



## Agriculture and Nutrition in Pakistan – Pathways and Disconnects

Results of the latest nationwide nutrition survey show that Pakistan has persistently high rates of undernutrition despite respectable rates of economic growth. Amongst economic sectors, agriculture could have positive impacts on nutrition outcomes, but only through nuanced approaches. Exploring possible links between agricultural growth and nutrition improvement in the country reveals that land, gender relations, individual behaviour and preferences, as well as political priorities and organisational effectiveness, act as disconnects between agriculture and nutrition. These areas represent both opportunities and challenges for improving nutrition outcomes. This has important implications for existing policy and programmes that address issues such as labour arrangements, women's agency, social protection and citizenship.

Similar to other countries in the region, Pakistan faces the 'South Asian Paradox' where a worsening in the state of nutrition has occurred despite respectable rates of economic growth in the country. According to the latest nationwide nutrition survey (NNS 2011) over 4 in 10 (44%) children in Pakistan are stunted, an even greater proportion than a decade earlier. Economic growth in general, and agricultural growth in particular, could support nutrition improvement far more strongly than it has done to date.

### Methodology

Mysbah Balagamwala and Haris Gazdar assembled existing evidence on the possible links between agricultural growth and nutrition improvement in Pakistan. The authors used secondary material, as well as their own analysis of available secondary data, to provide situation analyses of agriculture and nutrition, and the policy environment relating to both sectors. To review the links between agriculture and nutrition the authors used a framework developed by the research programme,



Tackling the Agriculture-Nutrition Disconnect in India (TANDI), which itself is based on UNICEF's framework for nutrition.

↑ A worker plucking green chillies from vegetable fields.  
VISUAL NEWS ASSOCIATES/  
WORLD BANK

### Pathways and disconnects between agriculture and nutrition

The authors analysed key pathways and disconnects between agriculture and nutrition in the context of Pakistan.



◀ Kalasha woman tending to her fields.  
MANAL KHAN

The seven pathways identified by TANDI are:

**Pathway 1** Agriculture as a source of food

**Pathway 2** Agriculture as a source of income

**Pathway 3** Supply and demand factors in agriculture that impact household food security

**Pathway 4** Non-food expenditure of income derived from agriculture

**Pathways 5 to 7** Role of gender through 5) female employment in agriculture and its impact on intrahousehold allocations, 6) mothers' care practices and 7) own energy expenditure

## The findings

This analysis highlights that it is important to move beyond an understanding of agriculture as a source of food for farm households and examine the trade off between self-consumption and the market price of food. In addition the study shows that local and temporary variations notwithstanding, the price of most food is determined by global markets, and not, as one might expect, local supply and demand.

Also an increase in agricultural income from cash crops, such as cotton, does not necessarily lead to an increase in consumption of own-produced food, as often cash crops leave less room for food crops. As a result the findings indicate that some of the regions with the worst nutritional outcomes in Pakistan are those where the agricultural economy is doing relatively well. In such areas the authors state that demand for women's labour is often high and this can have both positive and negative effects on nutritional outcomes. Positive because women's income can result in pro-nutrition household consumption choices, and negative because women's food consumption may not keep up with their additional nutritional requirements, and because their workload may leave them with less time for child care.

## Policy implications

These findings have important policy implications and the TANDI framework is a useful starting point to understand the agriculture–nutrition links in Pakistan. However, the authors establish that assessing progress along any particular pathway between agriculture and nutrition reveals that there are a wide range of intervening processes and conditions.

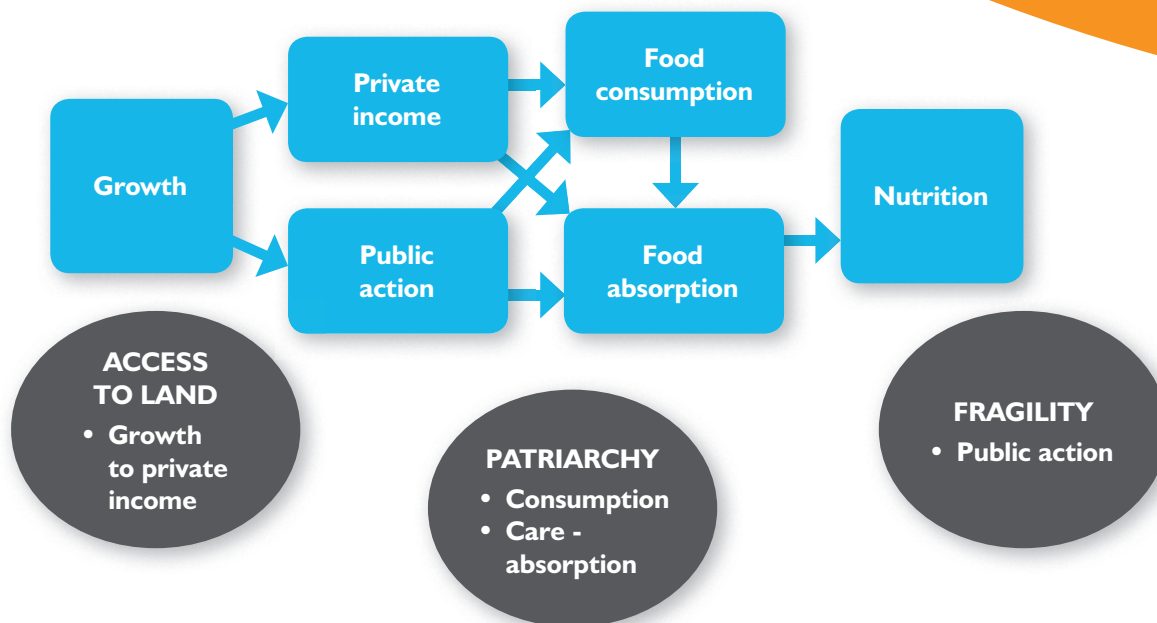
▶ Growing a way to self-sufficiency.  
VICKI FRANCIS/DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT





Figure 1

Pathways and Disconnects between Agriculture and Nutrition in Pakistan



Their research identifies the following salient disconnects that require further investigation (See Figure 1 above):

- **Access to agricultural land**, and associated labour arrangements influence the effectiveness of the link between agricultural growth and nutrition improvement. Agricultural growth may benefit those households which have access to land, but it may be the landless or land-poor that are the most nutritionally deprived. There is a clear hierarchy between farmers and labourers in terms of income, food security and nutritional status, with land owners benefitting more. Less than half of rural households (48%) own any land at all. Thus, the majority of rural households may not benefit directly from either greater availability or variety of self-produced food, or from increased overall incomes.
- **Patriarchy and unequal gender relations**, influence social policy and norms adversely affecting maternal health practices, women’s empowerment and intra-household allocations of food. These factors negatively affect household nutritional outcomes, as women in their roles as both caregivers and earners are shown

to have greater regard for factors influencing household nutrition than men.

- **Behaviour and preferences**, of households and individuals over matters concerning food consumption, dietary diversity, and care practices have an influence over agriculture’s ability to address undernutrition.
- **Political priorities and organisational effectiveness.**

The authors conclude that there are important knowledge gaps in all these areas, and a research agenda that addresses these gaps can play a strategic role in addressing agriculture–nutrition disconnects and improve nutritional outcomes. Existing programmes and policies such as cash transfer programmes and land grant schemes that address gender relations and access to land, provide opportunities for grounded empirical and policy research.

As part of LANSAs, research has been planned in these areas with the aim of generating evidence that will contribute to the mainstreaming of nutrition goals in agriculture policymaking.

“The majority of rural households may not benefit directly from either greater availability or variety of self-produced food, or from increased overall incomes.”

## Further reading

Balagamwala, M. and Gazdar, H. (2013) *Agriculture and Nutrition in Pakistan – Pathways and Disconnects*  
[http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/1401/LANSA\\_Pakistan\\_Evidence\\_Paper\\_May20132.pdf](http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/1401/LANSA_Pakistan_Evidence_Paper_May20132.pdf)

Hoddinot, J. (2012) 'Agriculture, Health and Nutrition: Towards Conceptualising the Linkages', in S. Fan and R. Pandya-Lorch (eds), *Reshaping Agriculture for Nutrition and Health: An IFPRI 2020 Book*, Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

Gillespie, S. Harris, J. and Kadiyala, S. (2012) *The Agriculture–Nutrition Disconnect in India: What Do We Know?*, IFPRI Discussion Paper 01187, Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

## Credits

This summary was written by **Samar Zuberi** from Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR). It was based on the evidence review 'Agriculture and Nutrition in Pakistan – Pathways and Disconnects' written by **Mysbah Balagamwala** and **Haris Gazdar** (CSSR) for LANSAs.

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▲ A village woman with her son.  
AHSAN



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