Country Synthesis Brief

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Pakistan

Government policies for agriculture have traditionally focused on increasing crop yields, maintaining food price stability and improving the distribution network of food crops in Pakistan. However, strong, recent interest in nutrition has brought opportunities to engage with these policies based on evidence on ways to enhance them.

The Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) research programme consortium aims to enhance the impact of agriculture on maternal and child nutrition in Pakistan. LANSA activities in the country have included: mapping of stakeholder perceptions of sectoral policies and programmes, primary research, secondary data analysis, policy dialogue, capacity strengthening, research uptake and dissemination.

The Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR) is the lead institution for LANSA research in Pakistan, working with the partners, The Leverhulme Centre for Integrated Agricultural Research (LCIRAH), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Institute of Development Studies (IDS). In addition, there were research collaborations with Action Against Hunger (ACF) Pakistan.

LANSA work

Landscaping and foundational work under LANSA[1] found that the key disconnects in Pakistan included inequalities in access to agricultural resources such as land, and in gender relations with respect to agricultural work. Governance issues and institutional weaknesses compounded the effects of these inequalities. Research showed that there might be scope for leveraging agricultural growth through more nuanced approaches such as supporting women agricultural workers, improving access to agricultural resources, and using

market-based approaches to bridge agriculture-nutrition disconnects[2]. It was also concluded that provincial governments had become important drivers of nutrition programming, and needed to be engaged with more deeply in a targeted manner.

LANSA research investigated the role of interventions in agri-food value chains, in bringing sustainable nutritional improvements amongst the poor. Two sets of agri-food value chain interventions – wheat flour fortification and modern dairy processing – were selected as case studies. These represent two of the most important foods consumed in Pakistan, and also

the two most important agricultural outputs. The dairy value chain has been the subject of significant private sector investment and policy support, but the study[3] found that the modern value chain that had started out with the promise of productivity shifts, failed to make significant inroads for the supply of nutritious food to poor consumers. The wheat flour fortification study[4] offers critical insights to a major DFID-supported intervention in Pakistan that seeks to improve nutrition through food fortification. Study findings indicate that a technological fix like fortification, was unlikely to have an impact on nutrition without addressing major institutional constraints in the post-harvest economy.

Policy challenges

Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy and a key driver to improve nutrition. The role of women workers who drive the sector and the implications of their work for nutrition has been a blind spot amongst policy makers. They fail to recognise how women subsidise agriculture with cheap or even unpaid labour. LANSA research in Pakistan identified women's agricultural work as a critical mediating factor between household poverty and undernutrition. Traditionally, government policy in agriculture has focused on increasing crop yields, maintaining food price stability and improving the distribution network of food crops. There has also been optimism about the role of technological change in agri-food value chains as a driver of agricultural growth. A stronger policy interest in nutrition in the recent years has created new opportunities for influencing action through evidence. Agricultural policies and interventions designed with the express goal of transforming the status of women's work can play a key role in this regard.

Stakeholder engagement

LANSA in Pakistan has engaged regularly with the Sindh government to inform local policies and programmes in nutrition and agriculture. In 2018, the Sindh government passed its first Labour Policy that marks an important dimension of recognition for women agricultural workers. It mentions that legislation will be passed to recognise rights of all members in the agricultural sector. LANSA research has informed the design and implementation of the Sindh government's largest, multi-million dollar nutrition programme 'Accelerated Action Plan for Reducing Malnutrition and Stunting' (AAP).

Several concerted efforts in raising the issue at multiple fronts have resulted in long-standing partnerships with national and international bodies. Partnership with the National Commission on the Status of Women

(NCSW) led to significant collaborative efforts in pushing forward the agenda on the rights of women agricultural workers at national and regional levels in the country[5]. In August 2018, LANSA Pakistan organised a consultation in partnership with NCSW. Policymakers and other stakeholders came together to discuss the issues faced by women agricultural workers in Pakistan, reflect on LANSA research findings, and debated potential ways of moving forward in recognising and protecting rights of women agricultural workers at local, provincial and national levels.

LANSA deepened its efforts to support the discourse on the rights of female agricultural workers at a wider scale in Pakistan, with the issue finally being acknowledged by one of the largest political parties in the country. Key messages from LANSA Pakistan's written recommendations and presentation to senior party leaders were reflected in its election manifesto, which features protection of rights of women agricultural workers as one of its key promises.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Through this work in Pakistan we have developed the following recommendations for enhancing nutrition through agriculture:

1. The rights of women agricultural workers should be recognised, protected and promoted in policy, legislation and programmes.

2. Policies should take into account the nature of agricultural work including seasonality; migration, cropping patterns, and other drivers of women's work such as household food insecurity.

3. Affirmative action and non-discrimination regarding women's land ownership, access, management and control, including ensuring equal entitlements in land distribution.

4. Agricultural policies and programmes need to be gender-sensitive, and can play a transformative role with respect to the status of women's work.

5. Provincial governments should establish systems of support for women agricultural workers by targeting women through social protection, health, and nutrition programmes.

6. Nutrition interventions need to be part of a broader reform agenda that has food security as its central objective.

7. Market-based technological changes in agri-food value chains must have explicitly articulated nutrition objectives if they are to have an impact on nutrition.