

Politics of Food Security in The Federation of Pakistan: Dilemma of The Agricultural Economy

Zainab Ahmed 

Assistant Professor, Seeta Majeed School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences,
Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding: zainab.ahmed@bnu.edu.pk

Maryam Ahmad 

Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, Virtual University of Pakistan

Email: mariamahmed@vu.edu.pk

Abstract

Food security is one of the pressing security concerns of Pakistan, stemming from resource instability, which implicates human security and, consequently, national security. A count of almost 250 million people who depend on 20% of GDP from agriculture as direct input struggles with the dilemma of food security. The fundamental dilemma of resource security in Pakistan is the politicization emanating from the contestation of federating units and the centre. The tumultuous geopolitics of food, climate change, water scarcity, rapid urbanization and consistent high population growth considerably complicate the web of food security. An inconsistent pattern of this phenomenon requires the sustainable availability of adequate food resources for the population. However, Pakistan is increasingly unable to meet as 63% of the country's households struggle with insufficient food supplies. This study is aimed at analyzing Pakistan's food security web from the perspective of politicization due to unresolved and contesting positions of the federation and federating units. The regional, international, economic, and environmental aspects are quite plausible, but the political angle has yet to be analyzed in depth, which this study aims at with the inductive approach through qualitative methodology.

Key Words: Food Security, Securitization, National Security, Climate Change, Federating Units.

Introduction

Food security is one of the essential elements of the construct of human security. Food security is not just about the amount of food but is greatly associated with the sustainable availability of food passably. Food security is fundamentally linked to the right of food sovereignty, which emanates from the fundamental concept that states and peoples must have the freedom to make their food and agriculture policies across their food chains (Kish, 2011). It is from the perspective of social and global justice. Thus, it can be concluded that the right to food sovereignty has been claimed as the right of communities, states, people and regions, not just individuals. From this right, a number of other rights emanate, such as, right to self-determination, the

right to development, and the right to permanent sovereignty over natural resources (Claeys, 2013). The fundamental right to food sovereignty has been recognized as having two dimensions. One is internal, which is associated with the right of people to choose their own political, social and economic system, while the external dimension is associated with the right of states to develop their agricultural systems (Claeys, 2013). The broad right to food sovereignty enables people to own land and produce food, thus extracting their power on social, economic and political output from the production of food. However, sovereignty is also associated with land ownership. The right to food sovereignty, if ensured effectively and equitably, leads to food security at the national level, which is vital for ensuring human security that is critical for instituting national security in the contemporary world.

Pakistan is a food-insecure country despite being an agricultural country. It is one of the imminent security concerns of the Federation of Pakistan, implicating human security and consequently the national security of the country. The results of the Global Food Security Index, as shown in Table 1, also validate the waning food security situation of Pakistan. The Global Food Security Index, which measures the quality, availability, and affordability of food, shows only minimal progress in Pakistan since it was introduced in 2012. In comparison to approximately 113 other countries, Pakistan's rating stayed largely static. Table 01 explains the ranking of Pakistan among 113 countries since 2012-2022, along with the score out of 100, which is not satisfactory in an agrarian federation like Pakistan. This stagnation or little progress in score and ranking over the period of time highlights the persistent challenges in improving the food security of the Federation of Pakistan.

Table 1: *Ranking and Score of Pakistan in Global Food Security Index-2012-2022*

Year	Rank of Pakistan	Score out of 100
2022	84	52.2
2021	75	54.7
2020	80	52.3
2019	78	56.8
2018	77	49.1
2017	77	47.8
2016	78	47.8
2015	77	45.7
2014	77	43.6
2013	75	39.7
2012	75	38.5

Source: *Economist Impact*

Although Pakistan's economy depends heavily on agriculture, which accounts for a large portion of the country's GDP, a large portion of the population still faces significant challenges in accessing nutritious food. When a significant proportion of

the population does not have reliable access to sufficient nutritious food, it results in widespread malnutrition, delayed child growth, and increased vulnerability to illness. This undermines societal stability and economic prosperity in addition to having an impact on personal productivity and health. These problems have the potential to worsen societal unrest and conflicts over time, directly endangering national security. Therefore, it is a dire need to examine the major challenges of the Pakistani federations' agrarian economy along with probing the significant concerns such as, whether Pakistan's food issue is politicized and securitized? if so, how? and is Pakistan's food security intertwined with the politics of the federation and if yes, how and why? This research basically revolves around these questions and has tried to figure out the challenges of the Pakistani federation with respect to food insecurity.

Dynamics of Pakistan

Pakistan is an agricultural economy. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24, the agricultural sector contributes 24% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country, whereas this sector creates 37.4% employment in the whole country (Finance Division, 2024). It shows the magnitude of this sector, which accounts for a sizable portion of Pakistan's GDP. Its importance is further increased by the fact that the agricultural sector is essential to any nation's food security and sovereignty. Likewise, this sector is vital for the food security of the Pakistani federation as well, but the food security outlook of Pakistan has recently been challenged and creating a multidimensional impact on the federation of Pakistan. The profiling of the Pakistani federation presented in Table 2 shows the situation of the country in terms of food security and its multidimensional impacts.

Table 2: *Profile of Pakistan as per Global Food Security Index*

Region	Asia and the Pacific
Category	Lower Middle Income
Prevalence of undernourishment	16.9%
Percentage of children stunted	36.7%
Percentage of children underweight	23.1%
Prevalence of Obesity	7.8%
Human Development Index	0.56
Rank	60
Affordability	50-60
Availability	50-60
Quality and safety	40-50
Sustainability and adaptation	20-30

Source: *Global Food Security, 2022 (Economist Impact, 2022, pp. 27–28).*

The statistics of Table 2 highlight the insecurity of Pakistan in various aspects like human development, sustainability, malnutrition, child health, quality and safety. Therefore, it is concluded that food security is not an isolated issue; rather, it has a

ripple effect which leads towards human insecurity and ultimately threatens national security. The food security of the Federation of Pakistan has been challenged significantly by the four following important factors.

- 1) A significant portion of its population is poor, and food insecurity is implicated and emanating from overall development challenges. (A sizable portion of the population of Pakistan lives in poverty, and food insecurity is linked to and a result of the country's general development issues.)
- 2) Pakistan is naturally vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change and weather disruptions, causing huge imbalance in food security, in particular for already deprived communities.
- 3) Pakistan's food security is linked with military conflicts in some areas and political conflicts in other areas.
- 4) The challenges of economic and developmental governance also implicate the agricultural system.
- 5) All the above challenges are complicated and compounded by the inflationary role of middlemen.

The aforementioned factors have changed the dynamics of Pakistan as an agricultural economy and have converted into serious challenges, which have played a major role in the nation's food insecurity, but it is also necessary to examine the food security dilemma of Pakistan in the backdrop of history.

Pakistan's Food Security Dilemma-Origin

Historically, Indian agriculture was confined to subsistence farming and village communities (Myllytaus & Sourabh, n.d.), which was not connected to open markets; rather the surplus, if any, due to climate conditions, was stored to be utilized during the lean years. Before the British rule, the concept was that all the classes associated with a piece of land had certain rights. This totally changed with the British system, which introduced "new land tenures, new land ownership concepts, tenancy changes" including heavier demands for land revenue that created a lot of difference in rural economic and social structure (Meena, 2015, p. 66). The British Raj earned a lot of land revenue by taking all the lands under their ownership. The cultivable lands were subject to a landlord-based system i-e, zamindari or an individual cultivator-based system called *raiyyatwari*, or maximum to a village-based system known as *mahalwari* (Meena, 2015). Pakistan's food security is historically embedded in the irrigating structure developed by the British Raj during the 18th and 19th centuries, considered to be one of the largest integrated irrigation systems in the world. However, this era remains one part of the overall development of agriculture. The partition of the Indian subcontinent can be considered as the second era during which the re-allotments of huge lands took place due to mass migration and displacements. The third era can be the three decades of land reforms in Pakistan by General Ayub Khan, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Zia-ul-Haq. During these periods, the attempt to seize land from big landowners and divide it up among small farmers to create a new structure that would change the British era proved unsuccessful. It was also attempted to deal with the social and economic issues, technological backwardness, and to change the power structure in politics

deeply associated with the land ownership (Gazdar, 2009). The small farms were performing much better in terms of overall productivity with adequate yield, labour-intensive methods, required crop production and with less reliance on technological techniques whereas the larger farms relied more on technological methods and synthetic fertilizers in order to boost year-round production in particular crops, diminishing the overall land quality (Brohi, n.d.). Therefore, the division of land into small farms was also a good step technically for enhancing crop production but practically it was not achieved. Later, General Zia-ul-Haq discredited the land reforms of General Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto by declaring them in contradiction with Islamic principles in order to consolidate his power with the same land ownership structure (Hathaway & Lee, 2004, p. 116). The fourth era is the current era, and it is of open markets and private property according to the global capitalism (Hathaway & Lee, 2004) but in Pakistan, land ownership is still associated to the contemporary ruling elite, which has significant sociopolitical and economic implications for legislation (Ahmed, 1959, p. 30).

Pakistan has witnessed few important legislations regarding land reforms in the different eras explained previously for abolishing the strong sociopolitical power structure which has economic ramifications also. However, all the laws have met the same fate and ultimately failed. For example, Punjab Tenancy (Amendment) Act of 1952 eliminated non-military jagirs and restricted the landlord's share to 40% of gross production, guaranteeing that occupancy tenants may acquire 7% of the total cultivated land and eventually becoming landowners in the long run (Ahmed, 1959). The structure was so strong that it survived any such legislation, and the land ownership remained in the hands of large landlords keeping political power intact too (Sims, 1993, pp. 146, 149, 156). The most important element of land reforms introduced by Ayub Khan through West Pakistan Land Regulation 1959 was the introduction of land ceilings limiting the ownership, being first legislation of its kind (Dawn, 2010). In the short run the reforms produced some sense of belongingness among the small landowners and tenants but in the long run, the large landowners were able to evade the restrictions by gifting lands to relatives and keeping it just in the papers. The land reforms of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto failed too due to the powerful land elite (Brohi, n.d.). The final blow was when the land reforms of 1972 were reinforced in 1977 withdrawing the exemption granted to religious institutions, the religio-political powers challenged those reforms in court, and these were declared to be un-Islamic (Qazalbash Waqf v. Chief Land Commissioner, 1990). The landowners were able to keep control over agricultural output and revenues throughout Bhutto's time as well (Khan et al., 2001) and soon Bhutto's land reforms disgruntled the peasants too (Zahoor, 2018, p. 124). According to this analysis, Pakistan's ruling elite controls the agricultural resources as well as nation's food production which has been politicized over the period of time due to sociopolitical power struggle and results in food security issue in the federation of Pakistan. The food security is a grave challenge of Pakistan in the current era, and it is aggravating with the passage of time and its is affecting undesirably human security as well as national security of the country.

Pakistan's Food Security Challenges

Since 2018, the federation of Pakistan had no documented roadmap for dealing with the issue of food security effectively. In 2018, Pakistan had devised its National Food Security Policy which is a first comprehensive document builds upon progress

in a number of social and economic areas. However, there are some significant ongoing challenges identified earlier that must be overcome in order to make additional progress towards food security. These challenges are discussed below in detail.

Impact of Global Food Price Surge

National and city level data from the Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Food Program indicates significant rise of food prices, especially food staples from 2007 onwards, which may be associated with these inflationary drivers. The international food price surge has also a significant impact on local markets. The period between 2007 and 2011 experienced soaring food price hikes, food price volatility, and disruptions in the distribution and availability of basic food stuffs in many regions of the world (FAO, 2011). From July to August 2025, economy wide inflation increased 0.3 percent. The all-items Consumer Price Index (CPI) was up 2.9 percent from August 2024. Food prices have risen higher than overall inflation. The CPI for all food increased 0.4 percent from July to August 2025 which was 3.2 percent higher than August 2024 (USDA, 2025).

The rise in international food prices, especially when this is translated into local markets has a direct impact upon food security which eventually leads towards human security in developing countries, further deepening the poverty of almost 1 billion people who were already living in deprivation (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2024). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), there were more than 166 million undernourished people in poor countries as a result of the first major price spike in 2007-08 (FAO, 2010). In turn, the World Bank estimated that the increase in food prices between mid-June 2010 and April 2011 led to an increase of estimated 44 million global poor (World Bank, 2017). Research also indicates that low and low-middle-income countries have experienced higher levels of food price inflation compared to upper-middle and high-income countries, particularly when international prices spike.

A large portion of Pakistan's population remains food insecure since its creation (Ahmad & Farooq, 2010; Khan & Shah, 2011). During the period when international food prices were soaring, the country's food production increased as it produces one of the major staple crops i-e, wheat. During that time, the country experienced strong economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2007). However, the availability of adequate food to large portions of underprivileged population remains elusive because of different reasons including low purchasing power (Suleri & Haq, 2009). According to the World Bank Global Consumption Database, Pakistani households spent 49.99% of their income on food and drink on average in 2010. The percentage of household spending on food and beverages was as high as 55.67% for the lowest segment of families, which spend less than USD 2.97 per capita per day, and 44.84% for the low segment, which spends between USD 2.97 and USD 8.44 per capita per day. The data further explains that bottom 60% households of Pakistan spend 45% of their income on food which is a high percentage of household income allocated to essential commodities and it is another general indicator of food insecurity sensitivity (World Bank, n.d.). During this time, rice, another staple, also experienced high increases. This exacerbated the nation's ongoing, already extremely difficult food security situation. The food inflation in the federation of

Pakistan also links with another significant challenge of food unavailability for the sizeable portion of the population because of the low purchasing power of the people of the country. It causes malnutrition or undernutrition among children. According to a study of World Bank, the stunting rate of Pakistan is 45% and it ranks 124 out of 132 countries in this regard and its patterns in these metrics are thought to be out of track with the 2025 World Health Assembly goals. These interconnected challenges are because of the food inflation in a low-income country like Pakistan where high food prices cost people's income heavily which consequently leads to food insecurity in the country. Public social protection instruments are viable tools for protecting the people of the country from this type of insecurity. In Pakistan, public social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP has generally been relatively low, for example in 2009 it was 1.7% overall, and excluding healthcare which was 1.3%. (For comparison, in the same year, India's overall social protection spending was 2.6% of GDP, and excluding healthcare it was 1.5%). However, there are well-established informal social protection networks and practices running by the affluent people of the federation of Pakistan for the provision of food for poor communities and these not reflected in official welfare surveys or government documents. These networks and practices offer a significant level of protection for the poorest communities and help them to mitigate the effect of food price inflation. Furthermore, a large number of these households, particularly those in rural areas, possess the resources necessary for a certain level of nutritional self-sufficiency. This lessens vulnerability to rising food prices and the possibility that they could contribute to instability of the country. But, working households with lower incomes, particularly those in urban areas, are more vulnerable to food price inflation and may be more inclined to become politicized in respect to social grievances since their income places them outside of the voluntary and informal social safety networks. Though, there is not much proof of the fact that this is causing or might cause significant instability in the country, whether as a result of collective action of informal networks for social protection.

Unchecked Population Growth

Another significant challenge of food security of Pakistan is high population growth. Rapid population growth puts a pressure on agricultural resources and raises food consumption, which has a substantial impact on food security. When agricultural output cannot keep up with population growth, its results in food shortages and malnutrition especially in developing nations like Pakistan. Pakistan's population is set to increase at same pattern and is projected to be fourth largest by 2050 (Ahmad & Farooq, 2010). There could be shortages and greater food insecurity as a result of the population's rapid expansion, which is currently 2.4% annually, outpacing the rise of food production (Islam et al., 2023). Rapid population growth often leads to urbanization, which reduces the amount of arable land available for farming. Pakistan has seen a sharp rise in urbanization, which has further boosted demand for food. Instability in crop yields and cultivated areas, especially for staple crops like rice and wheat that are essential for food availability, makes this issue worse (Malik & Ali, 2015; Peerzado et al., 2019). Despite being an agrarian economy, Pakistan's agriculture sector suffers many difficulties. Crop production at the necessary scale for the large population is hampered by problems like water scarcity, outmoded farming methods, and restricted access to contemporary agricultural inputs due to

which a considerable section of the population continues to be undernourished which is a major problem for Pakistan in terms of food security.

Climate Change

Pakistan faces a significant problem from climate change since it affects not just the environment but also the country's food security. Despite being one of the top seven countries in the world for wheat production, Pakistan has experienced harsh weather in recent decades, which has significantly affected food production and availability. Extreme weathers also result in unusual floods which cause serious damage to food production. The floods in 2010 and 2022 serve as a stark example of the damage that such natural disasters can inflict upon agricultural systems, highlighting the vulnerability of farming communities to climatic fluctuations. According to FAO, this flood was classified as a slow-motion tsunami affecting one fifth of Pakistan's territory, including a large portion of its most fertile land (Dorosh et al., 2010). The scale of devastation caused by the 2010 floods was monumental. More than 20 million people were directly impacted, with approximately 1.6 million homes damaged beyond use (Dorosh et al., 2010). The overall economic impact was estimated at USD 5.1 billion, reflecting the extensive damage to both infrastructure and agricultural resources. A staggering 2.4 million hectares of unharvested crops were lost (Dorosh et al., 2010), dramatically reducing food availability in a country already struggling with food security. On the other hand, floods in 2022 caused damages of approximately USD 40 billion (Finance Division, 2023). Among those most adversely affected by the floods were unskilled workers and smallholder tenant farmers. These groups, already living on the margins, faced dire consequences due to the loss of livelihoods and exacerbated poverty levels. With limited resources and access to recovery mechanisms, affected communities were left particularly vulnerable in the aftermath of the disaster, unable to reclaim their agricultural productivity or rebuild their lives without external assistance. In addition to disrupting the immediate food supply, the extensive damage of crops and fields presented long-term difficulties for agricultural output. Inadequate infrastructure and the need to reconstruct damaged assets, which frequently took years to restore, hindered recovery efforts. Significant soil degradation and changes to the hydrology of agricultural land caused by the floods created further challenges for farmers hoping to return to farming. In conclusion, the floods in 2010 and 2022 exemplify the devastating impacts of extreme weather events on agricultural production and food security of federation of Pakistan. The historical context of these floods reflects the urgent need for comprehensive climate adaptation strategies that include disaster preparedness, investment in resilient agricultural practices, and support systems for the most vulnerable population segments. Moving forward, addressing these issues will be critical to safeguarding Pakistan's agricultural future and ensuring the resilience of its food systems against impending climate challenges.

Instability and Conflicts

There are four significant dimensions of food security including availability, access, utilization, and stability (Kilelo et al., 2023). The disruption in any of these dimensions gives birth to instability which leads towards food insecurity. Pakistan has always been struggling with instability, and one of its manifestations is political instability. It creates disruption in agricultural productivity and food distribution

systems. On the other hand, food price hike also leads towards instability. Between 2005 and 2015, Pakistan witnessed a considerable number of significant incidents (large-scale food protests, rallies, or riots) connected to complaints about the cost and accessibility of food. Rising food prices affect different groups or sections of Pakistani society in different ways economically and socially; therefore, it creates social unrest and spawns conflicts among different segments of the society. For instance, there was severe rioting in Bannu, Waziristan, primarily against the government, in response to the Taliban's military campaign that displaced residents, who complained about a shortage of food. Food insecurity is made worse by conflict through a number of ways. Because of farmer displacement, infrastructural devastation, and market instability as agricultural practices are disrupted in conflict zones. The continuous violence hinders farmers' ability to grow crops, which has a direct impact on the supply of food. Intentional destruction of food supply as a weapon of war is a common outcome of conflicts, particularly those fuelled by ethnic conflict or territorial disputes (Macrae & Zwi, 1992). In case of Pakistan, food security conditions were especially calamitous in number of regions. According to statistics from the Uppsala Conflict statistics Program, Pakistan is experiencing continuous low-intensity, and occasionally higher-intensity, armed conflict. As per UCDP, 40,022 people have died in Pakistan as a result of political violence since 1990. The breakdown includes 32,412 from state-based violence, 3,744 from non-state violence, and 3,866 from one-sided violence. It results in driving deprived young men into the ranks of armed groups due to frustration and as a means of finding sustenance which government may fail to provide to the people of the country. Although food riots and other episodes involving complaints about food price inflation are probably isolated incidents rather than indicative of possible mass unrest and instability, however these can be converted into mass movements and can contribute to sociopolitical instability at large if not dealt effectively.

Misgovernance

Effective governance is essential in creating conducive policies to ensure adequate food availability and accessibility for all segments of society. Governance plays a critical role in regulating agricultural practices, implementing reforms, and managing resources effectively (Khan et al., 2024). In federation of Pakistan, poor infrastructure and ineffective water management have led to low agricultural output (Mari, 2013). The government has tried a number of irrigation reforms to enhance water management, but obstacles still exist, such as opposition from current bureaucratic institutions and a lack of political will. If there is improved agricultural production in Pakistan but there is an issue of accessibility and affordability of food items which gives birth to food insecurity. On the other hand, according to FAO's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' report, although Pakistan is a significant wheat exporter, it is referred to as a "Low-income food-deficit country" (FAO, 2021). These examples demonstrate poor agricultural production management and stewardship, which is blatantly misgovernance and contributes to the nation's food insecurity.

Politicization and Securitization of Food in Federation of Pakistan

In the federation of Pakistan, food has frequently been used as a strategic tool within political agendas, significantly influencing both governance and public welfare. Political parties often leverage the issues of food availability and distribution to

acquire popular support. This is particularly evident during election cycles, where promises of food security and subsidies are made to attract voters. Food distribution may be used by the government to win over the public during emergencies like natural disasters or economic downturns. For instance, government resources are sometimes used deliberately to increase political influence during floods or other humanitarian emergencies, making food assistance allocations occasionally politicized. The distribution of aid is frequently heavily influenced by political patronage, which exacerbates already existing inequalities and unhappiness among the affected communities. The intersection of climate change and food security adds another layer to the politicization of food in Pakistan. Climate-induced challenges such as droughts, floods, and rising temperatures have significantly impacted agricultural productivity, leading to food shortages and higher prices. The government's failure to effectively manage these challenges often leads to public protests, escalating the political stakes around food security. In this context, the government's response to food crises becomes not only a matter of social welfare but also one of maintaining political legitimacy and stability. Moreover, the distribution and movement of staple food like wheat or rice from largely produced federating units to units with little or no production have also been politicized by the political parties for their own political gains and benefits and it aggravates the food insecurity in the federation of Pakistan.

Securitization of food is another challenge in the context of federation of Pakistan. Food security is framed as a national security concern in Pakistan, and the government emphasizes food supply as a way to preserve social order and stability. Food insecurity in Pakistan is frequently viewed through the lens of state security, particularly in light of domestic unrest and regional conflicts. It is because of the securitized mindset that appears to be ingrained in the military, bureaucracy, and subsequent governments that has led to an overemphasis on the conventionally defined national security and a neglect of the human security needs of people and communities, such as access to food and welfare in general. The example of Balochistan is evident in this regard., The food security in Balochistan, especially in the districts that produce gas, people have been struggling with food insecurity for a long time. This has made them feel even more left out, ignored and deprived. The residents of those areas are of the opinion that their resources are being taken, but they are grappling with basic food items. And this feeling of being marginalized is fuelling some of the militant movements in the area. It is not just about ideology; rather, it is about people not having enough to eat. There is also another issue that the focus is too much on national security and military power, and not enough on the welfare of the people and hunger is just seen as a humanitarian issue, not a real human security concern, which is actually threatening the national security.

Federation of Pakistan and Food Security

The federation offers its own governance structure for managing the affairs. The foremost important is intergovernmental relationships because of the different layers of government in the federation. It requires effective intergovernmental relationships horizontally (province to province) and vertically (federal to province) for smooth functioning and facilitating the people effectively. After the 18th Amendment, food and agriculture have been devolved to the provinces in the Federation of Pakistan. It is now the provincial government's responsibility to

manage and look after the needs of people in terms of food supply. Therefore, food security is basically a provincial matter in the Federation of Pakistan, as it requires smooth interprovincial coordination along with the effective role of the federal government for balancing the demand and supply of food to fulfill the needs of the masses. In Pakistan's federation, trading and supplying food items such as wheat and rice from provinces with high production to those with low production is a common practice that aids in balancing demand and supply and regulating food prices. However, when provincial governments impose trade restrictions on other provinces, it can lead to chaos and conflicts between the federating units. After the 18th Amendment, Article 151 of the Constitution of Pakistan (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2012) authorizes the provincial governments within the federation to impose restrictions or ban on food trade for any reason. This leads towards food inflation and shortages of food items, particularly wheat and rice, in other federating units. There are multiple incidents which manifest this type of situation between different federating units of Pakistan. A recent incident happened in October 2025, when Government of Punjab had imposed restrictions on the trade and supply of wheat to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa because of floods in the province (Farooq & Ayub, 2025). It had not only inflated the food prices but also created crisis in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as it is low producing region in terms of staple food like wheat and rice. Therefore, it depends on Punjab and Sindh for supplies of food items, as these regions are the primary producers of staple food items in the country. This crisis had also been politicized because of the affiliation of the governments of both federating units with opposing political parties. This politicization of the issue had intensified the situation and affected interprovincial relationships adversely. In addition, it also endangered the food security of the province and created grave situation for the people of the province. In this context, the role of the federal government through the Ministry of Food Security and Research (developed after the 18th amendment for monitoring and coordinating research activities) is crucial for alleviating the tension through mediation between different provincial governments for ensuring uninterrupted food supply across the federating units.

Another vital tool of governance in a federation is the local government system and its role with reference of food security has been enhanced manifold because it is the most effective tool to satisfy the food needs of the people at the grassroots level, but in the case of Pakistan, the misgovernance at the part of provincial governments and absence or ineffective local governments have worsened the food security condition of the Federation of Pakistan. Another aspect is the capacity and capability of provincial governments to ensure food security in their jurisdiction. In the time since the 18th amendment, the provincial governments have not developed themselves in terms of ability, capability and governance mechanisms over the period of time due to which food security is a matter of serious concern in recent times in the agrarian federation like Pakistan.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite being a water rich country with ample opportunities to increase variable food availability, Pakistani struggles with food security which is increasing with high population growth, unchecked and unplanned urbanization engulfing agricultural lands, high vulnerability to climate change and traditional methods of farming. The contested federation of Pakistan is highly reflected in the water distribution disagreements of the state along with the fact that post 18th amendment

food is the provincial subject. Climate change has remarkably affected the food cycles and crop production patterns. The conflicts and crises had led to considerable increase in global food prices affecting the developing countries like Pakistan deeply. Another dilemma of food availability in Pakistan is the sufficiency of food contents and availability of suitable diet in reasonable prices. As almost 40% of population lives below poverty line in Pakistan, the availability of healthy food is a burden though a large population is spending around 50% income on buying food. The first food policy also discussed the challenges but still lacks in meeting all those targets due to ineffective vertical as well as horizontal intergovernmental coordination and misgovernance in the federation of Pakistan. It is imperative to take a few steps to improve food availability in Pakistan. Politically, the structure of efficient governance and democracy remains unfulfilled without efficient local government which is nonexistent in Pakistan and especially in Punjab being largest federating unit of the country for last fifteen years. The local governance system provides strong community empowerment and pragmatic feedback for policy making. The unfriendly agricultural policies of provincial governments have taken much toll on agricultural sector also. The governments all over the world are overwhelmed with financial constraints which render them unable to engage at larger scale. The efficiency of food production requires the involvement of private sector also incorporating public-private partnership in food sector. Pakistan has the potential to produce sufficient food which can enable it to export also but the policy reforms and effective governance as per the needs of the federation are much needed for food security and sustainability in the country.

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