NUTRITION SENSITIVITY OF NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR AGRICULTURE IN PAKISTAN

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Summary
This report presents a commentary on existing policy environment governing nutrition programming in Pakistan and the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The report presents an insight on the nutrition sensitivity and nutrition specificity of the programming paradigm; complementarity between nutrition, agriculture, food security, and other key sectors; robustness and comprehensiveness of documents in facilitating operationalization of policies; and possible way forward for future policy making, and strategic planning.

Methodology
The methodology adopted for undertaking the policy review to satisfy information requirements for this special report included a robust review of secondary sources, including policies (finalized and drafts), strategies, operational plans, reports, datasets, published and grey literature on nutrition sensitive and nutrition specific programming environment in Pakistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Discussion
According to the WHO, the burden of malnutrition remains high, and progress is slow, affecting all globally; malnutrition is responsible for more ill health than any other cause (1). The brunt of the effects are borne by the most vulnerable, specifically women and children, which contributes to economic losses over the human life cycle, resulting in a strain on the overall economic development and further adversely affecting vulnerable and poor populations (2).

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world with an estimated population of around 200 million (3). The World Bank classifies Pakistan as a lower-middle income country (4); with almost 40% of the population living at or below the poverty line; and less than 5% of the total population covered under Social Protection programming. A USAID report identifies Pakistan as a food surplus country (5), however, data collected through surveys suggests that 36.9% of the households are food insecure; with almost one in five (18.3%) being severely insecure (6); malnutrition affects half of the children and mothers, where only two out of five children receive the minimum acceptable diet, resulting in low productivity and low national development (7). Furthermore, disparities in wealth, living standards, access to food sources, lifestyle, and eating habits amongst urban and rural populations (8), has resulted in the double burden of malnutrition becoming increasingly apparent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite its complex multi-sectorial nature, Nutrition has been operating in Pakistan under the cloche of Health, while the Food Security has been largely a scattered subject of craft and the agriculture sector (9). According to Gillespie, Bold and Hodge context specific evidence relating agriculture and nutrition remains limited (10).

According to the World Bank, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Pakistan was USD 312.57 Billion in 2018, and is estimated to increase to above USD 320 Billion in 2019 (11). The agriculture and dairy sectors contribute one fifth and one tenth of the GDP respectively, while providing employment to almost half of the labor workforce (12). Rice is Pakistan’s major export, and constitutes one tenth of the global trade; while wheat is the preferred food, and contributes to half of the daily caloric intake of the country (13). Poverty in the rural areas has been identified as a major driver of production challenges for the agriculture sector in the country (14).

Synthesis of available evidence and review of public archives suggests that the Government of Pakistan recognized nutrition as a stand-alone policy priority in 2002 with the establishment of the Nutrition Wing under the purview of the Ministry of Health (15). The National Nutrition Programme was later established with a mandate to harmonize the Lady Health Worker (LHW) programme with the public-private-partnership initiatives for food fortification (16). The vision 2025 focuses on achieving a sustainable growth rate to ensure national food security, reduce rural poverty, and support the overall growth of the country including agriculture and related sectors (17). Concerted public private partnership efforts to improve nutrition and food security across Pakistan (18) has been moving towards creating an enabling programming environment; this is reflected in the legislative environment (through the Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Acts, adaptation of National Quality Standards Act, etc.); development of national and provincial policy frameworks (through the Pakistan Dietary Guidelines for Better Nutrition, National Food Security Policy, National Food Security Action Plan, FATA Agriculture Action Plan, Pakistan Integrated Nutrition Strategy, Multi-Sectorial Nutrition Strategies, Accelerated Action Plan, etc.); networking and linkages between academics, civil society, media and business fraternities; formation of district malnutrition addressing committees (DMACs), amongst others (19, 20, 21). Additionally, persistent efforts to mainstream nutrition by stakeholders resulted in inclusion of Nutrition as a key element within the political manifestoes of all major political parties (22) involved in the 2018 General Elections in Pakistan.

Agricultural policy in Pakistan has focused on improving productivity on agriculture through increasing output yield by availability of research and extension services and water management systems and by making small farmers productive through credit, technical and marketing support (23). Using the TANDI framework (24), a study concluded that economic gender equity, empowerment of women, and land ownership may provide a strategic link between nutrition and agriculture that has the potential to improve the nutritional status of Pakistan (25, 26).

### Table 1, presents the key findings of the nutrition policy review at the federal and provincial levels

| Federal | Provincial |
|---|---|
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |
| Number of Acts | Number of Acts |
| 4 | 3 |

1. However, vision provides an overview of the monitoring and evaluation mechanism
2. To some extent - Linked with 5yues and annual plans
3. Budget targets are also given
4. Implementation strategy mentioned in the policy
5. To some extent
6. To some extent
7. To some extent

Despite these strides, the policy links between malnutrition and agriculture have not been adequately focused (27, 28) in the country. The report reviewed 11 available policy documents at the federal and the provincial level (only for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) by using a modified version of the policy assessment framework developed by Howlett and del Rio (29). The key parameters for the review included an assessment of the: (i) nutrition focus - whether the policy provides a framework on nutrition sensitive or nutrition specific programming in the country; (ii) scope - whether the policy addresses the underlying causes of malnutrition; (iii) consistency - whether the policy aligns with national & provincial priorities; (iv) plan - whether the policy operational plan has been developed for the implementation of policy; (v) budget - whether adequate budgetary requirements have been identified to support implementation of the policy; (vi) Standard Operating Procedures for Implementers (SOPs) - whether the roles and responsibilities of implementers have been clearly defined; (vii) monitoring - whether internal controls and tracking mechanisms have been defined for implementation of the policy; and (viii) risks - whether extrinsic and intrinsic risks have been clearly identified, and possible mitigation measures described in the policy.
Table 2. Key findings of the Policy Review

| Parameter         | Assessment                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Focus             | Most policies reflected sensitivity, while few were specific to nutrition programming. The importance and association of agriculture and its impact on improving nutrition is not clear to any of the policies, except in case of KP Multi-focus Integrated Nutrition Strategy. |
| Scope             | All policies addressed social, cultural, economic, environmental, as well as household level causes of malnutrition, by all addressing food insecurity, inadequate care for women and children, inadequate health service, WASH, Education, etc., however, policies did not adequately address cross-cutting pathways. |
| Consistency       | Efforts have been increased to diversity production, increase in access, and promote consumption of nutritious foods through incentives. All policies showed consistency with documented national and provincial priorities; however, there is a scarcity of available evidence on context specific needs at the community, province, and national levels. |
| Plans             | Some policies included operational plans; however, the biggest gap is translation of policies into implementation plans. Slow approval processes, delays in translating policies to actions taken upon the development, and approval of programs. |
| Budget            | The nutrition and food security specific policies do not adequately provide financial resource requirements for operationalizing policy into practice. There is an association of this finding with the lack of a focused operational plan for these policies, which is essential to defining the level of effort and subsequent resource requirements. |
| SOPs              | Most policies provided clear guidelines on roles and responsibilities of implementers and implementation units. |
| Monitoring        | Internal control mechanisms were not defined at the national level; however, there were reflected in the provincial level policies. Monitoring Mechanisms, parameters, and process and outcome level indicators have not been clearly defined and operationalized to facilitate tracking, and determining consumption patterns and dietary diversity. |
| Risks             | Most policies identified intrinsic and extrinsic risks associated with nutrition and agriculture programming at the national and provincial level. However, evidence on the key priorities remains limited, and largely generic, and substantially does not allow for a more robust explanation in the policies. |

Way Forward
During the course of the review, a critical problem analysis was performed to ascertain the possible way forward to enhance the nutrition sensitivity of agriculture programming for improving the nutritional situation in Pakistan. The following key steps have been identified:

1. Improve policy coherence with respect to nutrition (including food price policies, subsidies, trade policies, and poverty alleviation policies). Establish, harmonize and ensure continuity of national definitions across sectors, and across levels.
2. Strengthen the context specific evidence base, needs, capacity gaps, understanding and development of linkage between nutrition and agriculture across sectors. Develop a well-defined concerted theory of change, processes, and assumptions for nutrition and agriculture.
3. Develop evidence driven operational plans at national and provincial levels with SMART objectives, key performance indicators and tracking variables for translation of nutrition sensitive and nutrition specific policies into action. Furthermore, establish linkages between sectors, and across levels.
4. Ensure adequate budgetary allocations for nutrition sensitive and nutrition specific programming at national and provincial levels aligned with operational plans.
5. Develop robust monitoring systems (covering the spectrum of standardization, capacity building, oversight) to enhance transparency, compliance, and accountability of operational plans for implementing national and provincial policies. Furthermore, establish linkages between sectors, and across levels.
6. Develop an evaluation system, with well-defined information requirements to inform relevance, effectiveness, gender sensitivity, coverage, efficiency, potential for impact and sustainability of nutrition sensitive and nutrition specific programmes.
7. Ensure inclusivity, participation and equity across all national and provincial policies and implementation strategies, with a focus on the poor and vulnerable segments of the society; particularly children and women. Key aspects should include economic empowerment, gender equality, human rights, food security, health, education, shelter, WASH, and social protection.

The following pathways may be explored in this regard:

a. Demand generation to improve consumption and nutrition effects through harmonized community awareness and strategic social and behavior change communication (SBCC)

b. Diversified food production, agriculture techniques, and skills development for improved access to food; optimization of natural resource management (including horticulture, small scale farming, fisheries, poultry, and livestock); production of nutrient dense foods, risk mitigation (legume production, nitrogen fixation limitation, bio-fortification, etc.); and enhanced income generation (improved processing, market access, storage, preservation, packaging, etc.).

Conclusion
The overall nutrition related policy environment in Pakistan, nationally, and in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, specifically, are more inclined towards sector specific nutrition sensitive programming, with little or no inter-connectivity, linkage or harmonization across sectors, and across levels. Greater focus is warranted in policy making on nutrition specific interventions and establishing context relevant SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) multi-sectorial linkages, complementarity and synergies between nutrition, agriculture, food security, and other sectors. Enhancing the role of diversification, information sharing and knowledge management across sectors and across levels may be key influencing factors in improving future policy and programming environments in the country.

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