

# The Challenges of Food Security in South Asia: Understanding its dynamics with Reference to Bangladesh

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the challenges of food security in South Asian region, particularly the challenges Bangladesh is facing, and how this region can possibly mitigate this challenge. Food security is a complex issue. The question of food security has a number of dimensions that go beyond production, availability and demand for food. It is generally understood as access to adequate food to all households at all times to enable them to lead a healthy and active life. The initial focus on food security as a global concern was on the volume and stability of food. Achieving food security in South Asia has become a major challenge. The food security scenario in South Asia has witnessed rapid progress over the last few decades, yet nutrition outcomes, especially those related to women and children, have failed to keep pace. In addition, the article has also identified a number of initiatives taken by the SAARC countries, and recommends some policies for the food security.

**Keywords:** Food Security, South Asia, Bangladesh, Challenge

## 1. Introduction

Food security, now a days, is considered as human rights of the citizens. The definition of Food security has evolved over time. Until the early 70s, adequate availability of food grains at the national level was considered a good measure of food security. Later, and mainly according to the writings of Amartya Sen, the question of 'access' and 'entitlement' gained prominence. Emphasis was placed on food self-sufficiency at the national level, principally through domestic production. The 1974 World Food Conference added another dimension to food security when it emphasized, apart from the overall availability, stability of food supplies within and over the years. An agreed definition of food security suggests that "all households should be able to avail at all times of adequate food for a healthy living." This interpretation of food security, apart from emphasizing the elements of availability, stability and access, also includes - while giving due attention to "healthy" living - the nutritional dimension.

The initial focus on food security as a global concern was on the volume and stability of food supplies. In the 1974 World Food Summit, food security was defined as "availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices". As time passed its scope widened. In 1983, FAO expanded its concept to include vulnerable people securing access to available supplies, stating that food security meant "ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need." Later, the 1996 World Food Summit redefined food security to take demand, vulnerability and nutritional aspects into account. At the summit, countries agreed that "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle". Household food security is the application of this concept to the family. WFP 2003 has subdivided food security into three main components. These are (i) food availability (ii) physical and economic access to food (iii) effective food utilization or absorption. In general, food security is defined as economic access to food along with food production and food availability level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern (FAO 2002). Since then, several definitions have been provided by different organizations such as the World Bank, FAO and UNDP's Human Development Report. UN's FAO: "access by all people at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life ". World Food Summit: "when all the people at all the times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for active and healthy life". USAID: "when all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for productive and health life" (Jappa, 2000).

Food availability alone, therefore, does not ensure food security; access to food is equally important. An FAO report, August 2008, defines food security in terms of the following four key aspects:

- **Food Availability** – Sufficient availability of food with the nation through domestic production, net imports (commercial or food aid) and carry-over of stocks.
- **Food Access** – Individual’s capability to purchase food and to be able to procure food through safety nets or availability.
- **Food Utilization** – Consumption of food by the household in a proper form. It also takes into account food preparation storage and utilization, food safety, nutritional safety and dietary balance.
- **Food Vulnerability**– Vulnerability of the population to food insecurity due to physiological, economic, social or political reasons.

Therefore, in short term, Food security can be defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food needed for an active and healthy life. It’s essential elements are the availability of food and the ability to acquire it” (Reutlinger, 1985). It is a state where people do not live in hunger or fear of starvation.

## 2. Aspects of Food Security

Food insecurity has become increasingly imperative in today’s world. Although the world, as a whole, has achieved its remarkable socio-economic growth and development year by year, portion of the world population facing food insecurity remains high. Food security of developing and under developed countries’ people has been under threat because of various circumstances. Food insecurity has long-term impacts on the ability of families, communities, and countries to develop.

There are a host of traditional and non-traditional factors that cause and protract food insecurity. The degree of permanence in certain aspects of food insecure people is to a large extent determined by triggering factors and societal characteristics. These factors of food insecurity that are prevalent can be broadly identified into five different categories.

### 2.1 Poverty and Landlessness

Poverty and landlessness have remained at the core of food insecurity. In South Asia, bonded labor and child labor cases to a certain extent hedge the poor from exposure to food insecurity. Poor people have lack of access to sufficient resources to produce or buy quality food. Poor farmers have very small farms, use less effective farming techniques, and/or are unable to afford fertilizers and labor-saving equipment, all of which limit food production. Often they cannot grow enough food for themselves, let alone generate income by selling excess to others. Without economic resources and a political voice, poor farmers are forced on to less productive land possibly causing further environmental deterioration. Addressing poverty is critical in ensuring that all people have sufficient food.

Moreover, the continuing economic crises can have severe impacts on poverty income levels, which in turn affect food security. Rising food and fuel prices has been a major source of inflationary pressure in South Asian countries. Poverty is a rather compounding problem and the plight of the vulnerable segments of the society is painting things worse. The recent food-rooted inflation has added another ten million people among the vulnerable, based on their reduced caloric intake. Worldwide the number of hungry people rose to 1.02 billion, greater than any other time and up 200 million from 2008 according to FAP (2009) (Jappa 2000).

### 2.2 Suicides and Hunger Deaths

It is the labor households that constitute the class suffering most from hunger, both chronic and seasonal. As a sequel to economic reforms, many farmers have switched over to cash crops that require more capital. Since such cropping was not practiced traditionally the vulnerability of farmers has increased sharply. Crops have failed on account of pests and drought conditions, exposing farmers to huge indebtedness. For instance, farmers in India switched over to Monsanto’s BT cotton, a genetically modified seeds. The seeds didn’t show any sustainability. The fungal infection struck fields. Farmers only reaped losses and frustrations. Within a few years farmers became so indebted that “in every family, the adults take turns to fast, one day each week, to stretch their limited supplies. They live in fear of their land being seized by money lenders (Faleiro 2005).

### **2.3 Natural Calamities**

The nature's role and capability of State are critical in both fighting the causes and shortening the occurrence of food insecurity. For instance, the immediate extent of food insecurity in a situation of drought and other natural calamities including cyclone, flood, earthquake and landslides is found to be extensive. Though the mitigation initiatives can blunt the deeper scars of food insecurity, remnants are found to be long-lasting, particularly when the State is not forthcoming. Some of these states simply don't have the resources and the wherewithal to cope. Others have to simultaneously engage in a range of such situations. So the nature of the State itself prolongs impact of natural disasters and exposes victims to food and other societal insecurity.

The great Bengal famine of 1943, the wheat crisis in Pakistan and cyclone in Bangladesh and floods in India are only some of the indications as to how much of havoc the natural calamities could cause in terms of food insecurity. Such a situation not only signaled the great dangers of human insecurity but also highlighted the linkage with the larger issues of national security. Droughts, floods, cyclones and pests can quickly wipe out large quantities of food as it grows or when it is in storage for later use. Likewise, seeds can be destroyed by such environmental dangers.

### **2.4 Geographical Inaccessibility**

There are sharp variations in the development indicators both among various South Asian countries and within a particular country. The most striking example of geography and food security linkage is to be found in the hills and mountains in South Asia which are mostly located in the international border areas. One would have believed that the more robust and resilient the people in the hills and mountains are in terms of economic, environmental and social security's, the sturdier will be the overall national security and development process of the country. But, it is precisely on grounds of national security, that many of these areas have not been developed in terms of roads, communications etc. Their accessibility is still utterly inadequate. The opportunities of making them so are ever shrinking. Since these states remain highly vulnerable to natural calamities and do not produce much of food, their accessibility to food becomes a serious issue.

### **2.5 Conflicts and Instability**

Food insecurity becomes rather conspicuous and blatant in conflict-ridden situations. People suffer from malnutrition and acute food shortage both during and in the aftermath of war, civil disorder or conflict-related sanctions. In fact "conflict is a common cause which dwarfs all others in its impact". Most of the recorded conflicts in South Asia have been the offshoots of a complex chain of factors. During the period 1946-2003 India was the most conflict-prone country in the world, second only to Burma (Myanmar). India recorded a total conflict years of 156 as against Myanmar's 232 and Ethiopia's 88 during this period (HSR 2005).

In 2002 it also recorded the second highest number (4046) of political violence in the world, next only to Congo-Brazzaville. The concerns and vulnerabilities at the federal, constituent state and local levels are becoming more diverse and are related mainly to non-traditional paradigms.

Conflicts displace people thereby injecting a serious sense of food insecurity. The refugee population in South Asia constitutes roughly about 21 percent of the world's total refugees. Similarly there has been a high concentration of internally displaced persons (IDP) in this region. Under such circumstances the institutions that usually ensure semblance of food security in normal times get disclosed and sometimes even destroyed.

Conflict can also reduce or destroy food in production or storage as farmers flee to safety or become involved in the fighting. Previously productive land may be contaminated with explosive debris and need to be cleared before it can again be used for food production. Stored food, seeds and breeding livestock may be eaten or destroyed by soldiers, leading to long-term food shortages. Government spending needs to priorities food security in the aftermath of conflict.

### **2.6 Regional Distribution and Disparities:**

In South Asia, regional disparities in all socio-economic indicators are obvious. The very uneven distribution of food production is a threat to food security in long run. The Green revolution has had no apparent impact on many of the states of India. Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana constituting about 21 percent total population and 10.13 percent of total geographical area, account for 72.17 percent of the total wheat production in the country. Within Punjab also, the skewed distribution of the benefits of Green Revolution became conspicuous,

when just 20 percent of rich farmers grabbed more than 60 percent of total land. The skewed distribution also acutely remained in various states (Telford 1992).

Across South Asia, food insecurity remains a major policy challenge. South Asian countries have seen high annual economic growth rate, but relatively low growth rates in agriculture during the period 1993-2006. The annual average growth rates for the period of 1993-2006 for all the South Asian economies has been 5.2%, 6.6%, 6.6%, 8.2%, 4.3%, 4.2% and 5.0% for Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka respectively whereas their agricultural sector grew with 3.5, 2.7, 2.6, (Maldives' missing), 3.5, 3.3 and 1.3. The gap was either met through imported food, alternative food or remained un-bridged. These countries also witnessed an increased, high level of growth in food consumption, primarily due to high population growth.

### **3. Challenges to Food Security in South Asia:**

The challenge of food security is one of the serious problems that South Asia is currently grappling with. Present increase of global food price and rising consumption of bio-fuels which is also squeezing food production, somehow, bring this issue in lime light. Raising demand of food and decreasing productivity of land; environmental degradation has also created a big challenge for South Asia's food security. The challenge in achieving food security is many: to reduce poverty, increase food security without further degrading natural resources, and to cope with population growth, rising incomes and urbanization. More than 800 million people in the world are food insecure. In South Asia, the situation is more serious than other part of the world; because Asia shares the largest proportion of world population (60% of World population) and the largest portion of world's poor (1.9 Billion people live under 2 USD incomes per day). Worldwide around 852 million people are chronically hungry due to [extreme poverty](#), while up to 2 billion people lack [food](#) security intermittently due to varying degrees of [poverty](#) (FAO, 2003).

#### **3.1 Hungry and Poverty:**

The international monitoring of hunger and poverty that is undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicates a persistent prevalence and distinct rise in hunger-incidence in this region in recent times. Needless to say, this is consistent with the rising global hunger incidence since mid-1990s. The number of hungry in South Asia increased from 278.3 million in 1995-97 to 336.5 million in 2004-06. The corresponding figures for the world during the same time periods were 824.9 million and 872.9 million. After the twin global crisis of food and finance, the FAO projections for hunger incidence has crossed a billion people (1.02 billion in 2009) (Policy 2010). Six million children die of hunger every year - 17,000 every day. When we consider the contribution of the South Asian region in world hunger, the region emerges as one of the hunger hotbeds of the world. In 2004-06, South Asia was home to roughly 38.5 per cent of the world hungry. This is even higher than the contribution of Sub-Saharan Africa (24.3 per cent) to world hunger in absolute terms, although the proportion of the population that is undernourished is higher in the latter region. As of late 2007, export restrictions and panic buying, US Dollar Depreciation, increased farming for use in [bio-fuels](#), world [oil prices](#) at more than \$100 a barrel, global [population growth](#), [climate change](#), loss of [agricultural](#) land to residential and industrial development, and growing consumer demand in [India](#) is claimed to have pushed up the price of [grain](#). However, the role of some of these factors is under debate. Some argue the role of bio-fuel has been overplayed as grain prices have come down to the levels of 2006.

#### **3.2 Natural calamities provoke poverty**

The frequent occurrence of natural calamities, deteriorating level of soil fertility, likely cut down in subsidies both because of ongoing economic reforms and new conditionality governing the agricultural trade in the global market, have all made the question of food security a major area of concern. What is more worrying is the fledgling commitment, decreasing zeal and crumbling delivery systems that countries utilize to reach the food insecure mass. The new regime of intellectual property rights under WTO has the potentiality of understanding the very basis of food security among relatively poor farmers.

#### **3.3 Food Availability and Sustainability**

At the macro level, food availability is the most important component to assess the food security situation but, mere food availability does not ensure food security at household level or for individuals, thus distribution and access of food to the population becomes equally important. Most of the South Asian countries are net importers of food and have suffered severe terms of trade shocks and accelerated food price situation due to recent food crisis. This has reinforced the importance of market integration for achieving food security, and sound economic

management for sustaining growth and poverty reduction in the region. The World Development Report 2008 has even called for the revival of agriculture in South Asia (Mittal, 2009).

### **3.4 Food production of SAARC region**

The SAARC region had considerably enhanced food production in the past, especially after the introduction of the Green Revolution technology in the mid-1960s. Consequently, there was a significant increase in per capita incomes and food consumption in the region. The per capita production in the region, which was 157.6 kg in 1971-73 (three-year average) substantially increased to 176.3 kg by 1988-90. Likewise, the per capita consumption of food grains also rose from 163.9 to 176.3 during this period. The years after 1990 have seen some decline in food production, when its growth rate fell below the 2 per cent rate of growth of population. As a result, there has been a decline in per capita food consumption; the figure declined to 172.8 kg in 2008-10. Surprisingly, although food production has been high and increasing in the last few years (after 2006), the consumption did not increase commensurately.

Thus, there has been a somewhat depressed or stagnated consumption of food grains in the region in recent times. This brings us to the more intricate challenges that remain before the objective of attaining food security in the region. A peculiar feature in South Asia is the high food prices that have prevailed in the markets even after the global food crisis was largely over and prices in the world markets declined from their peak levels. For example, the year-on-year food inflation rate in India has been in double digit in 2009-10 even when world prices have declined significantly. This has happened in spite of good harvest in the preceding two crop years. Food stocks have also touched a high in the current times both in India as well as in South Asia as a whole. The ending stocks in South Asia were already more than 39 million tons in 2008-09.

### **3.5 Price hike of commodities**

Hoarding and speculation in food grains, leading to high prices, have serious implications for food security even in times of plenty. This reduces the access to food, more so for the lower-income classes, as this section of the population spends higher shares of their income on food. This, in turn, perforce leads to adjustments in the diets of the poor, leading to an intensification of the problem of under-nutrition that this region is already burdened with. The high prices also do not translate in higher income for farmers or food growers due to two reasons. First, when price rise is essentially caused by speculation by private traders, it is normally the retail food prices that increase. Similar increase in food prices is not observed in terms of the wholesale prices or farm gate prices which are more crucial from the point of view of farm incomes. Secondly, given that an overwhelming majority of farmers in the region are net food buyers, a prolonged existence of high food prices would mean a depletion of the real income of farmers, when they run out of their on-farm food supplies and reach out to the retail markets for food consumption.

Therefore, high food prices, which persist for a fairly long period, adversely affect the low income classes in the urban areas as well as the large section of agricultural and non-agricultural labor and millions of small farmers in the rural areas in a region like South Asia. This augurs badly for any program that aims to reduce the incidence of hunger and poverty. Given the situation in the SAARC region in terms of food prices and consumption that we discussed above, there are two major challenges that need to be addressed on the issue of food security. The first of these would emerge in enhancing food production and also that of other essential food items like pulses and sugar. This is important as even though currently, there is no serious macro-economic supply-demand mismatch in food grains, one cannot overlook the fact that this apparently comfortable situation has been enabled essentially by a depressed state of consumption for food grains. Unlike the experience of the developed world, particularly the US and Western Europe, the emergence of a high growth regime in South Asia (mainly in India) and rising per capita incomes have not been accompanied by a rise in the demand for grains.

### **3.6 Food consumption of SAARC region**

The attempt to reach higher levels of normative food grain consumption by the South Asian region, thereby also fortifying the diets of the population with important macro- and micro-nutrients, will definitely require larger food grain supplies in the future. Given also the large absolute volume of demand for food grains that the region continues to have, relative to the total world trade in food grains, it will not be prudent to depend on imports for enhancing grain supplies. A point also to be noted in this regard is that most of the cereals are commodities, which are thinly traded in the world market. Given the current dimensions of world trade in grains, it is important for the South Asian nations to enhance the self sufficiency in food-production and keep their

dependence on grain imports at a restricted and reasonable level. Major food importing countries in South Asia, like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, can substantially benefit by raising domestic food production.

#### **4. Initiatives to eradicate food Insecurity**

The adverse impact of food insecurity can be eradicated. To eradicate food insecurity, we have to identify the causes and effects of food insecurity. Then we should take some initiatives to stop food insecurity and stay food secure. Some inter-governmental institutions are working to eradicate food insecurity-WFP (World Food Program); FAO (UN Food and Agricultural Organization), WHO (World Health Organization) etc is working with some initiative programs to eradicate food insecurity. Since 1994, FAO has undergone the most significant restructuring since its founding to decentralize operations, streamline procedures and reduce costs. The report *Reforming FAO: into the new millennium* outlines steps taken by FAO to decentralize the Organization and focus its program activities on key priorities. Highlights of the reforms include:

- Increased emphasis on food security.
- The transfer of staff from headquarters to the field.
- Increased use of experts from developing countries and countries in transition.
- Broadened links with the private sector and non-governmental organizations.
- Greater electronic access to FAO statistical databases and documents (He, 2004).

The challenge to eradicating food insecurity are many: to reduce poverty, increase food security without further degrading natural resources, and to cope with population growth, rising incomes and urbanization.

##### **4.1 Macro policy interventions**

The success in ensuring food security, or the lack of it, is conditioned by macro-economic developments as much as specific policies and programs addressed in South Asian countries to resolve this problem. Macro-economic policies in the countries in this region are pursued in the context of progressive liberalization, rather than de-bureaucratization, careful sequencing of reforms (starting from the industrial and financial sector reforms), and concern for stable price levels (i.e., curbing excessive inflation). These can help to eradicate food insecurity.

##### **4.2 Population growth**

Apart from a modest improvement in the rate of growth and low rate of inflation the other factor which contributed to eradicate food insecurity is the slowdown in population growth. Sri Lanka has already achieved a low annual rate of growth of population (1.3 percent, which comes close to China's 1.2 percent) reflecting its high standards in education, health and nutrition. Bangladesh, India and Nepal also slowly move in that direction. Pakistan only marginally improves in this regard, even though the rate of population growth in this country was already very high (3.1 percent per year).

##### **4.3 Agricultural growth**

Faster development of agricultural sector enables the countries in South Asia to make some dent in poverty and food security. Majority of workers in this region derive their livelihood from agriculture, and the food expenditures account for a high proportion of the total expenditure of the poor households. Other things being equal, the key to the success of the low-income food-deficit countries in ensuring food security lies in the extent to which they are able to increase their agricultural production.

India's initiatives to ensure food security for its citizens ranges from concerted efforts to boost agricultural production to far-ranging market interventions aimed at both income and price stabilization. Besides, measures have been introduced to improve the access to food of the really poor through public distribution and income generating schemes (Mittal, 2009).

Bangladesh and Nepal represented predominantly small holder agriculture. The Government of Bangladesh has, over the past three and a half decades, introduced reform measures and policies for agricultural development in its quest for food security for all. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Bangladesh pursues a policy of agricultural modernization by supplying modern agricultural inputs (seed, fertilizer and irrigation) and technology (HYVs and machinery) through government agencies and organizations like the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADDC), and Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). The government liberalize the seed market, allowed import of improved germplasm for research and development and developed its own facilities for producing foundation seeds (except for five notified crops - rice, wheat, sugarcane, potato and jute) through

the Seed Policy Act of 1992 and 1998. It also encourages the involvement of the private sector and NGOs in the seed delivery system. More recently, the newly elected government has decided to extend fertilizer subsidy to fertilizers other than urea in a bid to promote balanced fertilizer use. Bangladesh has also invested in agricultural research and extension system. Currently, a big project titled National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP) is being implemented.

For the past 13 years, agricultural policy in Nepal has been shaped by the Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP), which covers the period 1995-2010. The APP strategy is to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction objectives through accelerated growth of agriculture (Mittal, 2009).

Pakistan on the other extreme had small holdings accounting for a negligible (2 percent) share in the cultivated land. It is also characterized by high inequity in the landholding pattern. With the exception of Pakistan, the distribution of agricultural holdings in the countries of the region did not suggest any remarkable hegemony of the large farmers.

Bhutan has initiated several agricultural, food and trade policies to increase food production and ensure food security in the country since the initiation of the first five-year plan in 1961 (Mittal, 2009).

#### **4.4 Poverty alleviation programs**

Another important influence on ensuring food security is the Poverty Alleviation Programs (PAP). The South Asian countries have a long tradition of such programs which are normally divided into three categories: those that provide social safety net; those intended to create assets for the poor households; and those that generate wage employment. The success of these programs varied from country to country but is not spectacular. One program in this category which is gaining popularity is the mid-day meal program for the school going children. In many countries either food grains are distributed free or cooked food is provided to those attending schools. Such programs not only supplement food available to the poor households but also will encourage children to attend school. The more sustainable programs of poverty alleviation and food security are those which involve the distribution of assets among the needy households, or provision of gainful employment.<sup>1</sup> Sri Lanka's largest welfare program, the Samurdhi program was launched in 1995 with the twin objectives of ensuring food security and reducing poverty. The program covers two million households. Eighty per cent of its outlay is accounted for by a food stamp program (Mittal 2009).

#### **4.5 Improving food production**

Increasing the amount of food available is necessary to feed the growing population in South Asia. The Green Revolution of the 1970s and 1980s led to huge increases in output, largely due to the cultivation of high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat, the expansion of land under production and irrigation, greater use of fertilizers and pesticides and greater availability of credit. In many South Asian countries these gains have reached their limit, and social and environmental issues must now be addressed. Further increases in food production is improving farming practices through training and the use of technology to increase outputs from current land without further loss of productive land; land reform to provide secure access to land for more people; and the provision of low-cost finance to help farmers invest in higher quality seeds and fertilizers and small irrigation pumps. While genetically modified seeds are being hailed in most of the South Asian countries as a means of improving crop outputs; there are also concerns about the ownership of seeds, adequate compensation for traditional knowledge and possible side effects (2009). To ease the deficit in food availability from domestic production, import of agricultural commodities is liberalized and import duties and para-tariffs on various food items are substantially reduced by successive governments.

#### **4.6 Economic growth**

Increasing food production leads to greater availability of food and economic growth in South Asian countries. Generating income provide access to more and varied foods and provide cash for use in other areas of the economy, such as small enterprise and manufacturing, which in turn helps reduce poverty. In Nepal, the Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP) has been shaped to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction objectives through accelerated growth of agriculture. Other South Asian countries have been taking initiatives to grow their economic growth.

#### 4.7 Public distribution of food grains

The South Asian countries have a long tradition, dating back to the Second World War, of distributing food to the poor households at below-market prices. An earlier arrangement was rationing food grains; and in later years, maintaining a regime of dual prices and giving the poor the benefits of lower-than-market price.

All countries in this region have instituted Public Distribution Systems (PDS) to achieve this objective. PDS is run through food procurement in the domestic market at a pre-announced procurement price, although imports have been resorted to in some countries, e.g., India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Food grains are distributed through PDS (or 'fair-price' shops) at the "issue price" which is generally lower than the market price. As the gap between procurement and issue prices is usually narrow, the State subsidizes the PDS operations. In Bangladesh, domestic procurement of both rice and wheat is made by the government with a view to providing support to farmers and to procure quantity of food grains required to support the public food grain distribution system. The government distributes rice and wheat under the Public Food grain Distribution System (PFDS) both through monetized channels like Essential Priority (EP), Other Priority (OP), Large Employee Industries (LEI), Flour Mill (FM), Open Market Sales (OMS), and Fair Price Card (FPC) and non-monetized (targeted) channels like Food for Work (FFW), Test Relief (TR), Gratuitous Relief (GR), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Food for Education (FFE) and other relief channels.

Other cross-border initiatives to eradicate food insecurity in the region include the following:

- Harmonization of quality standards for food, animal and plant products and recognition of each other's sanitary and phytosanitary certification
- Mutual cooperation in physical infrastructure and human resource development for quality certification, particularly in view of the problems faced by relatively less developed countries like Nepal
- Improved regional connectivity to link the SAARC countries through the shortest routes and
- Removal of non-tariff barriers to cross-border trade in food including lifting of ban on import/export of food commodities within SAARC countries.

#### 4.8 People's awareness to stop food insecurity

To stop food insecurity people's awareness is necessary. Though government of every country, NGOs, and other Inter-governmental organizations are taking initiatives to eradicate food insecurity, but without people's awareness their efforts will be go in vain. So, to stop food insecurity from country, people of that country should first increase their hand with government. For that, public should be aware of the aspects of food insecurity and the possible solution to stop this fact.

Achieving adequate food security is arguably a necessary first step toward the more general development objectives of improved human well-being, the alleviation of poverty, and sustainable, broad-based economic growth. For the South Asian region with a large proportion of the world's poor and hungry, food security is a major challenge. As we know the main causes of food insecurity is malnutrition, hunger death, poverty, Natural calamities etc, we should work together to eradicate these problem. We have to improve our agricultural system. Agriculture is the dominant sector of the South Asian countries.

### 5. Policy Implications

**First,** South Asian countries will have to aim for a steady, sustained rise in production through the development or acquisition of new technology to raise food production and utilization. This would require the adoption of an integrated strategy that include measures to increase domestic production and expand social safety net program while simultaneously collaborating on various fronts, including the trade front.

**Second,** Government should focus on improving farm productivity to ensure greater global competitiveness and creating non-farm employment opportunities that will help farmers overcome the challenged posed by declining productivity, increased pressure on land because of rising population and fluctuating prices of agricultural commodities.

**Third,** Regional initiatives to end the endemic conflicts in the region are also needed if food security is to be achieved. Regions prone to conflict and natural disasters and the hilly regions of South Asian countries are amongst the most vulnerable in terms of food security.



**Fourth,** Comprehensive policy framework is needed that places focus on investment strategies in three major areas: (1) agricultural research and extension, (2) improved access of farmers to well-functioning markets, and (3) improved insurance and targeted social safety net programs for vulnerable groups, especially undernourished women and children. Across these three areas, attention needs to be focused on capacity building and good governance.

## 6. Conclusion

It is said that developing countries are the most food insecure in the world. The last few decades have witnessed a sweeping change in the food production scenario of South Asia. For the South Asian region with a large proportion of the world's poor and hungry, food security is a major challenge. Among these countries, the countries those have larger population and comparatively small cultivatable land, will be suffered most. In this case as a region, South Asia is more vulnerable than any other region. Furthermore, environmental degradation and the impact of climate change also made some Asian countries most vulnerable. Food is still insecure to the poor. The three dimensional impacts on food productivity (Environmental degradation, Climate change and use of bio-fuels) have already created a growing food scarcity all over the world, and in future developing world, especially South Asia will be suffered more. So, it can be said, only regional and international cooperation from the sustainability perspective can strengthen the food security in the world. Making the region food secure will require action both at the national and regional levels. Consequently, both availability of and access to food are adversely affected. Since regional food security presupposes food security at the national level, each country has to strengthen domestic production systems to overcome these challenges. All countries need to step up their investment in research and development and extension services to increase productivity. At the regional level, increased agricultural trade between South Asian countries will play a far more important role in achieving food security. South Asian countries should increase cooperation to stop food insecurity.

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