

Book Reviews

Joachim von Braun and Rajul Pandya-Lorch (eds.). *Food Policy for the Poor: Expanding the Research Frontiers: Highlights from 30 Years of IFPRI Research.* Washington, D. C.: IFPRI, 2005. 253 Pages. Price not given.

The research of the past 30 years at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) is highlighted in this volume. The topic is food and nutrition security. Of related concern are the development strategies that impact on technologies for agricultural production, resource management, conflicts and natural disasters, subsidies and safety nets, gender roles, and health.

The book consists of nine chapters. The first chapter discusses a changing IFPRI in a changing world. The current and future world food situation is analysed and ways are suggested to increase agricultural production and to explore policies for improving production, trade, and distribution of food so that an increase in the quantity and quality of food would be available for all people. IFPRI has heightened its efforts to raise the awareness about emerging food security issues. In particular, its “2020 Vision for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment” initiative is aimed at promoting policy actions that will lead to food and nutrition security.

The second chapter deals with IFPRI’s first major research activity, of food production and consumption. The gap between production and consumption could be filled on the basis of a country’s economic condition. The high-income countries have the advantage to invest in non-agricultural economic activities and depend on commercial export earnings to purchase their food import needs. Some middle-income countries also have favourable foreign exchange earnings, such as Mexico and Brazil. However, others such as Peru, Chile, and Turkey may face difficult problems unless food production can be increased. Finally, in most low-income countries, food consumption of much of the population is below dietary energy requirements. In developing countries, instead of accelerating, economic growth slows and populations grow more rapidly.

The third chapter is on “Development Strategies and the Role of Food and Agriculture”. Agricultural growth not only contributes directly to poverty reduction in the rural areas but also plays a key role in other parts of the economy. IFPRI researchers explore the growth linkages between the agricultural sector and the rest of the economy. In mostly rural, low-income countries accelerated growth in agricultural production is the main focus for alleviating poverty.

The fourth chapter focuses on the human and political impact that agricultural prices have in developing countries. In the 1990s liberalisation was common in the developing world which raised new questions about how to manage liberalisation without leaving the poor behind. Since the poor spend their income mostly on food, a rise in food prices causes an equivalent reduction in their income. Whereas richer people spend a smaller proportion of their income on food, they can maintain their food consumption when food prices rise substantially. The empirical findings of the developing countries and regional surveys indicate that the trade, macroeconomic, and sector-specific pricing policies adopted in these countries since the early 1950s have given rise to strong incentive biases against the production of tradable goods and in favour of non-tradables; and within the export sector, against agricultural products as compared with manufactured goods.

The fifth chapter addresses the role of technology in agricultural development. On the issue of food security, IFPRI research has focused on increasing food production and what inputs the farmer need to do so, i.e., seed, water, and fertiliser, etc. The most important argument for a high priority to agriculture was that the domestic food sector played a powerful role in facilitating and stimulating growth of other sectors of the economy.

In the sixth chapter, "Managing Natural Resources", attention is paid to how institutions and incentives affect the management of natural resources that influence food and nutrition security. IFPRI research had shown that with the help of appropriate investment and technologies, the reduction in poverty and environmental damage can be substantially managed. Water had been a major theme of research at IFPRI. Research had helped to establish the importance of economic incentives in water allocation in developing countries.

The seventh chapter titled "Assuring Household Access to Food" has three principal strands, i.e., food subsidies, famine relief, and insurance. In the 1970s, food subsidies were seen as an important means of guaranteeing access to food for poor households. The second strand of research focused on understanding famines and improving the mechanism to alleviate the harmful effects of droughts and floods. The third strand focused on improving food security through indirect policies, such as insuring the income streams of the poor, protecting the assets of the poor, and providing public employment programmes for the poor.

The eighth chapter deals with research on nutrition and health and is centred on concerns about lack of food in terms of quantity. Over time, researchers extended their interest to the problem of poor-quality diets. IFPRI scholars had done a great deal of research assessing the causes of food and nutrient insecurity arising from poverty, women's status, and childcare practices. IFPRI had also examined available evidence of the potential contribution of agriculture and food-based solutions to reducing micronutrient malnutrition in young children. Finally, IFPRI continues to give careful consideration to how it can best meet the challenges it will face in the

coming decade. IFPRI's vision, as given here, is of a world free of hunger and malnutrition.

This book addresses the food policy issues for the world in general and for developing countries in particular. The goal of this book is to provide the knowledge needed for food and nutrition policy for poor people and to be a source of understanding—of the linkages between research and policy change. Finally, it will be extremely useful to researchers, students, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and policy-makers to further strengthen the research on food policy issues. Pakistan is not a food-insecure country. However, the demand for food grain increases due to the continuously high rate of population growth and poverty. This book would be helpful to gain an understanding of ways of increasing agricultural productivity in the food-grain sector.

Ayaz Ahmed

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad.