driving positive change. Empowering women in agriculture and improving access to education and infrastructure further amplify these efforts. By fostering collaboration between the agriculture and health sectors, Pakistan can create sustainable solutions that not only enhance food security but also promote long-term health and resilience in rural populations. The path forward lies in breaking silos and embracing a holistic, coordinated model for development.

References: Nation; Dawn; PID; PBS; World Bank; National Nutrition Survey (2018); FAO; SUN Pakistan; PCRWR; WFP; Pesticide Action Network; NIH; Global Climate Risk Index; NDMA

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at shabnumsoomro0202@gmail.com

Addressing Malnutrition in Pakistan: A Priority

Malnutrition in Pakistan is a pressing public health necessity and a pivotal economic issue. The dual burden of undernutrition and overnutrition threatens human development and economic growth, highlighting the urgent need for effective policies and solutions.

Jannat Riaz

4/22/2025

Food and nutrition are fundamental to human health, productivity, and national prosperity. In Pakistan, malnutrition, including both undernutrition and overnutrition, poses critical challenges not only to public health but also to economic development. The country is currently grappling with a "double burden of malnutrition," wherein chronic undernutrition exists alongside rising rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). According to the Global Nutrition Report (2023), 40.2% of children under five suffer from stunting, a sign of chronic undernutrition, while 17.7% are wasted due to acute food deprivation, and 9.5% are overweight, reflecting poor dietary quality and rising lifestyle-related risks (UNICEF, 2023). These figures underscore a complex nutritional landscape, where access, affordability, and quality of food vary widely across regions and socioeconomic groups.

The prevalence of overweight and obesity among adults has surged in recent years, contributing to the increasing burden of NCDs such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and hypertension. According to the WHO (2023), nearly 28% of adults in Pakistan are classified as overweight or obese, placing additional pressure on the healthcare system and reducing workforce productivity. Contributing factors include excessive consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods, sedentary lifestyles, and lack of awareness about balanced diets.

Addressing these challenges requires a multisectoral approach that integrates agriculture, health, education, and social protection systems. Nutrition-sensitive agricultural policies must promote the production and consumption of diverse, nutrient-rich crops such as pulses, vegetables, and fruits. Public health campaigns should raise awareness about healthy dietary practices and promote physical activity, particularly in urban areas. School meal programs, micronutrient supplementation, and food fortification initiatives also play a critical role in improving nutritional outcomes. Ultimately, ensuring food security and optimal nutrition is essential for building a healthy and resilient population capable of driving Pakistan's sustainable development goals forward.

Understanding the Roots, Impacts, and Solutions to Pakistan's Nutritional Crisis

Pakistan is currently facing a critical public health and economic challenge due to the dual burden of malnutrition, both undernutrition and overnutrition, affecting a wide cross-section of its population. Undernutrition affects approximately 36.9% of the population (World Bank, 2023), with stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies most prevalent among children and women. This condition leads to impaired cognitive development, increased susceptibility to disease, and elevated mortality rates among children under five. On the other hand, overnutrition is on the rise, with 28% of adults classified as obese and a growing prevalence of diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and hypertension. Alarmingly, Pakistan now has the third-highest number of people with diabetes in the world, reaching 33 million cases (IDF, 2023). Cardiovascular diseases account for nearly 29% of all deaths nationally (Global Burden of Disease, 2023). Economically, the cost of treating obesity and related NCDs is staggering, consuming an estimated 6.5% of Pakistan's GDP annually (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023).

Food insecurity further compounds the malnutrition crisis. About 37.5% of Pakistanis, particularly in rural areas and urban slums, experience chronic food insecurity (WFP, 2023). Escalating food prices and stagnant wages push families toward cheap, calorie-dense, nutrient-poor processed foods, worsening both under- and overnutrition. Economic inequality plays a key role; nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, and proteins are up to 300% more expensive than processed alternatives (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Government subsidies that favor staple grains like wheat and sugar distort dietary patterns, promoting carbohydrate-heavy diets that lack essential nutrients.

Additionally, a lack of nutritional education contributes to unhealthy food choices. Only 12% of schools currently include nutrition in their health education curricula (Ministry of Education, 2023), while urbanization and fast-food marketing have led to a surge in unhealthy eating habits. For instance, fast food sales increased by 22% in 2023 (Euromonitor), with urban youth consuming significantly more sugary drinks than their rural counterparts. Weak policy frameworks fail to regulate junk food advertising, particularly targeting children, while agricultural policies continue to prioritize cash crops over nutrient-rich alternatives.

Environmental shocks such as the 2022 floods, which wiped out 70% of standing crops in Sindh and Balochistan, and ongoing water scarcity further threaten food availability and affordability (FAO, 2023). These climate-induced disruptions aggravate malnutrition by limiting access to fresh produce and increasing

dependency on food aid or processed substitutes.

To combat this multifaceted crisis, Pakistan must implement integrated, evidence-based solutions. Making healthy food more affordable through subsidies on fruits, vegetables, and pulses, and imposing taxes on sugary drinks and ultra-processed foods can shift consumer behavior. Programs like Ehsaas Nashonuma, which target child stunting through cash transfers and nutritional support, should be expanded nationally. Nutrition education should be mainstreamed into school curricula and reinforced through public awareness campaigns via mass media and digital platforms. Training healthcare workers to provide basic dietary counseling at primary healthcare centers is another critical step.

On the agricultural front, promoting crop diversification, supporting smallholders with incentives for growing climate-resilient crops, and encouraging urban agriculture can improve both food security and dietary diversity. Healthcare systems must integrate malnutrition screening and treatment into routine services and establish community-based programs to prevent and manage NCDs. At the policy level, Pakistan should adopt and enforce regulations on junk food marketing, especially to children, and work closely with international partners like WHO and FAO to implement and monitor the National Action Plan on Nutrition (2024–2030). Through coordinated action across health, agriculture, education, and economic sectors, Pakistan can address the root causes of malnutrition and foster a healthier, more productive population.

Conclusion

Addressing malnutrition in Pakistan is not only a public health necessity but a national economic priority. The country's dual burden of undernutrition and overnutrition poses significant risks to human development, productivity, and long-term economic growth. With alarming rates of stunting, wasting, and rising non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart conditions, the cost of inaction is far too high. These nutrition-related challenges are deeply rooted in systemic issues, food insecurity, economic inequality, weak policy frameworks, inadequate education, and environmental shocks, all of which reinforce unhealthy dietary patterns and poor health outcomes.

However, this crisis is not insurmountable. Integrated, multi-sectoral interventions that align agriculture, health, education, and economic policy can reshape Pakistan's nutrition landscape. Making healthy food more affordable, educating the public, supporting climate-resilient agriculture, and regulating junk food marketing are essential steps. Moreover, expanding programs like Ehsaas Nashonuma and strengthening healthcare integration for malnutrition and NCD prevention will be critical. By implementing the National Action Plan on Nutrition with urgency and accountability, Pakistan can reverse current trends and build a healthier, more resilient population. Ultimately, nutrition must be viewed not only as a health issue but as the foundation of sustainable development, national prosperity, and human dignity.

References: UNICEF; WHO; World Bank; Pakistan Health Research Council; FAO; Global Nutrition Report; IDF; Global Burden of Disease; State Bank of Pakistan

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Decline of Karachi's Shareefa Market

Explore the decline of Karachi's Shareefa market, a symbol of local identity now threatened by urbanization, climate change, and systemic neglect. Discover the economic challenges faced by farmers, including rising costs and competition from imported fruits.

Warisha

4/24/2025

Karachi, Pakistan's largest metropolis and economic powerhouse, was once celebrated for its wide array of seasonal fruits, among which the Shareefa, or Custard Apple, held a special place. Known for its creamy texture, rich flavor, and high nutritional value, the fruit was a common sight in local markets during its peak harvest months from August to October. For generations, Shareefa was not only a dietary delight but also an affordable and accessible treat for middle- and lower-income households. However, in recent years, this beloved fruit has become a rarity in the city's fruit bazaars. Prices have soared to unprecedented levels, making them inaccessible to many consumers and pushing them into the category of a luxury item.

The decline is both alarming and multifaceted. According to the 2023 report by the Sindh Agriculture Department, Shareefa production in Karachi and surrounding peri-urban areas has dropped by 60% over the last decade. Several interlinked factors are driving this decline. Rapid urbanization has consumed much of the agricultural land traditionally used for Shareefa cultivation. Climate change has further disrupted growing cycles, with rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns impacting yields. Farmers also face high input costs, lack of extension services, and limited cold storage or transport facilities, leading to significant post-harvest losses.

Moreover, poor supply chain infrastructure has worsened distribution challenges, often resulting in spoilage before the fruit reaches markets. If these issues remain unaddressed, Karachi may lose its once-thriving Shareefa trade altogether. Preservation of this seasonal delicacy requires urgent action, including investment in climate-resilient farming, incentives for peri-urban agriculture, and improved market access for small-scale fruit growers. Revitalizing Shareefa production could not only restore a cherished part of Karachi's culinary heritage but also strengthen local food systems and rural-urban economic linkages.

Reasons Behind the Decline of Shareefa in Karachi

The decline of Shareefa cultivation in Karachi can be attributed to a combination of environmental, economic, infrastructural, and policy-related challenges. Climate change has played a significant role in disrupting the growing conditions that Shareefa trees depend on. Once well-suited to Karachi's tropical-subtropical climate, Shareefa now struggles under rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and increased humidity. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), the average temperature in Karachi has increased by 1.5°C over the past two decades, and frequent heatwaves are disrupting the pollination process and fruit formation. In addition, erratic monsoon patterns and sudden downpours are causing premature fruit drop. Moreover, heightened humidity levels, especially in the coastal belt, have triggered the spread of fungal infections like anthracnose, further diminishing yields. A 2022 study by the University of Karachi found that nearly 40% of Shareefa orchards in key areas like Malir and Gadap are suffering from climate-induced stress.

Urbanization has also taken a toll. Karachi's agricultural heartlands such as Malir and Gadap have been swallowed by unchecked real estate development. Farmers, enticed by quick profits from land sales, are opting out of fruit cultivation. The Sindh Bureau of Statistics reports that more than 35% of Karachi's agricultural lands have been converted into housing schemes in the past decade. The Karachi Development Authority (KDA) has failed to enforce protective zoning laws to preserve green belts, leading to a rapid disappearance of fruit orchards.

Economically, Shareefa farming has become unsustainable. Farmers face water shortages and must rely on expensive tanker water for irrigation. Input costs for fertilizers and pesticides have surged by 25% in recent years. Even when the fruit is harvested, farmers face price suppression by middlemen who buy at low rates and sell at high markups. The traditional farming methods used by most Shareefa growers also contribute to inefficiency. Outdated irrigation methods such as flood irrigation wastewater, and limited access to training on pruning or pest control further hamper productivity.

Additionally, Shareefa's short shelf life poses logistical challenges. With no cold storage facilities and poor transportation infrastructure, post-harvest losses reach up to 40%, making it unappealing to wholesalers. The absence of cold chain logistics not only increases spoilage but also prevents Shareefa from being exported, despite demand in international markets like the Gulf. Imported fruits, which are available year-round, better packaged, and more durable, have overtaken Shareefa in both affordability and consumer preference. Consumers are more inclined to purchase fruits that last longer and are easier to store, pushing seasonal fruits like Shareefa to the margins of the urban market.

Lastly, the lack of government intervention and targeted support for Shareefa growers compounds the

problem. Without policy support, investment in cold chains, training programs, and price regulation, Shareefa cultivation will continue to decline. Unless urgent, integrated efforts are made to address these structural challenges, Karachi risks losing not only a once-vibrant fruit market but also a cultural and agricultural legacy tied deeply to the city's rural-urban landscape.

Measures to Revive Karachi's Shareefa Market

Reviving Karachi's Shareefa market requires a multi-pronged strategy that combines policy support, technological innovation, infrastructure development, and market diversification. To begin with, the government and agricultural departments must actively intervene to reduce the financial burden on farmers. Offering subsidies for essential inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and solar-powered irrigation systems can make Shareefa cultivation more economically viable. At the same time, declaring traditional growing areas like Malir and Gadap as protected agricultural zones can prevent further land encroachment and preserve remaining orchards. In terms of improving farming practices, partnerships with agricultural universities can be forged to deliver training programs on high-yield cultivation methods, drip irrigation, pruning, and organic pest control. Controlled-environmental agriculture, such as greenhouse farming, should be piloted to extend the growing season and protect crops from erratic weather conditions.

Addressing the post-harvest supply chain is equally crucial. Installing cold storage units near production areas will significantly extend the shelf life of Shareefa, while better packaging, such as ventilated plastic crates, can reduce damage during transportation. On the demand side, awareness campaigns can be launched to promote Shareefa's health benefits, as it is rich in vitamin C, potassium, and antioxidants. By building a health-conscious consumer base, demand for the fruit can increase in urban markets. Furthermore, Pakistan can explore export opportunities, particularly in Gulf countries where there is a niche demand for exotic fruits. This requires improving quality control and meeting international phytosanitary standards.

To support small-scale farmers, local governments can establish weekly farmers' markets across Karachi, allowing producers to sell directly to consumers without the involvement of exploitative middlemen. E-commerce platforms like Daraz should be encouraged to list fresh fruit vendors, offering a new sales channel. Finally, investment in research is vital. Institutions such as the Nuclear Institute of Agriculture (NIA) in Tando Jam should be tasked with developing disease-resistant, climate-resilient, and potentially year-round Shareefa varieties, ensuring the sustainability of this cherished fruit in the years ahead.

Conclusion

The decline of Karachi's Shareefa market reflects broader structural issues in Pakistan's agricultural and urban development landscape. Once a hallmark of seasonal abundance and local identity, Shareefa now teeters on the edge of extinction in the city due to unchecked urbanization, climate change, and systemic neglect. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and increasing fungal diseases have reduced yields, while the loss of farmland to housing schemes has stripped farmers of their livelihoods and consumers of cherished fruit. Economically, high input costs, inefficient farming practices, and the absence of cold storage and supply chain facilities have made Shareefa cultivation increasingly unviable. Meanwhile, imported fruits dominate markets due to their shelf stability and market presence, pushing Shareefa further into obscurity.

Yet, this trend is not irreversible. With timely and coordinated action, such as subsidies, zoning protections, cold storage investments, and market access innovations, Karachi can preserve and even rejuvenate its Shareefa sector. Promoting climate-resilient varieties, educating farmers, and building public awareness of Shareefa's nutritional benefits are crucial next steps. Supporting small growers through e-commerce and direct sales will further democratize access and reduce reliance on exploitative middlemen. Ultimately, reviving Shareefa is not just about saving a fruit, it's about preserving Karachi's agricultural roots, improving food security, and creating sustainable livelihoods in a rapidly urbanizing world.

References: Sindh Agriculture Department; Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD); University of Karachi; Food and Agriculture Organization; Trade Development Authority of Pakistan

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Sindh, Pakistan and can be reached at bintemasoodagriculturist@gmail.com

Impact of Household Income on Child Nutrition in Pakistan

Explore how household income affects child nutrition in rural Pakistan, where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line. Understand the links between income and malnutrition.

Qamar Ul Islam & Qurat Ul Ain

4/30/2025

Income serves as a fundamental determinant in fulfilling basic human needs, especially in developing countries like Pakistan, where economic disparities are stark and persistent. In rural areas, approximately 59.3% of the population lives below the poverty line (World Bank, 2023), making access to adequate nutrition a significant challenge. Household income directly influences dietary quality, food security, and child health, as reflected in Keynes' Consumption Function (C = f(Y)), which posits that consumption is a function of income. In contexts where income is low, households are less able to afford nutrient-rich foods such as meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables, leading to a diet dominated by cheaper, less nutritious staples. This reduced dietary diversity disproportionately affects children under five, a group most vulnerable to the long-term consequences of undernutrition.

The current state of child malnutrition in Pakistan is alarming. According to the National Nutrition Survey (2018), 40.2% of children under five are stunted (indicating chronic malnutrition), 17.2% are wasted (suggesting acute malnutrition), and 28.9% are underweight. These figures reflect a multifaceted crisis, shaped not only by income constraints but also by limited maternal education, poor sanitation, and inadequate access to healthcare. More recent data from UNICEF (2023) reveals that in rural regions of Sindh and Balochistan, the prevalence of stunting exceeds 42%, underscoring both regional disparities and the urgency of intervention.

This paper explores the income-malnutrition relationship by analyzing empirical data, government safety net programs like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), and international best practices in countries with similar socioeconomic contexts. By examining how income influences dietary intake and child growth outcomes, the study aims to inform more targeted, income-sensitive policy interventions. Understanding this nexus is crucial for addressing malnutrition and achieving sustainable improvements in rural health and development outcomes in Pakistan.

Income as a Determinant of Child Nutrition

Income plays a pivotal role in determining child nutrition outcomes, particularly in rural Pakistan, where financial constraints severely limit access to balanced diets and essential healthcare. Empirical evidence illustrates a direct correlation between household income and dietary intake. High-income families allocate 35–50% more of their food expenditure on protein-rich items such as eggs, meat, and dairy, whereas low-income households primarily depend on starchy staples like wheat and rice (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This consumption pattern leads to widespread micronutrient deficiencies, especially in iron, zinc, and vitamin A, among children from poorer families. A study by IFPRI (2022) found that a 10% increase in household income can reduce the likelihood of stunting by 3.2%, highlighting the income elasticity of nutritional improvement.

Beyond direct effects, income shortfalls perpetuate a poverty-malnutrition cycle. Around 57% of rural women are anemic (NNS, 2018), increasing the risk of low-birth-weight infants and weakened immune systems. Malnourished mothers produce lower-quality breast milk, compromising infant health and growth. This cycle is effectively captured by Ragnar Nurkse's "Vicious Circle of Poverty," where low-income results in poor nutrition, reducing human productivity and perpetuating generational poverty.

However, several non-income factors further intensify child malnutrition. Disparities in healthcare access are stark: only 28% of rural areas have functional health centers (WHO, 2023), and over 32% of rural children miss essential vaccinations (Gavi, 2023). Gender inequality exacerbates the crisis, female literacy in rural Pakistan is just 36% (UNESCO, 2023), despite evidence showing that educated mothers are 2.3 times more likely to practice optimal breastfeeding (Lancet, 2022). Cultural practices also divert limited resources; dowry systems and festival spending often consume 15–20% of household income that could otherwise be used for nutrition (SPDC, 2023). Therefore, addressing income deficits alongside social and institutional barriers is vital to improving child nutrition in rural Pakistan.

Government Interventions & Effectiveness

Government interventions in Pakistan have played a significant, albeit uneven, role in addressing child malnutrition, especially in rural areas where poverty and limited access to healthcare services exacerbate the crisis. One of the most impactful social safety net programs is the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), which provides quarterly cash transfers of PKR 9,000 to over 8.6 million women (BISP, 2023). Recent evaluations by the World Bank (2023) indicate that BISP has led to a 12% reduction in severe wasting among children in recipient households, highlighting the critical link between income support and nutritional outcomes.

Nutrition-specific programs have also yielded promising results. The Tawana Pakistan Project, which provided school-based meals to adolescent girls, improved body mass index (BMI) in 76% of participants. Similarly, the nationwide Lady Health Workers (LHWs) program

reaches approximately 60% of rural mothers with essential nutrition counseling, contributing to better infant feeding practices and awareness of dietary needs.

Agricultural support policies indirectly benefit nutrition by boosting rural incomes. For instance, the Kissan Card subsidies have led to an 18% increase in smallholder farmer earnings (FAO, 2023), enhancing household food security. Additionally, food fortification mandates, such as iron and folic acid in wheat flour, are aimed at addressing widespread micronutrient deficiencies.

International case studies offer valuable lessons. India's POSHAN Abhiyaan, through its Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and behavioral change campaigns, reduced national stunting rates from 38.4% in 2016 to 35.5% in 2021. Bangladesh achieved a 28% decline in stunting between 1997 and 2019, driven largely by rising female employment in the garment sector and community health clinics offering free micronutrient supplements. Conversely, Sudan's ongoing conflict-induced famine illustrates the devastating impact of income collapse, with acute malnutrition affecting 45% of children and over 4.9 million children displaced (UNICEF, 2024). These comparisons underscore the importance of stable governance, multisectoral coordination, and economic empowerment in combating malnutrition.

Recommendations

To address the persistent challenge of child malnutrition in rural Pakistan, a comprehensive, multi-tiered policy strategy is essential, one that integrates immediate relief with long-term structural reforms. In the short term, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) should be expanded and made more nutrition-sensitive by linking cash transfers to mandatory child growth monitoring and participation in health check-ups. Such conditionality will ensure that income support translates into better nutritional outcomes. Additionally, emergency feeding interventions should be deployed in malnutrition hotspots such as Tharparkar and South Punjab, where wasting rates exceed national averages. These could include community-based therapeutic feeding and supplementary nutrition schemes for vulnerable populations.

In the medium term, universalizing the coverage of Lady Health Workers (LHWs) is crucial. By reaching 100% of rural households, LHWs can provide continuous nutrition counseling, monitor child growth, and guide infant and young child feeding practices. Moreover, school-based nutrition programs should be rolled out widely, especially in food-insecure districts. Meals should be sourced locally to support rural economies and ensure cultural acceptability, while also incentivizing school attendance among children.

Long-term structural changes are equally important for breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Women's empowerment through vocational training, particularly in textiles and agro-processing, can enhance household incomes and decision-making power, which are strongly linked to improved child nutrition. Upgrading road infrastructure will connect remote communities to markets, enabling better access to diverse foods, health services, and income-generating opportunities. Finally, integrating population planning and reproductive health education into rural development strategies is essential to address resource constraints per capita and break the Malthusian trap of poverty and undernutrition. Together, these policy measures form a holistic framework for improving nutritional outcomes, building household resilience, and fostering sustainable human development across rural Pakistan.

Conclusion

Household income has direct impacts on child nutrition in rural Pakistan, where nearly 60% of the population lives below the poverty line. Malnutrition among children under five, manifested in high rates of stunting, wasting, and underweight, reflects a broader socio-economic crisis shaped not only by limited income but also by poor maternal health, gender inequality, and weak access to healthcare. Empirical evidence confirms that even modest income improvements can significantly reduce stunting and undernutrition, while non-income factors such as maternal education and health infrastructure play a vital complementary role.

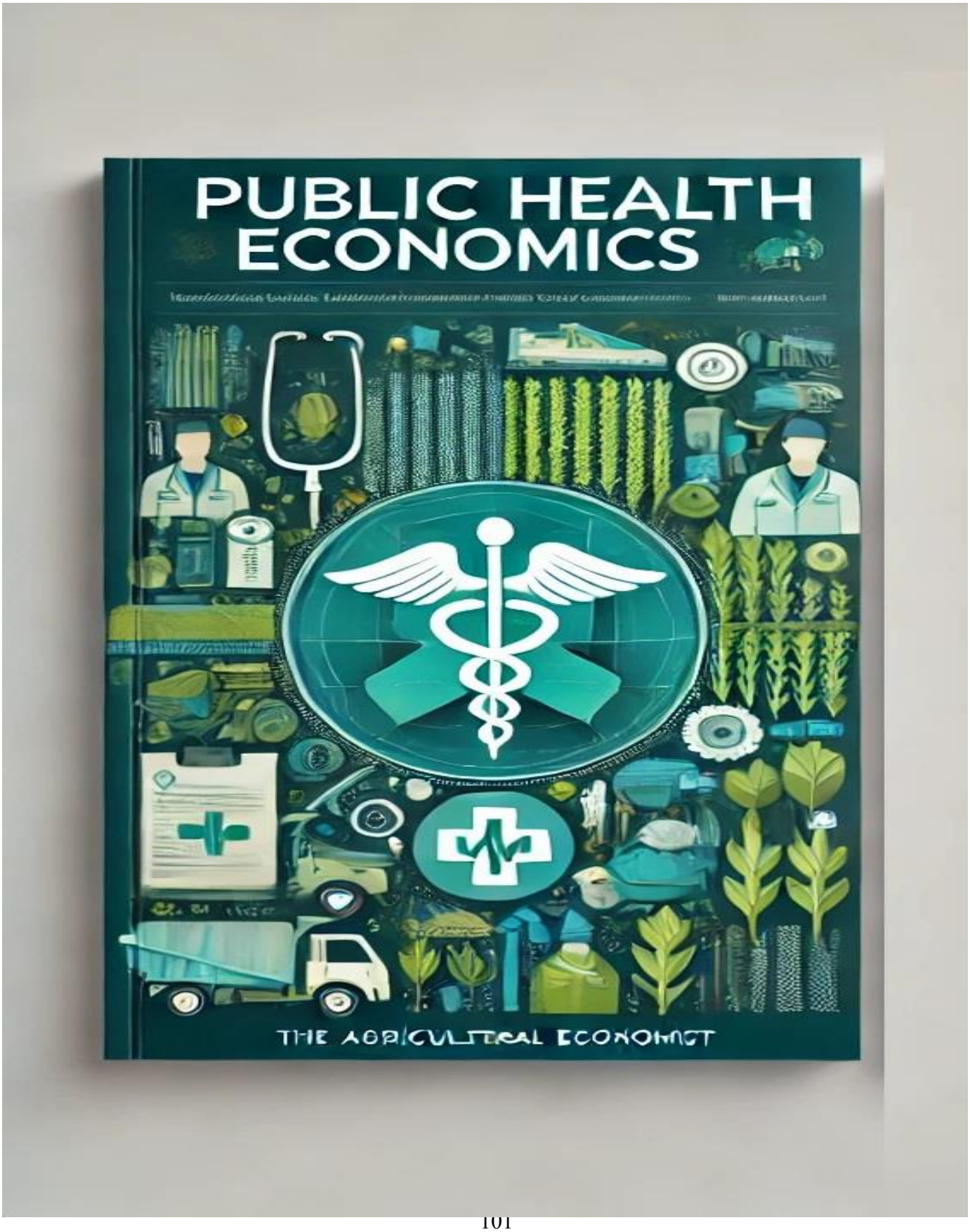
Government initiatives like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and nutrition-specific programs have yielded measurable benefits, but coverage gaps and limited integration with health and education systems have restricted their full potential. Comparative insights from India and Bangladesh demonstrate that multisectoral, community-based interventions can successfully reduce child malnutrition when supported by stable governance and strategic investments in women's empowerment, healthcare, and education.

To move forward, Pakistan must implement a tiered strategy that includes expanding social protection with nutrition-linked conditionality, strengthening rural health systems, promoting women's economic participation, and enhancing infrastructure. Addressing the structural and immediate causes of malnutrition is not only a moral imperative but also a crucial investment in the country's future productivity, human capital, and social equity.

References: World Bank; IFPRI; UNICEF; Lancet; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics; National Nutrition Survey; Gavi; SPDC; BISP

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writers are affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, and National Institute of Food Science and Technology, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan and can be reached at qamarbadar007@gmail.com


PUBLIC HEALTH
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Improving Rural Healthcare in Pakistan for Better Agriculture

Enhancing rural healthcare in Pakistan is vital for boosting agricultural productivity and ensuring food security. Addressing health challenges like malnutrition and infectious diseases is crucial for economic stability in rural communities.

Muhammad Zia uddin

4/3/2025

Agriculture remains the backbone of Pakistan's economy, contributing 22.7% to GDP and employing 38.5% of the labor force (Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24). However, the sector's productivity is severely hampered by poor rural healthcare infrastructure. With only 0.6 doctors per 1,000 people in rural areas (WHO, 2023) and 28% of rural households lacking access to basic healthcare (PDHS, 2022-23), Pakistan's agricultural workforce faces significant health challenges that directly impact crop yields and food security.

Health-related issues such as malnutrition, waterborne diseases, and respiratory infections are prevalent among rural communities, reducing labor efficiency and increasing absenteeism in the fields. The prevalence of anemia among rural women, who make up a significant portion of the agricultural workforce, is 42%, leading to decreased physical endurance and lower productivity (National Nutrition Survey, 2023). Additionally, frequent exposure to pesticides and other agrochemicals without proper medical intervention contributes to long-term health risks, including respiratory and neurological disorders (FAO, 2023).

The lack of adequate maternal healthcare further exacerbates rural health disparities. Approximately 35% of pregnant women in rural Pakistan do not receive prenatal care, increasing the risk of maternal and infant mortality (UNICEF, 2023). These healthcare deficiencies not only affect individual well-being but also threaten overall agricultural output by reducing the availability of healthy and skilled labor. Strengthening rural healthcare through mobile health clinics, telemedicine, and community health programs is crucial to sustaining agricultural productivity and ensuring long-term food security in Pakistan.

The Health-Agriculture Productivity Link in Pakistan

The link between health and agricultural productivity in Pakistan is critical, as poor health conditions directly impact labor efficiency, decision-making, and overall farm output. Malnutrition remains a pressing issue, with 40% of Pakistani children under five suffering from stunting (NNS, 2018), which threatens the future labor capacity of the agricultural sector. The disease burden in rural areas further exacerbates productivity losses. Malaria alone causes an estimated 500,000 lost workdays annually in Punjab's rice-growing regions (Punjab Health Department, 2023), while tuberculosis prevalence is 42% higher in agricultural communities compared to urban areas (NIH, 2023). These health challenges result in economic strain on farming households, with 17% of rural household income spent on healthcare expenses (PSLM, 2021-22). Additionally, 63% of farm loans are taken out to cover medical emergencies rather than for farm investment, limiting the sector's ability to modernize (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023).

Beyond physical health, cognitive impairments caused by nutritional deficiencies and chemical exposure also hinder agricultural productivity. Iron-deficiency anemia affects 53% of pregnant women in rural Sindh (UNICEF, 2023), impairing their decision-making capacity during critical planting and harvest seasons. Additionally, long-term pesticide exposure contributes to neurological disorders, reducing farm management capacity by an estimated 23% in Pakistan's cotton-growing regions (Aga Khan University, 2022). These combined factors create a vicious cycle where poor health undermines agricultural efficiency, leading to lower incomes, higher medical expenses, and continued economic vulnerability. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that improves rural healthcare access, promotes nutritional awareness, and mitigates occupational health risks to ensure a more resilient agricultural workforce.

How Improved Healthcare Boosts Agricultural Productivity

Improving healthcare in rural Pakistan has demonstrated significant benefits for agricultural productivity, as healthier workers are more efficient, resilient, and capable of making informed farming decisions. The Lady Health Worker (LHW) Program has been instrumental in reducing child mortality by 28% in program areas (World Bank, 2022) while also contributing to a 12% increase in women's participation in farm labor. This increase is particularly important, as women make up a substantial portion of Pakistan's agricultural workforce. Similarly, the Punjab Malaria Control Program has led to a 60% reduction in malaria cases in endemic farming areas between 2018 and 2023, directly resulting in an 18% increase in rice yields in treated districts. By preventing disease outbreaks, such programs ensure that farmers can work consistently, avoiding disruptions that negatively affect agricultural output.

The economic benefits of healthcare investments in rural areas are also substantial. A study by PIDE (2023) found that every 1% increase in rural health spending correlates with a 0.8%

rise in agricultural GDP. Additionally, improved healthcare access reduces financial distress among farming households, leading to a 5% decrease in farm loan defaults (SBP, 2023). When farmers are not burdened with high medical costs, they can invest more in modernizing their agricultural practices, improving productivity and sustainability.

Nutrition also plays a crucial role in agricultural efficiency. The introduction of biofortified wheat programs in Punjab has shown a 27% reduction in iron deficiency among farm families, which has translated into a 15% increase in farm productivity (PARC, 2023). Proper nutrition enhances physical endurance and cognitive function, enabling farmers to make better decisions regarding crop management, pest control, and resource allocation. Strengthening rural healthcare and nutrition programs can thus drive long-term agricultural growth and food security in Pakistan.

Current Challenges in Rural Healthcare Delivery

Rural healthcare delivery in Pakistan faces critical challenges that directly impact agricultural productivity and overall rural well-being. Infrastructure gaps remain a major concern, with 32% of Basic Health Units (BHUs) in rural Sindh being non-functional, limiting access to essential medical services (Sindh Health Department, 2023). Additionally, only 19% of villages have access to emergency transport, which severely affects timely medical interventions in critical cases (NIPS, 2022). Workforce shortages further exacerbate the situation, particularly in Balochistan, where the doctor-patient ratio stands at a staggering 1:6,500 compared to the urban average of 1:1,200 (PMDC, 2023). Seasonal vulnerabilities also strain rural healthcare systems, as seen during the wheat harvest when heatstroke cases surge by 40% due to prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures (Punjab Emergency Services, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted policy approach. Revitalizing BHUs through public-private partnerships (PPP) can improve service delivery, as demonstrated by the success of KP's Sehat Sahulat Program. Mobile health units for seasonal farmworkers, similar to a pilot program in Multan that increased vaccination coverage by 35%, can enhance outreach. Integrating healthcare with agriculture through on-farm clinics in major agri-zones, modeled after India's Krishi Vigyan Kendra system, could improve farmer health outcomes. Additionally, bundling health insurance with crop insurance, as currently tested in Punjab's Kissan Card program, can provide financial security against medical expenses.

Nutrition interventions, such as scaling up biofortified wheat and rice varieties to cover 40% of farmland by 2030, can address malnutrition and enhance productivity. School nutrition programs linked to local farm produce, like Sindh's Benazir Bhutto Breakfast Program, also hold promises. Leveraging technology through telemedicine, which successfully connected 82 villages in the Thar Desert to specialists (Sindh Health Initiative, 2023), and AI-based disease surveillance, as tested in Faisalabad's Smart Farming Project, can further strengthen rural healthcare systems.

Conclusion

Improving rural healthcare in Pakistan is essential for enhancing agricultural productivity and ensuring long-term food security. The persistent health challenges faced by rural communities, ranging from malnutrition and infectious diseases to occupational hazards, significantly reduce labor efficiency and increase economic vulnerabilities. High disease prevalence and inadequate healthcare infrastructure not only lead to absenteeism but also force farming households to allocate a substantial portion of their income toward medical expenses, diverting resources from agricultural investments. Addressing these health burdens is crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty and stagnation in the rural economy.

Successful interventions, such as the Lady Health Worker Program and the Punjab Malaria Control Program, have demonstrated that strategic healthcare investments can yield substantial agricultural benefits. Reducing disease prevalence and improving nutrition directly contribute to higher productivity and lower financial distress among farmers. Moreover, integrated policy measures, such as mobile health units, telemedicine, and health-insurance-linked agricultural policies, can bridge the gap in rural healthcare delivery.

To sustain agricultural growth, Pakistan must adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes healthcare accessibility, preventive care, and nutrition security. Strengthening rural healthcare through targeted investments and innovative solutions will not only improve public health but also ensure a resilient, productive, and self-sufficient agricultural workforce.

References: Pakistan Economic Survey; WHO Pakistan Country Profile 2023; Pakistan Demographic Health Survey 2022-23; Punjab Malaria Control Program Annual Report 2023; State Bank of Pakistan Agricultural Credit Review 2023; PIDE Health-Agriculture Nexus Study 2023; World Bank; NIH; PSLM

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Economic Impact of Malaria & Dengue on Agriculture

Explore the profound economic impact of malaria and dengue on agricultural productivity in Pakistan. Discover how these diseases disrupt rural economies, cause labor shortages, and lead to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Fatima Abid

4/4/2025

Malaria and dengue fever are among the most devastating vector-borne diseases in Pakistan, severely affecting public health and agricultural productivity. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), Pakistan reported over 3.5 million malaria cases in 2022, with dengue infections surpassing 50,000 annually, particularly concentrated in the densely populated provinces of Punjab and Sindh (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

These diseases place a substantial burden on the healthcare system and disproportionately impact rural communities where access to timely medical care is often limited. Beyond the public health crisis, the agricultural sector—which contributes 22.7% of Pakistan's GDP and employs 37.4% of the national labor force—suffers severe disruptions as a result (Ministry of National Food Security, 2023). Malaria and dengue reduce labor availability during critical planting and harvesting seasons by causing prolonged worker absenteeism due to illness and hospitalization. In some high-incidence districts, such as Tharparkar and Dadu, up to 20% of farm laborers report lost workdays during peak transmission seasons. This labor shortfall lowers overall productivity and delays key agricultural operations, ultimately reducing crop yields. Moreover, affected households divert limited financial resources to healthcare costs, reducing investment in farm inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds, and irrigation. In regions where subsistence farming is common, such disruptions threaten local food security and heighten vulnerability to poverty. Vector control remains limited due to fragmented health infrastructure, poor sanitation, and climate conditions conducive to mosquito breeding. Effective mitigation requires a multi-sectoral strategy, including early-warning disease surveillance systems, farmer health education, and targeted mosquito control measures such as larvicide distribution and drainage of stagnant water in agricultural zones. Integrating vector-borne disease management into agricultural extension services and rural development programs is essential. These tailored interventions can protect both public health and agricultural livelihoods, creating resilience in the face of recurring vector-borne disease outbreaks in Pakistan.

Mechanisms of Impact on Pakistan's Agriculture

Vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever have far-reaching consequences on Pakistan's agriculture, impacting productivity, investment capacity, labor availability, and gender equity. One of the most direct mechanisms of impact is labor shortages. Malaria, characterized by high fever, fatigue, and anemia, incapacitates infected individuals for extended periods, rendering them unable to perform physically demanding agricultural tasks. A 2023 study conducted in rural Sindh revealed that malaria-related absenteeism during critical planting and harvesting phases reduced wheat and rice yields by 20–30% (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2023). Similarly, dengue fever, which saw a major outbreak in Lahore in 2022, caused 15–20% labor shortages during cotton harvesting, leading to significant delays in crop cycles and overall productivity losses (Punjab Agriculture Department, 2023).

Beyond physical health impacts, the financial burden of treating these illnesses diverts household resources away from agricultural investment. Rural families spend an estimated 25–40% of their income on treating malaria and dengue, significantly reducing their ability to purchase inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, or irrigation equipment (World Bank, 2023). Many resort to borrowing to cover medical expenses, leading to cycles of debt that further limit future agricultural investment (State Bank of Pakistan, 2023).

The seasonal nature of these diseases compounds their effects. Malaria peaks during the monsoon season from July to September, overlapping with the rice transplantation period in Punjab and Sindh. Dengue cases typically surge in the post-monsoon months of September to November, coinciding with cotton and vegetable harvests (Pakistan Meteorological Department, 2023). These overlaps disrupt time-sensitive farming activities and cause cascading effects throughout the agricultural calendar.

Furthermore, women, who make up 60–70% of Pakistan's agricultural labor force,often bear increased caregiving responsibilities when family members fall ill. This not only reduces their participation in agricultural work but also exacerbates existing gender inequalities in rural economies (UN Women, 2023).

Consequences and Solutions

Vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue have produced measurable impacts on Pakistan's agriculture across different provinces, as demonstrated through several case studies. In Punjab, the 2021 dengue outbreak in Faisalabad led to a 12% reduction in cotton yields due to widespread illness among farm laborers (University of Agriculture Faisalabad, 2022). However, proactive mosquito fogging campaigns launched in 2023 helped reduce dengue cases by 35%, which correlated with improved cotton harvests (Punjab Health Department, 2023). In Sindh's Tharparkar district, malaria infections in 2022 resulted in an

18% decline in wheat output, intensifying local food insecurity (Sindh Agriculture University, 2023). Following the implementation of bed net distribution programs, wheat productivity increased by 15% in 2023, highlighting the benefits of targeted health interventions (WHO Pakistan, 2023). Similarly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Swat Valley, dengue outbreaks disrupted apple and peach harvesting seasons, leading to financial losses estimated at Rs. 2.5 billion (KP Directorate of Agriculture, 2023).

These health crises also have broad socioeconomic consequences. Reduced agricultural output increases the price of staple crops like wheat and rice, worsening food inflation and deepening food insecurity among the 37% of Pakistanis already living below the poverty line (World Food Program, 2023). When rural families spend their limited income on healthcare instead of nutritious food, child malnutrition worsens. The stunting rate among Pakistani children stands at a staggering 40.2%, and this is further exacerbated by disease-driven household spending patterns (UNICEF Pakistan, 2023). Export performance is also compromised; in 2022 alone, labor shortages linked to malaria and dengue led to a $500 million decline in rice and cotton exports—both vital for Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings (Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, 2023). Long-term, chronic exposure to malaria undermines human capital by impairing children's cognitive development, which can negatively affect agricultural productivity for generations (Lancet Study, 2023).

To address these challenges, a multifaceted strategy is essential. Strengthening public health infrastructure through the expansion of mosquito net distribution, indoor residual spraying, and deploying dengue surveillance drones in high-risk urban areas is a key priority (Malaria Control Program Pakistan, 2023; Ministry of Health, 2023). In parallel, agricultural adaptations such as promoting mechanization—like tractor-mounted harvesters—and introducing drought- and disease-resistant crop varieties can reduce vulnerability (Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, 2023). Policy-level solutions must include expanding subsidized healthcare access for farmers through the Sehat Sahulat Program, providing microfinance to help recover from medical debt, and enhancing inter-provincial coordination to improve outbreak response and preparedness.

Conclusion

The economic impact of malaria and dengue on agricultural productivity in Pakistan is both profound and far-reaching. These vector-borne diseases not only compromise the health of millions but also severely disrupt the rural economy, particularly during critical agricultural seasons. Labor shortages caused by illness, high out-of-pocket healthcare expenses, and delays in planting and harvesting all contribute to significant declines in crop yields. The consequences are felt not only at the household level, where malnutrition and debt cycles deepen poverty, but also at the national level, with reduced exports and increasing food insecurity.

Case studies from Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa illustrate the tangible losses faced by farmers and communities, but they also highlight the potential of targeted interventions, such as mosquito control campaigns and bed net distribution, to reverse these effects. Moving forward, an integrated approach that combines health and agricultural strategies is essential. Strengthening disease surveillance, promoting resilient farming practices, and ensuring policy support through subsidized healthcare and microfinance are vital steps toward protecting Pakistan's agricultural sector. Only by recognizing the interconnection between health and productivity can sustainable rural development be achieved. Addressing the dual burden of disease and agricultural vulnerability must become a central priority in Pakistan's development agenda.

References: WHO Pakistan; Ministry of National Food Security; Punjab Agriculture Department; World Bank; State Bank of Pakistan.

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Nutrition and Health Policies in Pakistan

Explore the critical intersection of nutrition and health policies in Pakistan. Understand the challenges and the need for a coordinated approach to address undernutrition, overnutrition, and non-communicable diseases for societal well-being.

Kinza Mubben

4/9/2025

Public policies serve as foundational guidelines for promoting and implementing services that contribute to societal well-being, particularly in critical sectors such as nutrition, agriculture, and public health. In developing countries like Pakistan, where systemic challenges and resource limitations persist, the intersection of these three domains plays a vital role in determining population health outcomes.

Nutrition, agricultural practices, and public health are deeply interwoven, and any policy aimed at improving one area must consider its implications for the others. For instance, poor agricultural practices can lead to nutrient-deficient food, thereby contributing to malnutrition and disease, especially among vulnerable populations. Effective public policies must therefore adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address food insecurity, promote healthy dietary habits, and improve overall public health (FAO, 2022).

In recent years, global discourse has increasingly focused on the development of sustainable and resilient food systems, emphasizing the need for integrated policy interventions that influence both dietary behaviors and long-term health outcomes (WHO, 2023). In the case of Pakistan, where the population now exceeds 240 million (World Bank, 2023), these challenges are compounded by rapid urbanization, population growth, and increasing environmental degradation. As demand for food rises, the pressure on farmers and supply chains intensifies, often leading to a dependence on high-yield but chemically intensive farming practices. While such methods may boost short-term productivity, they also pose serious threats to environmental sustainability and human health due to exposure to pesticides and reduced nutritional quality of crops (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2022–23).

To mitigate these risks, public policy must evolve to promote agroecological practices, strengthen nutrition-sensitive agriculture, and ensure access to safe, nutritious food for all. This requires collaboration across government ministries, the private sector, and civil society to build a coherent, health-focused food policy framework that supports both human and environmental health.

Agricultural Policies and Their Impact on Public Health

Agricultural policies play a critical role in shaping public health outcomes by governing domestic food production, imports, and distribution systems. These policies influence not only the quantity and quality of food available but also its safety, affordability, and nutritional value. In Pakistan, agriculture is a cornerstone of the economy, contributing 22.7% to the national GDP and employing 37.4% of the labor force (PBS, 2023). However, the sector faces growing threats from climate change, resource depletion, and outdated agricultural practices, all of which have significant implications for food security and public health.

One of the most pressing concerns is climate vulnerability. Pakistan is consistently ranked among the top ten countries most affected by climate change (Global Climate Risk Index, 2023). Erratic weather patterns, rising temperatures, and extreme climate events, such as the catastrophic floods of 2022, have severely disrupted food production, damaging over 4.4 million acres of agricultural land and threatening the livelihoods of millions (NDMA, 2022). Without proactive policy interventions to promote climate-smart agriculture and disaster preparedness, the risks to both food availability and nutritional quality will continue to grow.

Another critical issue is the lack of adequate support for smallholder farmers, who make up 65% of the agricultural workforce in Pakistan (Ministry of National Food Security, 2023). These farmers often lack access to modern technology, credit, fair markets, and extension services, making them especially vulnerable to economic shocks and environmental stress. Strengthening policies around agricultural subsidies, skill development, and access to inputs is vital for improving productivity and rural livelihoods.

Moreover, weak infrastructure, particularly in road networks and storage systems, results in post-harvest losses of 30–40% annually (FAO, 2021). These losses not only reduce food availability but also affect affordability and nutrition. Investments in cold chain logistics and transportation infrastructure are necessary for minimizing waste and ensuring a stable food supply that supports public health.

Nutrition Policies and Public Health Interventions

Nutrition policies in Pakistan are designed to enhance dietary quality and tackle the complex, interrelated issues of malnutrition. The National Nutrition Survey (NNS, 2018) revealed a troubling triple burden of malnutrition: 40.2% of children under five are stunted, 17.7% suffer from wasting, and 28.9% of women of reproductive age are overweight or obese (UNICEF, 2018). These figures highlight a paradox of both undernutrition and overnutrition coexisting within the

same population, largely due to poor dietary diversity, food insecurity, and limited awareness about balanced nutrition. Various national programs have been launched to address these issues. The Benazir Nashonuma Program, a conditional cash transfer initiative, provides pregnant women and young children with fortified foods to combat chronic malnutrition and stunting (Ministry of Poverty Alleviation, 2023). Similarly, the National Food Fortification Program mandates the addition of essential micronutrients like iron and folic acid to wheat flour to reduce anemia and other deficiencies (Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority, 2021). Additionally, pilot school meal programs in provinces like Sindh and Punjab aim to improve child nutrition through structured feeding schemes during school hours (WFP, 2022). Despite these efforts, the implementation of nutrition policies has faced multiple challenges. According to a WHO report (2023), Pakistan's nutrition strategy lacks operational clarity, robust monitoring systems, and inter-ministerial coordination, which results in fragmented delivery and uneven impact.

Parallel to nutrition, public health services are delivered through immunization campaigns, health education, and disease control initiatives. However, access to basic healthcare remains unequal, with 48% of the rural population still deprived of essential services (Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2022). Vaccination coverage is inadequate, with only 66% of children receiving complete immunizations (EPI, 2023). Non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, now affect 26.7% of the adult population (IDF, 2023), largely due to poor diets and sedentary lifestyles. Furthermore, maternal health indicators remain concerned, with 62% of rural births occurring without skilled birth attendants (NIPS, 2022). Although the National Health Vision 2025 outlines goals to strengthen healthcare systems, progress remains hindered by limited funding, governance issues, and systemic inefficiencies (Ministry of Health, 2023).

Challenges in Aligning Food Systems with Public Health

Pakistan's food system faces deep-rooted structural and policy-related challenges that hinder the alignment of agriculture with public health objectives. One of the primary issues is the presence of conflicting policies. For instance, while the government promotes nutrition-sensitive programs to combat malnutrition, it simultaneously maintains subsidies for sugar and edible oil industries, which contradict broader public health goals by encouraging the consumption of ultra-processed, nutrient-poor foods (PIDE, 2023). These contradictions reflect the lack of a unified national strategy that integrates food production with health and nutrition priorities. Food insecurity remains a significant concern, affecting approximately 36.9% of the population (WFP, 2023). Rising inflation and the increasing cost of staple foods have worsened hunger, especially in rural and low-income urban households. In addition, while food safety authorities such as the Punjab Food Authority have made progress in urban areas, the enforcement of food standards and hygiene regulations remains weak or virtually absent in many rural and peri-urban regions, leading to widespread consumption of unsafe and contaminated foods.

Addressing these challenges requires a systemic and coordinated approach. Agriculture must be reoriented from a production-focused model toward one that prioritizes nutrition and health outcomes. Key policy recommendations include promoting climate-resilient agriculture by encouraging drought-tolerant crop varieties and investing in water-efficient irrigation methods, which can help stabilize food production amid climate shocks. At the same time, scaling up nutrition-specific interventions such as large-scale food fortification and maternal-child feeding programs can directly address micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition. Better coordination between ministries of agriculture, health, food security, and education are essential, and the formation of inter-ministerial task forces could enhance policy coherence and implementation. Furthermore, increasing public health expenditure to at least 5% of GDP, in line with WHO recommendations, would strengthen healthcare infrastructure and support nutrition-sensitive health services. A cross-sectoral, collaborative approach is vital to transforming Pakistan's food systems and improving population health sustainably.

Conclusion

The intersection of nutrition, agriculture, and public health policies in Pakistan reveals a complex but critical landscape where coordinated action is essential for long-term societal well-being. Despite significant efforts and numerous initiatives, fragmented policy frameworks, limited resources, and institutional inefficiencies continue to hinder the full realization of public health goals. The coexistence of undernutrition and overnutrition, along with the persistent burden of non-communicable diseases, underscores the need for a holistic and integrated approach to policymaking.

Agricultural practices must transition from productivity-centered models to nutrition-sensitive strategies that promote sustainable, diverse, and safe food systems. Strengthening climate resilience, investing in rural infrastructure, and supporting smallholder farmers are essential for food security and health equity. At the same time, public health services must be expanded to ensure universal access, particularly in underserved rural regions. Improved coordination across ministries and increased public health funding, aligned with WHO recommendations, are critical to achieving these outcomes. As Pakistan continues to face environmental, economic, and demographic pressures, a multisectoral, inclusive policy framework that bridges gaps between agriculture, nutrition, and health is not just necessary, it is imperative for building a healthier, more food-secure future for all citizens.

References: FAO; WHO; Pakistan Economic Survey; UNICEF; World Bank; PBS; Global Climate Risk Index; NDMA; PIDE; WFP; Ministry of Health; EPI; Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey; NIPS; IDF; Ministry of National Food Security

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Mental Health Challenges for Farmers in Pakistan

Addressing the mental health challenges faced by farmers in Pakistan is vital for their well-being and agricultural productivity. Financial instability, climate change, and social isolation are significant factors affecting decision-making, work efficiency, and increasing the risk of accidents.

Mubbarra Ghaffar

4/9/2025

Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, contributing 22.7% to the national GDP and employing 37.4% of the labor force (PBS, 2023). Despite this critical role, the mental health of farmers. an issue that directly influences agricultural productivity, remains underexplored in both academic research and policy discourse. Farmers in Pakistan face a convergence of stressors including financial insecurity, unpredictable weather patterns, rising input costs, limited market access, and social isolation, all of which adversely impact their psychological well-being (FAO, 2023).

According to a recent report by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE, 2023), nearly two-thirds of smallholder farmers report moderate to severe levels of psychological distress, with depression and anxiety being the most common conditions. Moreover, 40% of farmers in flood-affected districts of Sindh and Punjab experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following the 2022 climate catastrophe (NDMA, 2022).

The scarcity of mental health infrastructure in rural areas compounds the issue. Pakistan has less than one psychiatrist per 500,000 people, and rural districts often have no trained mental health professionals at all (WHO Mental Health Atlas, 2022). Social stigma surrounding mental illness further discourages farmers from seeking help, contributing to underreporting and untreated conditions. Studies have shown that untreated mental health issues among farmers are associated with reduced work efficiency, poor decision-making, increased suicide risk, and ultimately, decreased agricultural output (FAO, 2023; PIDE, 2023).

Addressing the mental health crisis in rural farming communities is vital for ensuring long-term agricultural sustainability. Policymakers must prioritize the integration of mental health services into agricultural extension programs, introduce community-based interventions, and develop rural mental health outreach campaigns to reduce stigma and improve access to care.

Mental Health Challenges Among Pakistani Farmers

Mental health challenges among Pakistani farmers remain a critical yet overlooked public health concern. Agriculture, though central to the country's economy, exposes farmers to a unique set of stressors that severely impact their psychological well-being. Over 60% of Pakistani farmers live below the poverty line, with persistent debt burdens, input cost inflation, and inconsistent crop prices intensifying emotional and financial stress (World Bank, 2023). Climate-related shocks further compound these pressures, Pakistan ranks among the top five most climate-vulnerable countries globally, and the 2022 floods destroyed approximately 4.4 million acres of crops, displacing thousands of farming families and leaving many in emotional turmoil (Global Climate Risk Index, 2023; NDMA, 2022).

Rural isolation and a lack of mental health literacy deepen the crisis. More than 70% of farmers are reluctant to seek psychological support due to stigma and cultural taboos (Journal of Rural Mental Health, 2023). Mental health infrastructure is nearly absent in most rural areas, with Pakistan having fewer than 500 psychiatrists for a population of over 240 million, and even fewer practicing in rural districts (WHO Mental Health Atlas, 2022). Long working hours, physical exhaustion, and repeated exposure to occupational hazards also contribute to chronic stress and physical burnout, leading to increased accident rates and further emotional strain (ILO, 2022).

A 2023 study in Punjab revealed that 42% of farmers showed symptoms of depression, particularly among smallholders and older adults (PJPH, 2023). Alarmingly, suicide rates have risen in agrarian communities, especially in Sindh and Punjab, where crop failures and debt traps have pushed many farmers to despair (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Children in farming families are also affected, facing psychological distress due to poverty, lack of stability, and limited access to education and support systems (UNICEF, 2022). Comprehensive mental health integration into rural health and agricultural policy is urgently needed to address this growing crisis.

Impact of Mental Health on Agricultural Productivity

Poor mental health among farmers in Pakistan significantly impacts agricultural productivity, creating a vicious cycle that further exacerbates economic instability. The ability of farmers to make sound decisions is crucial for optimizing crop choices, managing resources effectively, and responding to market conditions. However, stress and anxiety can impair judgment, leading to poor decisions regarding crop selection and the management of inputs like water, fertilizers, and pesticides. This mismanagement not only affects crop yields but also reduces the overall efficiency of the farming system. In fact,

a study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE, 2023) highlighted that mental health issues like depression and anxiety directly correlate with reduced labor productivity, as fatigue and emotional distress cause a decline in work output. As a result, agricultural output suffers, further exacerbating food insecurity in the country.

Additionally, mental fatigue increases the risk of accidents, especially when operating machinery or working with livestock. Fatigued farmers are more likely to experience accidents, leading to further physical and mental harm. This risk is heightened in rural areas where access to medical facilities is limited. Furthermore, farmers grappling with mental health challenges are less likely to adopt new farming techniques, including climate-smart practices and innovations that could improve productivity and sustainability. This resistance to changing limits agricultural growth and deepens the reliance on outdated methods.

In rural Pakistan, mental health care remains a critical issue due to several barriers. Less than 10% of rural areas have access to mental health facilities (Ministry of Health, 2023), and cultural stigma surrounding mental illness discourages many farmers from seeking help. Financial constraints, driven by high levels of debt, prioritize immediate survival needs over mental health care. Additionally, a lack of awareness about mental health disorders in rural communities' further hampers efforts to improve the mental well-being of farmers, preventing them from seeking help when needed. Addressing these barriers is essential for improving both the mental health of farmers and the overall agricultural productivity of the nation.

Public Health Interventions & Policy Recommendations

Public health interventions targeting mental health in rural farming communities in Pakistan are essential to alleviating the stressors that significantly affect farmers' productivity and well-being. Community-based support programs are one effective strategy to address this issue. Farmer support groups and peer counseling networks have the potential to reduce social isolation, which is a key stressor for many rural farmers. Initiatives like Aga Khan University's rural mental health programs in Sindh have demonstrated success in providing psychological support to farmers (AKU, 2022). These programs foster a sense of solidarity among farmers and offer guidance on managing mental health challenges, thus helping mitigate the adverse effects of stress on agricultural productivity.

Telehealth and mobile mental health services also represent critical innovations in addressing the mental health crisis in rural areas. Helplines such as "Tabeer," operated by the Punjab Health Department, offer free counseling services to farmers, providing them with essential mental health support without the need to travel long distances (Dawn, 2023). Digital platforms can further bridge the gap in remote areas where traditional healthcare services are scarce.

Awareness campaigns are also vital to combat the stigma surrounding mental health in rural communities. Media and religious leaders can play an influential role in normalizing conversations about mental health, encouraging farmers to seek help. School programs that focus on psychological well-being can help equip rural youth with the tools to manage stress and emotional challenges.

Policy reforms are crucial for creating long-term systemic change. Integrating mental health into agricultural extension services, as suggested in the Pakistan Agricultural Policy 2023, can ensure that farmers receive the support they need alongside agricultural advice. Additionally, debt relief programs and subsidies aimed at alleviating financial stress are key to improving farmers' mental well-being. Training healthcare workers in rural mental health first aid can further enhance the accessibility of mental health services in these communities.

Despite growing awareness, stigma remains a major barrier to effective mental health interventions. Media coverage of farmer suicides has sparked important public debate, but significant systemic changes are needed to address the root causes of mental health challenges among farmers. Government-led mental health programs tailored for farming communities, alongside research on the impact of agricultural policies on stress levels, can create a more supportive environment for mental well-being. International collaboration, drawing from the experiences of countries like India, where farmer mental health programs have successfully reduced suicide rates, could also provide valuable insights for Pakistan's approach to mental health in agriculture.

Conclusion

Addressing the mental health challenges faced by farmers in Pakistan is essential not only for improving their well-being but also for enhancing agricultural productivity, which is crucial for the country's economic stability. The stressors impacting farmers, including financial instability, climate change, and social isolation, directly impair decision-making, reduce work efficiency, and increase the risk of accidents. As mental health issues persist in rural areas, they contribute to a vicious cycle that undermines both the personal health of farmers and the overall agricultural output. The absence of mental health infrastructure, coupled with cultural stigma, further prevents farmers from seeking the help they need.

To break this cycle, public health interventions must focus on integrating mental health services into agricultural policies and extending outreach programs to rural areas. Community-based support programs, telehealth initiatives, and awareness campaigns have shown promise in addressing these issues. Furthermore, policy reforms that provide financial support, improve healthcare access, and reduce stigma are critical for long-term change. International collaborations and successful models from countries like India can provide

valuable insights for Pakistan in creating effective mental health support systems for farmers. Ultimately, investing in the mental health of farmers is not only a matter of individual well-being but also a strategic approach to ensuring sustainable agricultural development and food security for Pakistan.

References: PBS; FAO; PDE; NDMA; WHO Mental Health Atlas; World Bank; Global Climate Risk Index; Journal of Rural Mental Health; ILO; PJPH; UNICEF; Human Rights Watch; Ministry of Health; AKU; Dawn

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Investing in Rural Health Services in Pakistan

Investing in rural health services is crucial for Pakistan's public health and economic growth. With over 60% of the population in rural areas, improving health outcomes is essential for national development.

Malaika Akram

4/16/2025

Rural health refers to the overall physical, mental, and social well-being of populations living in non-urban and remote areas, where access to basic healthcare services, health education, and awareness remain severely constrained. In Pakistan, rural health is a critical concern, given that approximately 63% of the country's population resides in rural areas (PBS, 2023). These communities face persistent health disparities due to underdeveloped infrastructure, high poverty rates, limited transportation, and a shortage of trained healthcare professionals. According to the World Bank (2023), Pakistan's rural areas have some of the country's poorest health outcomes, with high maternal and infant mortality rates, low immunization coverage, and widespread malnutrition.

Malnutrition remains a pressing challenge. Over 40% of children under five in rural Pakistan are stunted, while 17.7% are wasted due to inadequate nutrition (NNS, 2018). These conditions are compounded by the lack of sanitation facilities, unsafe drinking water, and limited awareness about preventive healthcare practices. Moreover, rural health infrastructure is insufficient, with many Basic Health Units (BHUs) either non-functional or lacking essential medicines and personnel. The doctor-to-patient ratio in rural areas is critically low, often exceeding one doctor per 7,000 people, far above the World Health Organization's recommended standard.

Improving rural healthcare is not only a matter of public health but also a foundation for national economic development. Healthier populations are more productive, experience fewer workdays lost to illness, and contribute more effectively to the economy. Investments in rural health—such as mobile clinics, telemedicine, and community health worker programs—can bridge access gaps and reduce disease burdens. Furthermore, integrating rural health with nutrition, sanitation, and education policies can produce long-lasting, intergenerational benefits. Addressing rural health disparities is therefore essential to achieving inclusive growth, reducing poverty, and fulfilling Pakistan's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Importance of Rural Health Services

Rural health services play a foundational role in ensuring equitable access to healthcare across Pakistan, especially in areas where basic medical infrastructure is lacking. With nearly 63% of Pakistan's population residing in rural regions, addressing rural health disparities is a crucial public health and development priority. The current healthcare system in Pakistan includes around 10,000 primary healthcare facilities such as Basic Health Units (BHUs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs), yet these are often plagued by mismanagement, underfunding, and corruption, compromising their efficiency and outreach (Ministry of National Health Services, 2022). Only 30% of rural residents have access to adequate healthcare services (WHO, 2023), leaving the majority dependent on unregulated clinics or traditional healers. This lack of access is further compounded by a severe shortage of healthcare workers. Rural areas have just one doctor for every 5,000 people, while urban areas average one doctor per 1,200 individuals (Pakistan Medical Association, 2023).

The high cost of medications and consultations in rural markets forces many families to spend over 50% of their income on healthcare, pushing them deeper into poverty (UNDP, 2022). Poor transportation infrastructure delays emergency care, particularly for maternal and neonatal complications, which contributes to Pakistan's high maternal mortality rate of 186 deaths per 100,000 live births (PDHS, 2022). Malnutrition remains pervasive, with 40% of children under five in rural Pakistan classified as stunted (UNICEF, 2023). Moreover, mental health remains neglected, with few counseling services available despite increasing rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.

Investing in rural healthcare brings substantial economic benefits. Healthy individuals are more productive, contributing effectively to agricultural and other labor-intensive sectors. Preventive healthcare lowers long-term treatment costs and eases pressure on tertiary hospitals. Expanding rural health services also creates jobs for medical and support personnel and enhances agricultural productivity by reducing illness-related work absences. Educational outcomes also improve, as well-nourished and healthy children perform better academically, ensuring a future skilled workforce. Since 2000, coordinated public and private sector investments have reduced infant mortality in rural Pakistan by 25%, underscoring the impact of sustained intervention (SBP, 2023). A robust rural healthcare system is essential for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth.

Challenges to Rural Health Investments and Policy Option

Investing in rural health in Pakistan presents immense benefits, yet a range of structural and systemic challenges continue to obstruct progress. Geographical barriers remain one of the most pressing issues. Poor road conditions and limited transportation infrastructure in remote regions delay timely access to medical services, often increasing mortality rates during

emergencies. Workforce shortages are equally concerning. Low salaries, limited career advancement opportunities, and professional isolation deter qualified doctors and nurses from accepting rural postings. As a result, rural areas suffer from an acute lack of medical personnel, affecting the quality and consistency of care.

Financial constraints further hinder progress. Rural health facilities often operate with minimal budgets, making it difficult to purchase or maintain modern medical equipment. Low population density in many rural regions reduces the perceived cost-efficiency of large-scale healthcare investments, discouraging both public and private sectors from expanding services. Political neglect compounds these issues, as policymakers often focus on urban healthcare models, overlooking the unique needs of rural populations. In addition, the digital divide prevents the adoption of innovative solutions such as telemedicine, which relies on stable internet connectivity, something lacking in many rural communities.

To address these challenges, several policy recommendations can be implemented. Encouraging public-private partnerships (PPPs) can bring in much-needed capital and management expertise for rural clinics. Incentives for healthcare professionals, including higher salaries, housing, and career development, would help attract and retain talent in rural regions. Expanding telemedicine through improved digital infrastructure can bridge the healthcare access gap. Preventive health programs, including vaccination campaigns and nutrition awareness, can significantly reduce the disease burden. Infrastructure development, such as roads and transport services, is essential for ensuring faster medical access. Additionally, digital health transformation through electronic health records (EHRs) and mobile health apps can streamline services and enhance patient care. Addressing these barriers holistically is critical for strengthening Pakistan's rural health landscape.

Conclusion

Investing in rural health services is not only a public health imperative but also a strategic economic intervention for Pakistan. With over 60% of the population residing in rural areas, the health and productivity of these communities have a direct impact on the nation's broader development trajectory. Persistent challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, workforce shortages, high out-of-pocket expenses, and geographic isolation continue to undermine health outcomes. These issues are further compounded by malnutrition, poor maternal care, and neglected mental health services, which reduce labor productivity and perpetuate poverty.

However, the economic and social benefits of improving rural healthcare are both measurable and transformative. Healthier individuals contribute more effectively to agriculture, education, and rural economies. Preventive health measures reduce the financial burden on families and the state, while job creation through health infrastructure expansion stimulates local economies. Evidence shows that even modest investments have led to significant gains, such as a 25% decline in infant mortality over the last two decades.

To unlock the full potential of rural Pakistan, the government must prioritize healthcare as a cornerstone of inclusive growth. By adopting holistic policies that integrate public-private partnerships, digital health solutions, and targeted incentives, Pakistan can create a healthier, more productive rural population and build a more resilient national economy.

References: World Bank; PBS; WHO; UNDP; SBP; Ministry of National Health Services; Pakistan Medical Association; WHO; PDHS; UNDP; UNICEF

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Institute of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Agriculture Policies in Pakistan: Transforming Rural Health

Explore how agriculture policies in Pakistan can enhance rural public health, food security, and socio-economic outcomes. Despite progress, challenges like policy fragmentation and malnutrition persist, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms to address systemic issues.

Syeda Rida Fatima

4/21/2025

Agriculture policies play a crucial role in shaping rural economies, food security, and public health outcomes. In Pakistan, where nearly 65% of the population resides in rural areas (World Bank, 2023) and agriculture contributes 22.7% to the national GDP (Pakistan Economic Survey 2022–23), these policies directly affect the quality of life and health of millions. This article explores the interconnectedness between agricultural policymaking and rural public health outcomes, drawing upon recent data, programs, and structural challenges.

Agriculture is not only the backbone of the economy but also the primary source of livelihood for 38.5% of Pakistan's labor force (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Government initiatives such as fertilizer and seed subsidies, minimum support prices for crops like wheat, and interest-free credit schemes are intended to stabilize rural incomes and incentivize food production. Programs like the *Kamyaab Kisan Program*, which provides cash assistance to smallholder farmers, have demonstrated a positive impact on rural income security and household resilience (Ministry of National Food Security & Research, 2023). A stable income improves rural families' ability to afford health services, nutritious diets, and schooling, thus reducing the prevalence of malnutrition, anemia, and related diseases—particularly among women and children. According to UNICEF (2022), 40% of children in rural areas are stunted due to chronic undernutrition, a condition strongly linked to agricultural performance and food access.

However, the potential of agriculture policies to positively influence public health is often undermined by policy inconsistency, inequitable resource distribution, and limited outreach of support services. Small and marginal farmers, who constitute the majority, frequently lack access to timely subsidies, extension services, and healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, current agricultural policies focus heavily on staple crop production, which has led to a neglect of crop diversification and nutrient-rich farming. This imbalance contributes to poor dietary diversity, exacerbating micronutrient deficiencies.

Moreover, overreliance on chemical inputs, such as pesticides and fertilizers, without adequate training or regulatory oversight, has resulted in water contamination, respiratory illnesses, and increased pesticide poisoning in rural populations. Thus, integrating public health perspectives into agriculture policy, such as promoting sustainable farming, biofortified crops, and safe water practices, is critical.

Challenges Surrounding Food Security and Public Health

Pakistan continues to grapple with complex challenges surrounding food security and public health, many of which are intricately linked to agricultural policies and rural development dynamics. One of the most pressing issues is the dual burden of malnutrition, where both undernutrition and obesity coexist. According to the National Nutrition Survey (2018), 28.9% of children under five are stunted, indicating chronic malnutrition, while adult obesity rates are steadily increasing due to imbalanced diets. A significant contributor to this issue is the policy emphasis on staple crops such as wheat, rice, and sugarcane, which dominate both production and consumption patterns. These crops, although calorie-dense, lack the essential micronutrients needed for a balanced diet. Despite policy frameworks like the Prime Minister's Agriculture Transformation Plan (2020–25), which aims to diversify crop production toward high-value and nutrient-rich options such as fruits, vegetables, and pulses, progress in implementation remains limited. Nevertheless, there are promising developments, such as the introduction of biofortified wheat varieties like Zincol-2016, which are designed to address widespread zinc and iron deficiencies (Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, 2022).

Simultaneously, environmental and occupational health risks are rising, particularly in major agricultural zones. In Punjab and Sindh's cotton-growing belts, the unregulated and excessive use of pesticides has been associated with higher incidences of cancers and neurological disorders, particularly among farm workers (Pesticide Action Network, 2021). Although Pakistan has adopted the Pest Warning and Quality Control of Pesticides Act (2019), enforcement is often weak or inconsistent, rendering the legislation ineffective in protecting rural health. Water-related issues further complicate rural health outcomes. With 70% of Pakistan's water deemed unsafe for consumption (PCRWR, 2023), rural communities are highly vulnerable to waterborne diseases like diarrhea, which remains a leading cause of mortality among children under five (WHO, 2022).

Access to healthcare in rural Pakistan remains insufficient to address these growing risks. Despite efforts such as the Sehat Sahulat Program, which offers

health insurance to low-income families, many rural clinics remain understaffed and poorly equipped. Public health infrastructure lags behind, and only 30% of the rural population has access to adequate medical services (Ministry of Health, 2023). Complementary programs like the Clean Green Pakistan Initiative have initiated improvements in sanitation and water quality, but these efforts require more sustained investment and monitoring to achieve meaningful impact across rural areas.

Challenges in Policy Implementation and Strategic Recommendations

The implementation of agriculture and health policies in Pakistan faces multiple challenges that hinder their effectiveness, particularly in rural areas where vulnerability to environmental, economic, and institutional risks is highest. Climate change remains a critical concern, with Pakistan ranked the 8th most vulnerable country globally to climate impacts (Germanwatch, 2023). The devastating floods of 2022 submerged over 4.4 million acres of cropland, displacing millions and severely disrupting food production and supply chains (NDMA, 2022). These events not only exacerbated food insecurity but also led to widespread outbreaks of waterborne and vector-borne diseases due to standing water and compromised sanitation systems.

Policy fragmentation is another major obstacle, particularly the lack of coordination between federal and provincial governments. Agriculture, health, and environment sectors often operate in silos, resulting in poorly integrated strategies. The absence of a unified framework prevents the scaling of successful pilot projects and weakens the overall policy response to interrelated rural development challenges. Furthermore, smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of the agricultural workforce, remain largely marginalized in policymaking processes. Women, who constitute 74% of the agricultural labor force, own only 3% of land (FAO, 2021), limiting their economic and decision-making power. Their exclusion from institutional structures not only perpetuates inequality but also impedes the adoption of inclusive and gender-sensitive agricultural and health strategies.

Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach. Strengthening intersectoral coordination among the agriculture, health, and environment ministries is vital to ensure a unified policy response. Promoting climate-resilient farming practices, such as the adoption of drought-resistant crops and subsidies for sustainable irrigation technologies like drip systems, can mitigate the impacts of climate variability. Enforcement of pesticide regulations must be prioritized, particularly in regions where chemical misuse is common, to protect both human health and environmental sustainability.

In addition, the government should incentivize nutrition-sensitive agriculture by supporting the cultivation of pulses, vegetables, and biofortified crops to improve rural dietary diversity. Expanding rural healthcare infrastructure through increased funding for clinics, mobile health units, and trained personnel will ensure early detection and treatment of climate-related and occupational diseases. Only through integrated, inclusive, and well-enforced policies can Pakistan address the interconnected challenges of agriculture, health, and rural development in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Conclusion

Agriculture policies in Pakistan hold transformative potential for improving rural public health, food security, and socio-economic outcomes. While the country has made strides in supporting smallholder farmers through financial aid programs and crop subsidies, structural challenges, such as policy fragmentation, weak implementation, and environmental degradation, continue to undermine the full impact of these initiatives. The persistence of malnutrition, poor dietary diversity, pesticide-related health risks, and limited access to clean water and healthcare are symptoms of deeper systemic gaps that require urgent attention.

Moving forward, an integrated policy approach is critical. Agriculture and public health must no longer function in isolation. Instead, coordinated efforts among government ministries, provincial authorities, and community stakeholders should be prioritized. Investments in climate-smart agriculture, nutrition-sensitive policies, and gender-inclusive reforms can drive meaningful progress. Enhancing rural healthcare systems, enforcing pesticide regulations, and promoting sustainable water practices will be equally essential in safeguarding health outcomes.

Pakistan's path toward resilient and equitable rural development lies in recognizing the interdependence of agriculture and health. By fostering inclusive, sustainable, and health-conscious agricultural policies, the nation can build a future where rural communities not only survive but thrive economically, nutritionally, and environmentally. This holistic transformation is essential for achieving long-term national stability and development.

References: World Bank; Pakistan Economic Survey (2022-23); UNICEF; Ministry of National Food Security & Research; National Nutrition Survey; PCRWR; NDMA; FAO; Germanwatch

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.


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Evolution of Marketing in Türkiye: A Digital Shift

Explore the evolution of marketing in Türkiye, highlighting the shift from product-focused strategies to consumer-centric and technologically driven approaches. Discover how Türkiye has adapted to align with changing consumer behavior and global best practices.

Mithat Direk

4/11/2025

Marketing is defined as the process of understanding and influencing consumer behavior to establish a connection between producers and end-users. It serves as a critical bridge that links businesses with their target audiences, primarily through advertising, market research, and customer engagement strategies. The American Marketing Association (AMA, 2023) defines marketing as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." Over time, marketing has undergone a profound transformation, driven by shifts in consumer preferences, the digital revolution, and evolving economic landscapes.

Historically, marketing began with a product-centric approach during the industrial era, transitioned to a sales orientation in the early 20th century, and gradually moved toward a consumer-centric model in the late 20th century (Kotler & Keller, 2022). In Türkiye, the marketing sector has seen rapid modernization in the last two decades. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat, 2023), digital advertising expenditures in Türkiye reached 3.7 billion Turkish Lira in 2022, marking a 23% increase from the previous year, reflecting a significant shift towards digital platforms.

Contemporary marketing in Türkiye blends global strategies with local cultural dynamics. For instance, the rise of influencer marketing and mobile commerce has accelerated consumer engagement, particularly among Gen Z. As of 2023, 84% of internet users in Türkiye access social media daily, making platforms like Instagram and TikTok vital tools for brand communication (Social & Meltwater, 2023).

Historical Evolution of Marketing

Philip Kotler, a leading authority in marketing, explains that modern marketing has evolved through several distinct phases, transitioning from production-centric approaches to customer-focused strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Although this framework emerged in Western economies, Türkiye's adoption of marketing practices followed a distinct path influenced by its unique economic history, industrial growth, and cultural dynamics.

In the early stages, particularly before the 1960s, Turkish businesses primarily followed a production orientation. During this period, driven by state-led industrialization and import substitution policies, the focus was on mass production, efficiency, and cost reduction to meet basic consumer needs (Öztürk, 2020). As the Turkish economy opened up, firms began to emphasize product quality. Companies like Arçelik and Vestel invested in manufacturing durable and innovative goods, operating under the belief that superior products alone would ensure market success (TÜSİAD, 2021). However, this product-focused mindset often overlooked the importance of consumer feedback.

Simultaneously, a sales-oriented approach emerged during the 1950s and 1960s. As market competition increased, businesses began employing aggressive advertising tactics and direct sales strategies, such as door-to-door selling and radio promotions, to influence purchasing behavior (Yıldırım, 2019). By the 1970s, Türkiye witnessed a pivotal shift toward marketing orientation, as firms began conducting market research and aligning product offerings with customer preferences. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, 68% of medium and large enterprises now incorporate consumer feedback in product development (TÜİK, 2023), reflecting a more customer-centric business model.

Over the years, Turkish brands also embraced relationship marketing to build long-term loyalty. Institutions like Türk Telekom and Garanti BBVA adopted Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems to better serve and retain clients (Deloitte Türkiye, 2022). The rise of digital and social media platforms in the 2000s marked another turning point. As of 2024, Türkiye has more than 69 million internet users, with 95% actively using social media (Social & Meltwater, 2023). E-commerce platforms such as Trendyol and Hepsiburada have leveraged artificial intelligence and personalized marketing, contributing to the country's booming $35 billion e-commerce sector (EY Türkiye, 2023). This historical evolution underscores the dynamic nature of marketing in Türkiye, where adaptation to consumer needs and digital transformation continues to shape industry practices.

Current Marketing Trends in Türkiye

Marketing in Türkiye is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by digital innovation, shifting consumer values, and data-centric strategies. A major development is the surge in digital transformation, particularly in the e-

commerce sector. As of 2024, online sales constitute 12.5% of Türkiye's total retail volume, reflecting an accelerated shift toward digital shopping habits (TÜİK, 2024). Social media platforms have become powerful tools for consumer engagement, with Instagram and TikTok leading the way. According to a recent report by Kantar (2024), 62% of Turkish consumers have made purchases through social commerce, underscoring the growing importance of interactive and influencer-driven marketing.

Another notable trend is the rise of sustainability and ethical marketing. As environmental awareness grows among the population, businesses are responding to increased demand for eco-conscious products and operations. A 2023 survey by PwC Türkiye found that 73% of Turkish consumers now prefer to buy from brands that demonstrate environmental responsibility, prompting major retailers like Migros and BIM to invest in green supply chains and reduce plastic usage.

Technological advancements are also reshaping marketing practices. Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics are being increasingly deployed to optimize marketing strategies. McKinsey (2023) reports that 45% of Turkish marketers are currently using AI-driven tools for customer segmentation and targeted advertising, improving return on investment and customer retention.

Politics has also entered the digital marketing landscape. The 2023 Turkish general elections saw unprecedented levels of digital campaign activity, with political parties leveraging platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to micro-target voters based on behavioral data (Reuters, 2023). This trend highlights how marketing tools, originally developed for commerce, are being repurposed to influence public opinion.

Conclusion

The evolution of marketing in Türkiye reflects a broader global shift from product-focused strategies to consumer-centric and technologically driven approaches. From the early years of production orientation shaped by industrial policies to the current age of digital and data-driven marketing, Türkiye has shown remarkable adaptability in aligning with changing consumer behavior and global best practices. The widespread use of social media, with 95% of internet users engaging on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, exemplifies the country's embrace of digital marketing.

Moreover, the increasing importance of ethical and sustainable branding, supported by 73% of Turkish consumers preferring eco-conscious companies, signals a shift in values that businesses can no longer ignore. The integration of AI and big data, now utilized by 45% of marketers, further enhances the precision and personalization of campaigns. Additionally, the use of marketing techniques in political spheres, as demonstrated during the 2023 elections, underlines marketing's growing role in shaping public discourse. As Türkiye moves forward, the marketing landscape will continue to evolve in response to technological innovation, consumer expectations, and socio-political factors. Understanding this dynamic progression is essential for both scholars and practitioners aiming to navigate the complexities of modern marketing in the Turkish context.

References: AMA; TurkStat ; Kotler & Keller; Social & Meltwater; Öztürk; TÜSİAD; Yıldırım; TÜİK; EY Türkiye; Kantar; McKinsey; Reuters

Please note that the views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of any organization.

The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Selcuk University, Konya-Türkiye and can be reached at mdirek@selcuk.edu.tr

Trade Fairs in Türkiye: Marketing Opportunities

Explore the significance of trade fairs in modern marketing, particularly the Konya Agriculture Fair in Türkiye. Discover how these events drive economic growth, foster collaboration, and enhance competitiveness, making them essential for branding, networking, and direct sales.

Mithat Direk

4/18/2025

In today's globalized and technology-driven economy, increasing competition has not only intensified business rivalry but also transformed marketing into a core strategic function—often taking precedence over traditional production processes. While earlier economic theories like Say's Law emphasized that "supply creates its own demand," such assumptions have become outdated in the face of rapidly changing consumer behavior, digital advancements, and global trade dynamics. Modern consumers demand not only quality and utility but also personalization, emotional connection, and immediate access to goods and services. Consequently, production alone cannot ensure success; effective marketing strategies have become essential for survival and growth (Torun et al., 2012).

Firms are now required to develop comprehensive marketing plans that integrate traditional tools like advertising, sales promotions, public relations, and direct marketing with digital innovations such as influencer marketing, search engine optimization, and content marketing (Aycı, 2011). These efforts are geared toward creating value, generating interest, and maintaining long-term customer loyalty. In this competitive landscape, physical platforms like trade fairs have retained and even expanded their relevance. Fairs offer a unique opportunity for businesses to showcase products, build brand awareness, network with industry stakeholders, and directly engage with both existing and potential customers.

This article focuses on the strategic role of fairs in modern marketing, particularly their relevance and benefits for firms operating in Türkiye. Drawing on recent data, case studies, and industry reports, it evaluates how trade fairs contribute to branding, market expansion, innovation diffusion, and business-to-business (B2B) interactions. The rising popularity of specialized and international trade fairs in Türkiye reflects a broader trend where experiential and relationship-driven marketing is gaining ground. By analyzing the growing economic and strategic importance of fairs, the article highlights how these platforms are evolving from simple exhibition venues to integral components of dynamic, multichannel marketing ecosystems.

The Concept of Fairs

The term "fair" originates from the Latin word *fariae*, meaning carnival or festival (Koldaş, 2006). Historically associated with cultural gatherings and religious celebrations, fairs have evolved into vital commercial and promotional events where tradeable goods, services, and innovations are exhibited to stimulate sales, build new market linkages, and foster technical cooperation. They serve as dynamic marketing communication platforms that allow businesses to present their products and services to targeted audiences, including consumers, distributors, partners, and investors (Okay, 2000). Today, fairs represent a strategic convergence of commerce, networking, and branding.

On a global scale, approximately 10,000 fairs are organized annually in around 150 countries, reflecting their central role in international trade and business development (Sülün, 2004). Europe leads the global fair industry, with Germany standing out as the frontrunner by hosting between 400 and 450 high-quality exhibitions each year, followed by France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. These events span diverse sectors, from agriculture and textiles to defense and digital technology, highlighting their adaptability and reach (Sülün, 2004).

In recent years, Türkiye has significantly advanced its fair infrastructure and international outreach. Cities like Istanbul, İzmir, Bursa, and Konya have become prominent centers for hosting specialized and multisectoral trade fairs. According to the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TİM, 2023), Türkiye organized more than 250 international fairs in 2023 alone, drawing over 2 million visitors, including buyers from across Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. This indicates the growing significance of fairs in enhancing Türkiye's export capacity and global market visibility.

As a powerful marketing tool, fairs have gained importance in an era marked by product diversification, rising consumer expectations, and global competition. Unlike other marketing channels, fairs offer immediate, face-to-face interaction between producers and consumers, allowing for product demonstrations, real-time feedback, and stronger brand recognition. They also serve the functions of public relations and advertising, positioning them as multi-dimensional instruments within broader marketing strategies. In this context, fairs not only facilitate direct sales but also provide critical insights into market trends, competitor strategies, and customer preferences, making them indispensable for businesses aiming to remain competitive in domestic and international markets (Koldaş, 2006).

Key Benefits of Fairs in Marketing

Fairs serve as dynamic marketing platforms that provide substantial

advantages for both exhibitors and visitors. One of the primary benefits is enhanced customer engagement. Unlike conventional sales visits that may be limited to scheduled or regional client interactions, fairs offer an inclusive and accessible setting where businesses can engage with a broader, often previously unreachable audience. According to Kotler (1994), 85% of visitors make purchasing decisions during fairs, spending an average of 22 minutes at each stand, which highlights the effectiveness of this face-to-face interaction in influencing buyer behavior.

Fairs also offer significant cost advantages. Compared to individual client visits or advertising campaigns, they are more cost-effective while yielding a higher return on investment. Herbig et al. (1997) identify fairs as the second most impactful promotional tool after direct sales. Their multifunctional nature, combining advertising, public relations, product demonstration, and direct selling in one venue, makes them particularly valuable for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with limited marketing budgets.

Additionally, fairs are instrumental in helping businesses expand into new markets. Exhibitors benefit from opportunities to discover untapped market niches, evaluate industry competitiveness, build strategic partnerships, and introduce new technologies. Visitors, on the other hand, enjoy the advantage of product comparison, price benchmarking, networking, and even placing direct orders. The environment fosters real-time feedback, which can guide product development and market adaptation strategies.

A compelling example is the 21st Konya Agriculture Fair, held from April 8 to 12, 2025. This event demonstrated the growing role of fairs in Türkiye's agricultural economy. With 436 exhibitors from 20 countries and over 251,000 visitors, the fair highlighted Konya's significance in agricultural machinery, a sector in which it accounts for 70% of national production (Konya Chamber of Commerce, 2025). The fair also emphasized academia-industry collaboration, with Selçuk University's Faculty of Agriculture offering expert consultations and research insights to visitors. This integration of knowledge sharing, innovation showcasing, and commercial networking further reinforces the strategic value of fairs in contemporary marketing.

Conclusion

Fairs remain a cornerstone of modern marketing, offering unparalleled opportunities for businesses to engage customers, showcase innovations, and expand market reach. In Türkiye, the growing prominence of trade fairs, such as the Konya Agriculture Fair, demonstrates their critical role in driving economic growth, fostering industry collaboration, and enhancing global competitiveness. These events provide a unique convergence of branding, networking, and direct sales, making them indispensable in an era where experiential and relationship-driven marketing dominate.

For businesses, fairs serve as cost-effective platforms to assess market trends, gather real-time feedback, and establish long-term partnerships. The success of Türkiye's fair industry, evidenced by rising international participation and visitor numbers, underscores its potential as a catalyst for export growth and sectoral advancement. As digital and physical marketing ecosystems continue to merge, fairs will evolve further, integrating technology to enhance engagement while retaining their core value: human connection in commerce. Moving forward, leveraging fairs as strategic marketing tools will be essential for businesses aiming to thrive in both domestic and global markets.

References: AUMA; Aycı, A.; Koldaş, M.; Kotler, P.; Sülün, E.; Torun, A. et al.; TİM; Konya Chamber of Commerce; Herbig et al.

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The writer is affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics, Selcuk University, Konya-Türkiye and can be reached at mdirek@selcuk.edu.tr

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