



SDPI Putting food security on the national agenda

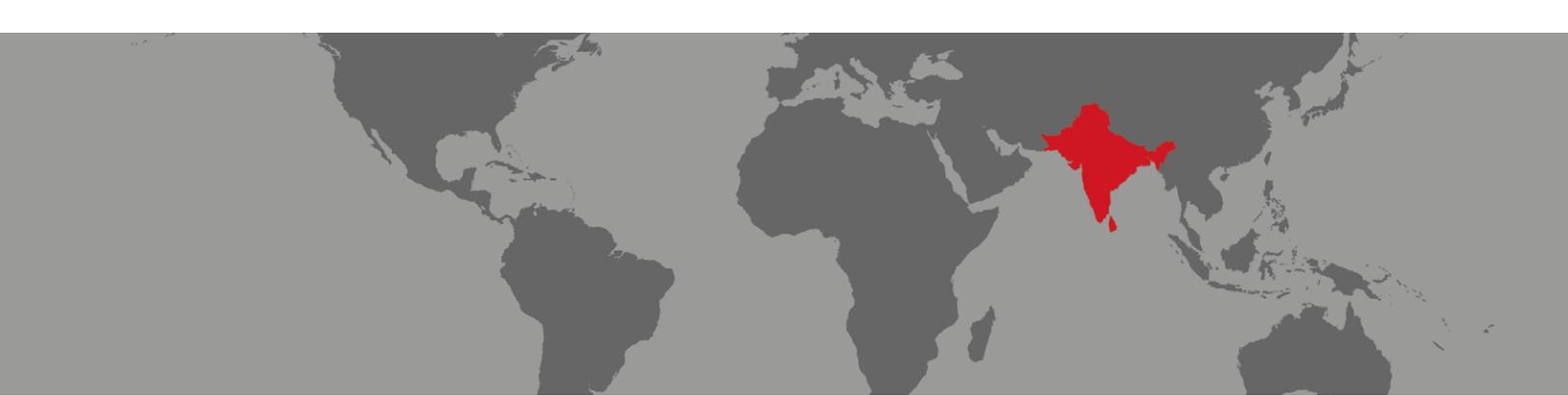
The *Sustainable Development Policy Institute* (SDPI) is encouraging the Government of Pakistan to make food insecurity a national security issue.

SETTING THE SCENE —Pakistan has long been a site of conflict and violence, particularly in the western region of the country. Consequently, the Government of Pakistan's policy focus has been on national security at the expense of social and economic sectors like education, health, energy and trade. Frequently changing governments and persistent military regimes have further distracted Pakistan from its path to social and economic development. Partly as a result of this neglect, food insecurity is quickly emerging not only as an urgent humanitarian problem, but also as another threat to Pakistan's national security. Hunger can make people do desperate things and many analysts believe that extremist forces are exploiting the hunger of vulnerable Pakistanis to motivate them to undertake violent, militant acts.

The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as "when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." A landmark study produced by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the World Food Programme, brought this issue to the forefront in Pakistan.

WHAT SDPI DID —SDPI, established in 1992, is known nationally in Pakistan and regionally in South Asia for its expertise in sustainable development issues, including food security. The organization observed that, because food security was not high among the government's priorities, there was no credible national data available on food security in Pakistan. The think tank sought to fill this gap with a study of food insecurity in rural Pakistan in 2003; it followed this up six years later with its flagship study, *Food Insecurity in Pakistan 2009*. The study estimated that almost half of 165 million Pakistanis were food insecure in 2009. It noted that the situation had deteriorated significantly since 2003, with a sharp increase in the number of districts that had inadequate conditions for food security. It also found that food insecurity was the highest in the conflict-prone west, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This was not only the first national survey of its kind in Pakistan, but it also drew a connection between militancy and food security that attracted the attention of policymakers and donor agencies. SDPI used that attention to promote a paradigm shift wherein policymakers approached food insecurity not only as a humanitarian issue, but also as a national security issue.



SDPI directed its efforts towards establishing a food security ministry, now known as the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, using the opportunity to advocate for a dedicated government structure tasked with monitoring and delivering food security and nutrition programming. In recognition of SDPI's significant contribution, its Executive Director was appointed by the Secretary of the new Ministry as Chair of the *Task Force on the Committee on Zero Hunger*. The task force comprises representatives from the United Nations and bilateral agencies, civil society organizations such as Oxfam, and relevant government officials. It exists to assist and support the new Ministry in establishing structures and programmes necessary for eliminating hunger in the country, and effectively solicited the support of the then Prime Minister of the country.

THE OUTCOME —In March 2012, SDPI facilitated the *National Workshop on Food Security in Pakistan: Future Challenges and Coping Strategies* with the newly formed Ministry of National Food Security and Research in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and Oxfam. The Prime Minister of Pakistan attended the event and took the opportunity to announce a new government initiative to combat food insecurity: the *National Zero Hunger Programme*. He also announced the establishment of the National Council for Food Security, comprised of representatives from the federal and provincial governments, the private sector and civil society, including SDPI.

The purpose of the six-day workshop was to formulate the new ministry's operational strategy and to produce a set of guidelines and frameworks for the new program. Inspired by similar programs in Brazil and Indonesia, the five-year *National Zero Hunger Programme* aims to reach 61 million food insecure people across Pakistan at the household level. The program has six priorities: i) school feeding programs in the most food insecure districts; ii) a nutrition program for children under five; iii) a nutrition program for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers; iv) targeted and conditional social safety nets; v) zero-hunger shops (utility stores that sell subsidized food items) in extremely food insecure districts; and vi) coordination among federal and provincial ministries, and with private-public partnerships. As an example of its success, the Ministry of National Food Security recently signed an agreement with the World Food Programme through which 500,000 metric tonnes of wheat donated by the Government of Pakistan will be converted into nutritious food. This food will be used in feeding programs, particularly for malnourished children, pregnant women and primary school children.

Unfortunately, the 2013 post-election change of government in Pakistan slowed down the implementation of these schemes. As a result, SDPI is once again advocating for the prioritization of the Zero Hunger Programme to the new government, while continuing its assessments of highly food insecure areas.

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