Occasional Paper Series

Section on International and Comparative Administration (SICA) of the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA)

Volume 4, Special Issue, Global Food Insecurity (August 2022)

Table of Contents

Front Matter
• Letter from the SICA Chair (pp. 2-3)
• Letter from the Guest Editor (p. 4)
• Letter from the Editor (pp. 5-6)

Research Idea
• Food Insecurity in Kenya’s Urban Areas during COVID-19, Felix O. Vescovi & Susan E. Baer, Ph.D. (pp. 7-14)
• Contextualizing the Leadership Role of RIZQ Foundation (Food Bank) in the COVID-19 Epoch: A Vaccine of Compassion for Local Food Insecure Communities of Pakistan, Amna Siddique & Yaamina Salman, Ph.D. (pp. 15-23)
• How will Africa, Specifically its Sahelian Countries, Address Food Insecurity during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Keba Sylla, Ph.D. (pp. 24-33)
• Comparative Analysis of Food Assistance Policy in Canada and the United States, Liam Monahan (pp. 34-44)

Practitioner Perspectives
• How Well Are We Feeding the Future? Data Limitations in Monitoring the Impact of the U.S. Global Food Security Initiative, Rianna Jansen, Heather Latta, Deidre Sutula, Teresa Heger, Suzanne Kaasa, Steven Putansu & Judith Williams (pp. 45-53)
• Development as a Tool to Support Food Insecurity Interventions at Institutions of Higher Learning, Michael R. Ringenbach (pp. 54-60)

Policy Brief
• Impact of COVID-19 on India’s Mid-Day Meal Program, Anbu Arumugam, Ph.D. (pp. 61-70)
• Food (In)security in South Asia: Comparative Study of India and Bangladesh, Purusharth Chawla (pp. 71-76)
Letter from the SICA Chair

Dear readers, I am excited to bring to you our second special issue of this year on ‘Global Food Insecurity.’ According to the United Nations World Food Program, 345 million people are currently faced with acute food insecurity across 82 nations across South Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America. The majority of the populations threatened by lack of food are women and children.

Malnourishment and lack of food are among the greatest challenges faced by a large proportion of the world population. Thus, the UN declared zero hunger as the second Sustainable Development goal by 2030. While this goal is ambitious, the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine, climate change, growing inequality, and poverty have further exacerbated the problem of food insecurity globally. Given the nature of this complex issue, our special issue brings perspectives from various parts of the world, including Africa, South Asia, and the US. You will access eight papers, of which 4 are research ideas, two practitioner perspectives, and two policy briefs.

The first paper in this series examines the impact of food insecurity in Kenya’s urban areas during the pandemic. The authors, Vescovi and Baer analyze factors that lead to food insecurity and discuss various policies implemented to alleviate the challenge of food insecurity in the urban region of Kenya. While this study is focused on Kenya, several countries around the globe can draw parallels to similar challenges and implications of food insecurity. In another study in the region, the author, Dr. Keba Sylla, argues that the problem with food insecurity in the Sahelian region that separates the Sahara Desert to the north and the savannas to the south stem from rainfall deficits since the early 1970s. Investing in proper land management practices, modernizing agriculture, and promoting economic and political stability in the region are a few solutions offered by the author to combat the problem of food insecurity in the region.

Three papers in this issue focus on South Asia to counter the challenge of food insecurity. The study in Pakistan by Siddique and Salman utilizes a case study approach to examine a food bank, RIZQ foundation. The authors provide the readers with a framework embedded in collaborative governance to address food insecurity in the region. The remaining two papers are policy briefs, one focused on the impact of COVID on the mid-day meal program in India authored by Dr. Arumugam, and the other compares India’s food distribution and food security schemes Bangladesh during the pandemic. Strengthening the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India and consistently monitoring the Food Friendly Program in Bangladesh are strategies highlighted by both Arumugam and Chawla.

One does not associate food insecurity with the developed world, however, as demonstrated by Monahan in his research paper, food access is a problem in the US and Canada. The challenge is significant in higher education.
institutions in the US as demonstrated by Ringenbach. According to estimates, one-third of college-going students out of the 20 million are food insecure. This global challenge needs a multi-prong approach including performance monitoring and reporting of the Feed the Future initiative by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) highlighted by Jansen et al. of the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Authors offer a combination of policy interventions and solutions in this series to combat one of the most serious concerns of modern times, food insecurity. My hope is that all the papers in this series will help broaden our perspectives and understandings of this wicked problem. Let us all join in this fight to address one of the basic needs of human existence, access to food.

--Meghna Sabharwal, Ph.D., SICA Chair and Professor, The University of Texas at Dallas
Letter from the Guest Editor

This issue of the Occasional Paper Series, like the previous issues, is the result of effective collaboration and cooperation between and among hard-working SICA colleagues dedicated to the continued advancement of our mission. From developing the concept through calling for proposals to requesting peer reviews, it has been both a pleasure and joy to work with all our collaborators to pull this off during the terribly busy Spring and Summer semesters as we transitioned to “normalcy” from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On my part, it was indeed a privilege to serve as Guest Editor and to work closely with the SICA Chair, OPS Editor, and contributing authors with exceptional talent and dedication. They made my role easier and enjoyable, and I would like to thank everyone for exhibiting such great collegiality and professionalism in putting this eye-opening issue of food insecurity together.

As the SICA Chair, Dr. Meghna Sabharwal concisely lays it out, we could not have found a more appropriate theme than “Global Food Insecurity” within a period of pandemic and climate change challenges. In putting it squarely within the context of the UN’s World Food Program, Dr. Sabharwal pinpoints the magnitude of the problem, one that deserves greater global attention than has been the case.

In line with this globalism, and as the coverage indicates, contributors address the theme expertly from a global perspective, drawing both from the Global South regions (Africa, Latin America, and South Asia that have been hit the hardest) and from the Global North (US and Canada). Perhaps, this is one realistic way to approach administration and management in the emerging post-Covid-19 world.

The contributors have done an excellent job in providing stimulating discussions and analyses that will motivate further research into this existential threat. They blend unique regional experiences with empirical thought to offer geo-strategic solutions that the broader SICA community will find rewarding to read. On their part, they will find satisfaction in the opportunity to tell their part of the story of the urgent issue of our time: food insecurity. As guest editor, I have had the honor of assisting them in accomplishing that goal, and I will be happy to do so again if the opportunity arises.

-- Peter Haruna, Ph.D. Guest Editor and Professor, Texas A&M International University, Laredo Texas.
Letter from the Editor

It is my distinct pleasure to share the special issue of our Paper Series on Global Food Insecurity. This issue aims to examine how governments, international and regional organizations, and nonprofit, public, and for-profit organizations are approaching the unfolding global food crisis. The call was issued last year and framed in the context of the UN’s Sustainable Goal 2, aimed at ending hunger, achieving food security, and promoting sustainable agriculture, and in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the food crisis has been made worse by the growing number of food trade restrictions put in place by countries intended to increase domestic supply and reduce prices, supply-chain disruptions, and the continued economic consequences of COVID-19. Record food prices have exacerbated a food crisis that will drive millions more into extreme poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. These measures significantly impact people in low- and middle-income countries, with lasting implications on youth cognitive development.

The special issue introduces eight manuscripts in the form of research ideas, policy briefs, and practitioner perspectives, produced by a diverse range of authors, and covering food security issues in Kenya, Sahelian countries in Africa, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the United States, and Canada. While each regional context influences the magnitude of the problem and the types of policy solutions offered so far, there is significant value in comparing similar and diverse cases across all levels of government. All papers contribute to the comparative scholarship by employing proper methodologies that enhance one’s understanding and awareness of various systems, cultures, and patterns of action, casting fresh light on policy and administration arrangements and enabling us to contrast them critically with those prevalent in other countries. This comparative research also tests various theories across diverse settings. It helps evaluate the scope and significance of food security, contributing to generalization while challenging claims of ethnocentrism or naïve universalism. Last but not least, the manuscripts provide access to a wide range of alternative options and problem solutions that can facilitate or reveal a way out of food insecurity in other contexts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the authors for their consideration of the Paper Series, their expertise, and their patience in waiting for this issue to the published. Thank you to our peer reviewers, who have done a stellar job in consulting the submitted manuscripts, to Prof. Meghna Sabharwal, SICA Chair, for her phenomenal engagement and support, to the OPS Committee, and to Prof. Peter Haruna, Guest Editor, for initiating this process and guiding our work while helping identify additional reviewers and providing this own insight on the topic.

The Paper Series invites submissions under the following formats: Policy Briefs, Research Ideas, Reflections, Practitioner Perspectives, and Case Studies.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

-- Cristina M. Stănică, Ph.D., Assistant Teaching Professor, Northeastern University; Editor-in-Chief, Occasional Papers Series

Note:

The Section on International and Comparative Administration of the American Society for Public Administration is concerned with promoting research and communication of public administration with an international and comparative focus. The Occasional Paper Series was created to contribute to the public interest by disseminating the intellectual and professional work of the section’s members and opening it up (both through online and open access) to the global community of actors interested in comparative public administration and governance. The papers in the series are available for download free of charge. They can be used and referenced as any other academic reference, with offering proper credit and acknowledgment. However, we have no explicit copyright policy.

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Research Idea

Food Insecurity in Kenya’s Urban Areas during COVID-19

Felix O. Vescovi¹
Susan E. Baer, Ph.D.²

Abstract: Studies report damaging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on global food insecurity. This paper adds to the literature by examining the pandemic’s effect on food insecurity specifically in Kenya’s urban areas. Using secondary data, the paper first analyzes major factors that have contributed to increased food insecurity in Kenya’s urban areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper next discusses public policies that have been implemented to alleviate food insecurity in Kenya during the pandemic. The paper concludes by describing additional policies needed to alleviate food insecurity in Kenya’s urban areas.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that has engulfed the world since early 2020 has increased global

footnote ¹ Doctoral Candidate, School of Public Policy and Administration, Walden University, felix.vescovi@waldenu.edu

footnote ² Contributing Faculty Member, School of Public Policy and Administration, Walden University, susan.baer@mail.waldenu.edu
residents in Kenya’s urban areas skipped at least one meal in late March 2021. The situation worsened in early April 2021, rising to 39%. Food security during the pandemic also varied within Kenya’s urban areas, with people living in urban informal settlements experiencing the greatest levels of food insecurity (HRW, 2021). Approximately 43% of residents surveyed in 12 informal settlements in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu experienced high levels of food insecurity from August to September 2020 (IPC, 2020).

Factors Contributing to Increased Food Insecurity in Kenya’s Urban Areas during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The first case of COVID-19 within East sub-Saharan Africa was reported in Kenya in early 2020 (Aluga, 2020), and Kenya experienced a higher number of COVID-19 cases compared to other East African countries (UN-Habitat & WFP, 2020). Following World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, the Kenyan government enacted various restrictions such as lockdowns, dawn to dusk curfews, closure of produce markets and businesses, and travel restrictions to contain the spread of the pandemic within its boundaries (Kansiime et al., 2021; Steverding & Margini, 2020). However, the devastating impact of COVID-19 and some of the measures taken by the Kenyan government to reduce its transmission among the public proved highly disruptive to agri-food supply and delivery chains (Kusmer, 2020) and led to increased unemployment (Pinchoff et al., 2021).

Food Supply Disruptions

Restrictions enacted by the Kenyan government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic led to secondary effects such as the obstruction of all stages of the food supply chain, including production, distribution, processing, and consumption (Siche, 2020; Torero, 2020). For example, travel restrictions such as COVID-19 testing regimes at national and international borders caused transport bottlenecks (Steverding & Margini, 2020). These bottlenecks impeded traders’ and transporters’ access to farms and markets or caused delays in delivering agri-food commodities to urban areas (Kinyanjui et al., 2021; Siche, 2020; GAIN, 2021). The sharp decline in food supply led to increased food prices across Kenyan cities (Siche, 2020; Torero, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Pinchoff et al., 2021). As a GAIN (2021) survey showed, 8% of businesses stopped food production, 63% decreased their food production capacity considerably, and 26% of businesses decreased food production volume somewhat or slightly. In the same survey, results also revealed that 100% of food vendors reported decreased sales under COVID, and 60.4% of consumers observed changes in food availability, resulting in about 79% of households in Kenya’s urban areas experiencing increases in food prices during the pandemic (Kinyanjui et al., 2021).

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2021), since the pandemic’s start, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Kenya’s urban areas has gradually increased from 107.46 points in March 2020 to 116.077 points in September 2021. See Table 1. Shupler et al. (2020) also found that 88% of Kenya’s urban...
residents could not afford to buy food for basic household consumption during the pandemic.

**Table 1: Kenya’s Consumer Price Index (CPI)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2021)*

**Loss of Employment**

The food system is key to Kenya’s economic development, and it is heavily dominated by informal markets and small, independent transporters that link producers with consumers (Bailey & Turner, 2002). According to GAIN (2021), the food system contributed about 32.4% to Kenya’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 and accounts for about 65% of national export earnings. The closure of many of these markets and travel restrictions in urban and peri-urban areas during the COVID-19 pandemic caused high rates of unemployment, which particularly impacted people living in Kenya’s urban informal settlements (HRW, 2021) and working mainly in the informal sector (Shupler et al., 2020; Steverding & Margini, 2020). In addition, studies indicate a gender dimension because women living in Kenya’s urban informal settlements experienced a disproportionate degree of both pandemic-related unemployment and food insecurity (HRW, 2021; Pinchoff et al., 2021).

Characteristics of Kenya’s urban informal settlements before the COVID-19 pandemic included high rates of poverty and unemployment, high population density, and a lack of basic public services such as running water (HRW, 2021), and the pandemic and related governmental restrictions have worsened conditions. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2020) and TIFA Research (2020), 43% of residents in Kenya’s urban informal settlements lost their source of income during the pandemic and 69% reported reduced earnings because of the pandemic. Due to a sharp decline in income during the pandemic, the World Bank (2020) defined about 1.7 million people living in urban informal settlements in Kenya as food insecure. As an example, Pinchoff et al. (2021) found that people living in Nairobi’s informal settlements and reporting a complete loss of income during the pandemic were 15% more likely to skip meals.

**Public Policies Implemented to Alleviate Food Insecurity in Kenya during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

After introducing COVID-19 containment measures that adversely altered food mobility and public consumption patterns, the government of Kenya simultaneously enacted measures to mitigate the risk of the collapse of food systems and to ensure the availability and affordability of food. In an effort to achieve this goal, Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, and Cooperatives...
(MoALFC) formed a Food Security War Room (FSWR) that took over the monitoring of food prices and other food security metrics to support the country’s most vulnerable populations. The FSWR’s key interventions included maintaining the flow of produce from farms to markets and access to food by consumers, managing price increases, and supporting continuous extension services to farmers (“Real-time Ag Data for COVID-19 Response in Kenya,” 2020).

In response to the pandemic, the Kenyan government also implemented a national cash assistance program initially aimed at reaching 669,000 households but ultimately reached half (HRW, 2021; Jerving, 2021). The Human Rights Watch (HRW) report described flaws in the rollout of the program, including the identification of program beneficiaries by the Kenyan government, a difficulty attributed to the government having no centralized database. Many potential beneficiaries did not receive information from the government about registering for the program, and very few people who were supposed to receive the cash transfer ever received any money. Instead, family, friends, and supporters of government officials reportedly found it easier to enroll in the program and receive cash assistance (Igoe, 2021; HRW, 2021).

Additional Policies Needed to Alleviate Food Insecurity in Kenya’s Urban Areas

Although multiple policies are needed to alleviate food insecurity in Kenya’s urban areas, the need to improve road networks throughout the country deserves emphasis. The supply chain for Kenya’s urban food system depends on distant food production locations, creating challenges for the country’s transportation infrastructure (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2019). Due to the poor condition of Kenya’s road networks and the distance between food sources and cities, transport serves as the highest cost to urban food retailers other than stock. The resulting increased cost to transport food to Kenya’s cities leads to higher food prices in cities which in turn limits access to food by urban residents, particularly low-income urban residents, and worsens food insecurity in Kenya’s cities (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2019).

Improved road networks and innovations in food distribution including improvements in refrigerated transport will not only allow farmers to ship perishable food over greater distances (Rees, 2013) but also help lower the cost of supplying food to cities and could therefore reduce food prices in cities which may help to alleviate urban food insecurity. As evidenced in the literature, innovations in food production and distribution, including improved road networks and new technology for storing and moving produce, have provided the bulk of the world’s food over the 20th century. For example, many authors, including Rees (2013) and Smil (2004) have argued that innovations in food production and distribution have helped U.S. farmers to ship perishable food over greater distances, thus, making the country a major exporter of world food, especially during times of scarcity and pandemic (Fornari, 1976).

In addition, urban planning currently gives little attention to the urban food system and urban food security issues in Kenya even though city and county actors help to shape
these systems (Hayombe et al., 2019). Greater formal involvement of local actors in urban food security issues should be encouraged. One way that local actors may positively influence urban food security is by promoting urban agriculture. Urban agriculture serves as an adaptive response by urban households to improve their food situation and diversify their livelihood options under persistent economic uncertainty and declining purchasing power (Mougeot, 2000; Foeken & Owuor, 2000; Foeken & Mwangi, 2000).

While rarely enforced, colonial-era by-laws prohibiting urban agriculture in Kenya are still in place today (Hayombe et al., 2019). To authentically promote urban agriculture, Kenyan authorities must first recognize it as an acceptable activity, not only in words but also in law and policy. Because developing land proves more profitable than using it for food production (Hayombe et al., 2019), attempting to increase urban agriculture in Kenya’s cities will likely have a minimal effect on overall urban food security. Nevertheless, the additional use of urban agriculture by some percentage of Kenya’s urban residents may enable them to grow a small portion of their food to supplement the food they purchase.

**Conclusion**

Global food insecurity has received increased attention since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper aimed to examine the pandemic’s effect on food insecurity in Kenya’s urban areas using secondary data. The paper described how food supply disruptions and loss of employment and income during the pandemic served as two main factors contributing to increased food insecurity in Kenya’s urban areas. The paper also described the FSWR program and the national cash assistance program that the government of Kenya implemented during the pandemic to address food insecurity. In addition, the paper discussed the need for improved road networks throughout Kenya to lower the cost of supplying food to cities which could reduce food prices and may help to alleviate urban food insecurity. The paper also recommended that local actors such as planning officials take a greater role in addressing food insecurity in Kenya’s cities.

**References**


Research Idea

Contextualizing the Leadership Role of RIZQ Foundation (Food Bank) in the COVID-19 Epoch: A Vaccine of Compassion for Local Food Insecure Communities of Pakistan

Amna Siddique³
Yaamina Salman, Ph.D.⁴

Abstract: In the South Asian region, liberal democracies have observed the latest shift towards a networked form of governance as an inclusive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the post-colonial doctrine, South Asian region, particularly Pakistan, faces multifaceted policy problems, and “food insecurity” is one of them. In this study, we critically analyzed the leadership role of a food bank in this uncertain time of COVID-19. We inferred that the RIZQ foundation has a unique structural framework based on “collaborative governance.” This foundation is working on the philosophy of social change, food philanthropy, and community development. Particularly, in COVID-19, the RIZQ foundation worked 24/7 by launching its digital campaigns through social media platforms. Holistically, there is a way forward to make a mutual, integrated, and collaborative coalition to deal with this humanitarian crisis by engaging the public policy actors- public servants, politicians, civil society, the private sector, and most importantly, the ‘public.’

Introduction

In this era of global digital governance, we are moving towards new paradigms and institutional developments. In the COVID-19 crisis, the imperative of change management coupled with Neo-institutionalism demands holistic approaches, robust leadership techniques, and pragmatic, innovative solutions (Christopher Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2020). In VUCA-volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous working environments, the public sector and third sector have delivered their services to infinity. While COVID-19 exacerbates vulnerabilities worldwide, unsung heroes at all levels of society help the tide turn toward a brighter future. Unfortunately, in post-colonialism, there are multi-faceted public challenges in the South Asian region and specifically in Pakistan. In adverse circumstances of epidemic, we are battling the menace of food insecurity. This important policy problem has been addressed in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan by introducing the

³ Master of Public Administration from Institute of Administrative Sciences, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan, amnasiddique66@gmail.com
⁴ Director of Institute of Administrative Sciences, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan, yaamina.ias@pu.edu.pk
participation of multiple stakeholders with a contextual focus on the third sector. The management and sustenance of food banks, social entrepreneurial ventures, and locally based philanthropic public projects advocating public awareness are crucial steps taken by South Asian liberal democracies. Comparatively, there is a need to address the issue of ‘food insecurity at federal, state and local levels of governance to cater to its future repercussions on social, political and economic dimensions.

Innovatively, a unique food bank - RIZQ foundation, brings forth an innovative approach to the world as they have been working on the national mission of hunger-free Pakistan since 2015. This philanthropic food venture has a unique social change model which works only in public collaborations and voluntary assistance. In the harsh situations of an epidemic, they worked tirelessly to reach the food insecure communities with the help of digital spaces. Thus, the thumping success of their digital campaigns is a practical example of collaborative leadership guided by collective consciousness and these relief efforts are turned out to be a vaccine of compassion for the public.

In a nutshell, this article has contextualized the collaborative leadership role of RIZQ foundation (food bank) and critically analyzed the general operations during a pandemic; also, this paper addressed the different manifestations of food insecurity, community leadership, social change, collaborative governance and sustainable development; moreover, it also explained the synergetic effect of multiple policy stakeholders which were the key enablers in the management of the humanitarian crisis of COVID-19; and suggesting a constructive way forward to solve the conundrum of reforms in the post-pandemic world for public leaders in South Asia, along with a comprehensive conclusion.

**Literature Review**

Both from an empirical and conceptual standpoint, in this study we reviewed diverse sources to get an overarching idea of food insecurity, food banks and their implications in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the inception of globalization and capitalism, emerging economies have been experiencing chronic food insecurity (Randall, 2021). To address this major policy problem, liberal democracies are taking measures because it is not limited to one nation; globally, every country faces it in different proportions and intensities. For this purpose, in 2015 world united to build a consensus on this global mutual challenge in the form of SDGs-sustainable development goals (Martins, Ferreira, & Braga, 2021). Goal 2 emphasized alleviating food insecurity to mitigate its drastic long-lasting effects on the socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Many scholars maintained that when public assistance fails to satisfy the public's basic needs, the third sector bumps in to support them. Similarly, in the context of food insecurity the local community showed civic responsiveness and sensitivity towards this human issue by introducing food banks, soup vans and community kitchens.
According to the findings of Van der Wal (2020), collaborative governance has assisted public managers in responding more effectively and efficiently in the VUCA- volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous working environments at a global level (Bianchi, Nasi, & Rivenbark, 2021). It is still in the explorative stage of which countries have adopted the best strategies to mitigate the pandemic, but literature is updating all the important facts for post-pandemic reforms. In the South Asian region, one of the key competencies of public leaders observed in COVID-19 is empowering and leveraging collaborative networks. Engaging all policy stakeholders in the pandemic was a huge challenge for public sector, but due to public cooperation and civic responsiveness, governments minimized the ramifications of the crisis.

If we mainly talk about Pakistan, the volatile and chaotic environment has damaged the policy frameworks, questioned the government performance, and faced the credibility crisis due to weak institutional capacities in crisis management. Additionally, nations' socio-economic and political developments are converging into global governance. The liberalization of democracies, inclusive trading, integrated advocacy networks, diplomatic political fronts, diverse public mechanisms, freedom of speech and expression, digitalization and open international relationships are paving a path to sustainable development (Bak, Cheba, & Lacka, 2020; Kinsey, & Rundle, 2020). Sustainable development negates isolationism. It promotes global governance and integrates donor countries with aid recipient countries. The global issues including wildfires, climate change, smog in South Asia, water depletion and inter alia, are mutual policy challenges and with special reference to the global pandemic the collective response of regions was truly a colossal victory against this human catastrophe (Huang, 2020). So, there is a profound connection between local community problems and contemporary global challenges; they are heterogenous but interrelated and have integrated patterns.

**Conceptual Framework**

In this case study, through empirical understanding, theoretical perspective, and academic support, the chief theory underpinning the significant findings is the 'social change model'; profoundly explained by Komives and Wagner (2016).

**Figure 1: Illustrating the Conceptual Framework of the Case Study**

**Methodology**

In this discourse, the research methodology used was explorative and descriptive having epistemology of interpretivism and ontology of
constructivism. In accordance with the main research question, the case study method was preferred because in-depth investigation and analysis of the phenomenon can only be done by it. The food bank taken for extensive case analysis in this research was the “RIZQ foundation.” The data was collected by using the following protocols:

i. Semi-structured online interviews for 60 minutes,

ii. Participant observation technique-researcher volunteered in a digital campaign of RIZQ foundation named EHSAAASKARO (BE EMPATHETIC) in March 2020,

iii. Online media tool kits, reports, official documents, and social campaigns’ data on digital spaces like Facebook, Instagram, and official website of a food bank.

The qualitative inquiry adopted the purposive sampling technique due to the specific orientation and perspective of the discourse. The unit of analysis (sample) comprised of management of food bank – owners, volunteers of RIZQ foundation, and community – post-graduate students. Additionally, the data was analyzed through thematic analysis. For reliable and valid results, this method is very effective in handling the data, which is mainly collected from multiple resources (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 1993).

Findings

1. Battling COVID-19 in Pakistan – A Pragmatic Response of RIZQ Foundation

RIZQ foundation stepped forward to help the underprivileged and affected communities of Pakistan. In difficult times of COVID-19, on 18th March 2020, they initiated the campaign named “EHSAAASKARO” (be empathetic). It was the first youth mobilizing movement focused on alleviating the repercussions of COVID-19 on the downtrodden parts of the community. With the help of collective community efforts, they have managed to reach, feed, and sustain the 15,000 affected families for two months during the first wave of the coronavirus.

Table 1: Snapshot of EhsaasKaro Campaign during the First Wave of COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution during 1st wave of COVID-19</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This movement becomes successful just because of the equal efforts of the stakeholders: corporations, local government, donors, logistic partners, institutional RIZQ chapters in different universities, and digital media. Thus, this was a collaborative, shared, pragmatic approach to crisis management.

2. Sustaining ‘Collaborative Governance’ by Robust Technology-Powered Communication Strategies during the Pandemic

Online activism has stimulated available digital spaces to reach out to affected communities. The embedded network of volunteers and RIZQ management utilized the technology-driven communication strategies to
make their inclusive efforts more effective and efficient in challenging times of COVID-19. In this study, the aspect of digitalization and its impact on community has been critically analyzed in this section.

• The official website (www.sharerizq.com) depicted a transparent approach to the food bank. To maintain the foundation’s credibility, the channels of communication between donors and aid recipients are visible and accessible.

• Creation of public awareness regarding the deadly virus on local TV channels and voiced the campaigns of RIZQ foundation.

• Facebook official page, this social media platform has a synergetic effect on boosting local campaigns and civic activism. They highlighted the issue on a larger scale by giving live sessions and updating the community about their response to the coronavirus.

• Similarly, Instagram has also assisted to channelize the general operations and diversifying their fund-raising activities.

• The application of WhatsApp – formal WhatsApp groups were managed to communicate and monitor the activities of volunteers.

• Also, the print media has equally participated in generating authentic ‘public information’ through pamphlets and food bank media kits.

Thus, it is inferred from the data that in COVID-19 health emergency, the food bank has galvanized the community to respond to the viral disease most logically and rationally through online activism and volunteerism. In a nutshell, they had managed the virus stress and tried to utilize the available, accessible, and attainable digital resources by leveraging technology for network governance in a critical pandemic state.

3. Vaccine of Compassion Encapsulated by Innovation, Civic Responsiveness, and Social Cohesion

In this disaster, community leadership stood firm to fight back. They supported the philosophy of civic responsiveness and social cohesion. The public was cooperating in lockdowns and had followed the government's guidelines. There were conflicts, different public opinions, and diverse suggestions to deal with this disaster. Still, all the stakeholders responded very wisely by sticking conclusively to only one mutual “common purpose”: to alleviate the future repercussions of COVID-19.

Holistically, the public leaders had tried to make robust policies to block the invisible enemy, it included safety measures, emergency preparedness, social distancing, wearing of masks, public awareness, initiation of a process of vaccination, availability of hospitals, especially the wards for COVID-19 patients, travel restrictions, and among other things; these public innovative solutions and strategic planning paved a path of immunity from this dangerous disease. So far, these colossal efforts have resulted in a low number of infections and deaths in Pakistan, particularly the
leadership role of the third sector in this regard, which has been hailed as an emerging new model of social change coupled with collaborative governance.


In this study, we explored a unique model based on NPG – New public governance stakeholder approach. Strategically, they engaged the corporations, local government, civil society, public, partners, and donors to contribute to this noble cause. RIZQ had also initiated its different chapters to mobilize the youth in a proper direction in different universities in Pakistan. So far, they have conducted 100+ seminars and lectures to create public sensitivity toward COVID-19, food insecurity, and food wastage. They are making a sustainable and secure food network through strategic corporate partnerships through bottom-up policy making. They made an inclusive social value chain to channelize the structure of collaborative governance. The 3 C’s - collaboration, compassion and cohesion- are their operations' legitimate supporters.

Figure 2: Explaining the Inclusive and Sustainable Coalition among Public Policy Stakeholders

5. Global Civil Society and Conundrum of Reforms in Post-Pandemic Epoch

As a collective response to COVID-19 world catastrophe, the global civil society has advocated the global mission to reduce the grim consequences of the virus. The imperative of transnationalism and the domestic policy arena in the global pandemic illustrates the notion of the international developmental projects mainly introduced by welfare liberal nations. For instance, the role of the World Health Organization-WHO in the mitigation of SARS-CoV-2. The practicality of this dimension pillared on the fusion of the global policies into the domestic programs through sustaining the transnational relations in the region. These facts are quite evident in the fight against deadly COVID-19. The cross-culture coordination and constructive participation of these institutions had an influential impact on its alleviation. Incorporating international health policies into local public programs and their inclusion into state policies was the collective and united response to the novel virus. This dimension has a trickle-down effect on multilateralism and regionalization.
Similarly, the engagement of partners and regional institutions in the COVID-19 epoch particularly in South Asia, SAARC- the South Asian association for regional cooperation has a potential role in involving the region to take timely preventive measures and avoid the detrimental effects of COVID-19; similarly, SCO- Shanghai cooperation organization has also guided its member states including Pakistan and India. Both these organizations focus on utilizing digital spaces by conducting virtual meetings, conferences, and seminars to find different perspectives and approaches to dealing with COVID-19. They are governing their regions in a positive direction to equip their public leaders and human resource with desired leadership tool kit. The significant findings illustrated the adaptation of the collaborative approach of these organizations to control, prevent and reduce the spread of the infectious disease by promoting policies of social distancing, travel restrictions, testing of SARS-CoV-2, preparedness of vaccination, quarantine protocols, symptom screening, masks and many more.

Recommendations – A Way Forward

For the ease of public leaders in the post-pandemic world, this case study has discovered some practical suggestions:

1. Understand cultural acceptability and adopt a proactive approach to the COVID-19 crisis.

2. Tackle the issue and its granularity with cooperation & collaboration.

3. Connect action to the evidence of impact in policy making and engage local communities in online activism.

4. Recognize social value and develop resilience in crisis management.

5. Rejuvenate the spirit of ‘humanism’ in state institutions and integrate the public policy stakeholders.

Conclusion – Resolving the Issue

In this neo-liberalism doctrine of globalism, nations are striving for public welfare and sustainable development. Concerning post-pandemic reforms in South Asia, institutional change is not always easy. It requires continuous efforts, an inclusive workforce, and diverse, innovative solutions. Therefore, the essence of administering state affairs relies upon the continuation of public programs, the willingness of administrators, the negation of sweeping & simultaneous reforms, and the adoption of collaborative leadership by giving equal opportunity for participation to each public policy stakeholder. In this study, the comprehensive case analysis of the food bank-RIZQ foundation has succinctly articulated the collaborative response to deadly disease by reaching out to less privileged food insecure communities of Pakistan through self-organized online activism and volunteerism. Rationally, they proved that coronavirus is a test for humanity, and we should have to promote the narrative of ‘humanism’ in our social structures and public institutions because the true moral values of compassion, empathy, and solidarity are enough to fight
COVID-19 pandemic. In VUCA post-pandemic epoch, the guidance of collaborative governance is a ray of light for public leaders. If they work on the principles of self-accountability, public service motivation, philanthropic ideology, and social justice, then world societies will control the massacre of COVID-19 in the proceeding years.

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Research Idea

How Will Africa, Specifically its Sahelian Countries, Address Food Insecurity during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

Keba Sylla, Ph.D.5

Abstract: This paper examines the food insecurity in Africa with special attention given to the Sahelian region, where this situation was a concerning issue before the Covid-19 pandemic. This article argues that food insecurity in the Sahelian region of Africa has resulted from a seasonal rainfall deficit for many years. This rainfall deficit started in the 1970s after many countries in that region became independent from their colonial powers. The first long devastating drought occurred in 1973.

Conceptual Framework of Food Insecurity

This paper examines several conceptual frameworks to help understand food insecurity dynamics in general, particularly in the Sahel region of Africa. The framework or concept helps policymakers understand and address some measures to secure food for the population.

During the 1996 Summit of the United Nations for Food and Agriculture (FAO) in Rome, Italy, it was stated that food security exists when all people always have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life. There are three fundamental analytical points in that statement that ensure food security. The first point is food availability (sufficient); the second point is the accessibility to food (physical and economic access to food), and the third point is food utilization (food intake by person per day that meets dietary needs to ensure health). The absence of these basic characteristics of food security leads to food insecurity. Therefore, food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access over a long period, i.e., two (2) months or longer, to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life (FAO, 1996, 2012). These three elements of food security are not often met in the Sahel. Food unavailability has resulted from insufficient rainfall over several consecutive years. According to Sharon E. Nicholson (2018), across the Sahel region, rainfall has diminished from the northern to the southern part of the region. It measures from near zero millimeters of rain in Eastern Sahara to over 10,000mm yearly in the south. However, most of the Sahara receives less than 25mm per year. This reinforces drought and the decimation of livestock. However, Nicholson (2018) indicated that maize, wheat or sorghum,
beans, fonio, suna (local version of wheat), and other local agriculture products have all increased and met the increase in the Sahelian population during the past decades. Cecile Barbiere (2018) demonstrated that the Sahel does not have a chronic deficit of food production or availability, but the region has a seasonal deficit due to climate or a problem of accessibility to funds. Barbiere (2018) also indicated that farmers in the Sahel increased production by increasing the arable land zones today no one is dying in the Sahel from hunger, but malnutrition remains very problematic among children. The author continued to argue that these issues stem from the cost of food. In many cases, food is too expensive but also inaccessible due to wars, i.e., Bokou Haram and other terrorist activities in the region, or bad roads for the transport of agricultural products across the region.

In a similar vein, Margrethe Brigham (2011) posited that the food exports policy is why many Sahelian countries suffer from partial food insecurity. Her research further demonstrated that providing food exportation to alleviate hunger and poverty is not the solution to eradicate food insecurity anywhere. The author continued to outline that these issues stem from the cost of food. In many cases, food is too expensive but also inaccessible due to wars, i.e., Bokou Haram and other terrorist activities in the region, or bad roads for the transport of agricultural products across the region.

Mariana Chilton and Donald Rose (2009) presented the Human Rights Framework perspective. It is based on three principles: respect for the right to food, to fulfill the right to food, and to protect the right to food. These points stipulate that people have a right to "want," including food. Under this statement, these rights must be protected by all governments. These include the need to respect the right to food, so others do not interfere with one's ability to require food. The fulfillment of the right to food has two components that are required to facilitate or to create social and economic environments that foster human development. Finally, protecting the right to food is to ensure that others do not interfere with access to food. Sheri et al. (2015) analyzed this study's last framework or policy analysis. This point of view is based on the malnutrition aspect of food insecurity anywhere. The authors demonstrated that food insecurity has a direct connection with health through three (3) aspects that affect the well-being of people, particularly children. They include the nutritional, mental, and behavioral aspects. Furthermore, the authors indicated that these aspects lead to three levels of determinants: the community, the household, and the individual. The community level of the concept includes climatic features characterized by drought and flooding.

Meanwhile, the household level of this conceptual framework includes socioeconomic factors, including poverty and access to education. The last level of determinants of the conceptual framework is the social factor which provides for gender inequality, health-related stigma, and local food availability and
consumption of healthy food. This point of analysis is different from other frameworks because their analysis includes children and women who are often left out in a general study concerning poverty and economic issues in many regions across the world. These frameworks allow politicians and governments to ensure that basic human rights regarding food and availability are protected everywhere. They also help to understand the basics of food insecurity across the globe as well as in the Sahel. The next step of this analysis focuses on the Sahel region where food insecurity has become prevalent over several decades.

**The Sahel Region and Food Insecurity**

The Sahel region stretches from Senegal in the West to Chad to the east. It is located between the south of the Sahara Desert and the north of the tropical region in the south. This region comprises 15 countries (from Ca Verde in the West to Chad in the east), and some 44,000,000 people live there with constant food insecurity. Drought affects some parts of the following states Northern Togo, Benin, Northern Nigeria, Northern Central African Republic and Northern Cameroun. However, only nine countries (9) form a regional organization to combat drought in the region (CILSS). CILSS member states are Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cape Verde, Gambia, and Guinea Bissau. For the last decades, the Sahel region has faced more instability, stemming from armed conflicts, terrorist groups, drought, and other environmental changes. All affect and increase the possibility of food insecurity in that region (FAO, 2018). Despite the aridity of the region, the people in that part of Africa have always managed to handle food shortages. Furthermore, food shortage or insecurity is not always due to the lack of rainfall in that region, which is always lower compared to other African regions. Trudell et al. (2020) asserted that in 2018, 52.5% of Africa's population was moderately or severely food insecure. The paper indicated that the cause stems from many factors including climate change, conflict in the region, and general economic downturn. Furthermore, the authors linked food insecurity to mental health. The findings also indicated many women, mostly during pregnancy, and people living with HIV/AIDS were severely affected by mental stress and anxiety.

Furthermore, Maria Sassi (2015) analyzed the underlying causes of undernourishment, food availability, access to food and its utilization. She argued that the solution to food insecurity in the Sahel must come from local and subregional responses rather than from the international aid groups or a policy based on international development policies.

According to Catherine Raga et al. (2022), scientific analyses show that the wind and dry air from the Sahara impede the rainfall in that region; this phenomenon can reduce any chance for rain to come on time but also not in sufficient quantity to allow agriculture and the farmers to harvest in abundance. This meteorological aspect can lead to climate change. This may hinder food production with less available arable land to produce more local crops. However, this situation can be mitigated by investing in irrigation, introducing modern agricultural equipment, and training farmers to use these tools in
agriculture. In addition, the CILSS (Centre International de lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel, French translation), which is an interstate organization to control drought in the Sahel, indicates that drought destroyed agriculture and farm livelihoods from 1640-1680 in that region. Many European travelers reported food insecurity in their journals from the Sahel region during the same period. Consequently, before today's climatic debate, drought was known by the people in the Sahel, but they always managed it and continue to do so. Therefore, climate change is real but not necessarily an insurmountable pillar of food production in the region.

Boubacar Barry (1988) argued that the Sahel region was devastated by drought and food shortages during the 15th and 16th centuries. He further demonstrated that this situation stemmed from the slave razzias that destroyed agriculture and led to war and political instability in West Africa and the Sahel region. Consequently, food insecurity became the norm in the farmers' lives in that region during this troubled time in Africa.

Food Insecurity in Sahel During the 20th Century

In the 20th century, another great drought caused by a rainfall deficit over several years hit the Sahel. This drought started in 1968 and ended in 1973; even though the year 1973 was a wet year in the region. Climatic variations caused this great drought and the consequences were dramatic. The region lost many people, and the herds were greatly affected. An estimated 50,000 to 200,000 people died in eastern Burkina Faso during this great drought (UN report, 1980s). The causes of this great African drought are unknown; however, recent research indicates that drought could result from global and local climate patterns. Recent analysis of that drought explained that starting in 1968, a series of droughts hit the Sahel from the West to the east and ended in the 1980s. The consequences were tragic, with over 100,000 people dying due to food shortages and disease. This situation created a fear that the Sahel may become an endless desert. It also led to the mismanagement of natural resources and increased overgrazing. Some argued that overpopulation in the region had increased the deterioration of the environment there. This latest aspect still is not endorsed by local people.

By 1985, the wettest years arrived due to climate variation, not climate change in the region (Giannini, 2007). This climate variation played a significant role in droughts, according to Giannini. The author argued that recent studies showed that changes come from the global sea temperatures (SST) which play a big role in climate variations over the region of Sahel. However, Nicole Ball (1978) argued that the lack of economic autonomy constituted the major cause of the degradation of the region's ecosystem. Her study further demonstrated that specific policies, initiated under the colonial administration continued under independent governments in the region. These policies reduced the ability of West African farmers and herders to exploit their environment with an adequate safety margin. To combat the aftermath of this disaster,
international and local agencies began to be interested in the region's situation. These aid groups did not promote economic autonomy nor ecological stability for the countries in the region. Therefore, food shortages and ecological erosion continued to degrade food and alimentation dynamics in the Sahel for many years to come.

In addition, many authors indicated that food insecurity in the Sahel leads to many health issues that became prevalent in that region during the 20th century. These health issues include malnourishment and increased morbidity among children and pregnant women. For instance, Nalley et al. (2018) indicated that food insecurity or food shortage is a prevalent concern across Sub-Saharan Africa which is among the medium-income countries in the world. The researchers indicated the drought that hit the Southern African region in 2014 and 2015 affected some 22% of South Africa’s population, making them severely food insecure. The findings attribute the causes of this drought to many factors, including the currency instability across African nations. This situation exposed many countries to the risk in global wheat exchange markets.

Furthermore, the authors advised increasing funding for national agriculture research centers and food crop production by local and regional farmers. Banks, Bell, et al. (2021) outlined the importance of routine health care visits to understand the needs and behavior of individuals or families who screen positive for food insecurity. Furthermore, findings indicate that health care screenings may get information about the resources people need. The authors also asserted that this method of screening might not be available widely in developing countries, making it difficult for local healthcare workers to assist this vulnerable population in the Sahel region. Preventive measures are lacking in the region according to these findings. In a similar vein, Benzekri et al. (2021) looked at the importance of food insecurity on HIV outcomes in Senegal, West Africa. Although, Senegal has a low rate of HIV among its population, the findings of this study indicate that it is important to understand the impact of food insecurity on HIV. The finding also highlights the importance of nutritional status, socioeconomic, and self-stigmatization relative to food insecurity and HIV outcomes.

In a similar vein, Rahman et al. (2021) also linked food insecurity to mental health issues in many developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The findings outlined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and other vulnerable populations in rural areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many women faced food insecurity due to the general lockdown. In addition, they developed severe anxiety, stress, and other psychological traumas. Other authors indicated that food insecurity is not only a Sahelian issue; western countries also face prevalent food insecurity, mainly in big cities. In that perspective, Jesch et al. (2021) emphasized the public health aspect with respect to food insecurity in Western countries, in contrast to developing countries such as in the Sahel region. Furthermore, the authors posited that in developing countries, food insecurity is considered general economic poverty rather
than a public health threat to all populations. The findings also show that food insecurity is prevalent in the USA and England among college and university students. Olayemi, M. Olabiyi (2020) focused his research on the relationship between food insecurity and electoral participation in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings show that people living in food insecure areas tend to vote and participate massively in the electoral process more than those living in food secure areas. Furthermore, the author asserted that politicians use food or food insecurity as a tool to increase participation in the democratic process and a way to secure votes. Finally, other authors gathered newspaper coverage of food insecurity not only in the Sahel, but in Europe and in America, demonstrating that food insecurity is not just an African issue.

**Actions Taken by West African States to Combat Food Insecurity**

During colonialism, the French government tried to implement some measures to improve economic development in the Senegal River basin. They started constructing a dam to control river flooding and installing an electric power plant on the river for electricity production. None of these projects were fruitful. These economic ambitions were revived after their independence in the 1960s. Some of these projects stemmed from the organization of regional entities to better coordinate newly independent state policies regarding economic development and territorial management for food production, electricity, water, and soil management for their population around the Senegal River basin.

After the independence years, many states in the region started to implement national policies aimed at promoting economic development. Economic plans for the revitalization of rivers and valleys were initiated to coordinate their action for agricultural food production between the countries bordering the Senegal River. The first regional organization was of L’Organization des États Riverains du Fleuve Sénégal (OERS), created in 1968, regrouped four (4) states, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Sénégal. One objective of OERS was to regulate the Senegal River in order to avoid excessive flooding. Another objective was to create water reservoirs along the basin to control soil erosion, and the third was to improve food production via irrigation and control water-borne diseases around the river basin. Unfortunately, OERS was short-lived and few or none of these objectives were accomplished. With political differences between Sénégal and Guinea, L’OERS did not achieve several of its main objectives. Then it was disbanded in 1972.

It was replaced by another regional organization, OMVS (Organization pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal) with similar objectives, and without the Republic of Guinea (Bernus & Perrot, 1993). The new organization continued to work but generated more problems. The construction projects of two dams on the river did not yield great outcomes. The dams generated artificial flooding or redirected some of the river tributaries’ waters. Consequently, erosion, destruction of arable soil, and an increase in water-borne diseases led to fewer crop
productions (Timberlake, 1985). In addition, the creation of regional economic and monetary organizations (UMOA and CEDEAO or ECOWASS) did not integrate the region economically. Instead, they have increased their balkanization, negatively affecting agricultural products’ circulation in the markets of West Africa. In sum, the region has become vulnerable to food shortages, poverty, and other related ills that hinder food and alimentation securities in the Sahel. Moreover, these political organizations have simply made bad choices due to their inefficiency in delivering economic development, food security, and environmental stability in the Sahel.

**COVID-19 Pandemic and Food Insecurity**

The COVID-19 pandemic would be considered a devastating disease if it arrived in Africa, particularly in the Sahel. With its contagious effect and the lockdowns, the pandemic would hinder any economic activities, including the agriculture sector in that region. With cultural structures, Sahelian societies would not accept a social distancing policy to avoid the spread of COVID-19. However, this pandemic did not spread over Africa. In fact, the continent was less affected than predicted by the WHO (The World Health Organization) and by other news outlets in the West. Therefore, COVID-19 did not interrupt food production nor create hunger across the Sahel. The worst fear was not realized. In fact, according to the Senegalese Agriculture Minister, Moussa Baldé, it was the agriculture sector that saved our population during the COVID-19 pandemic (Interview from Afrique Media outlet, December 2021). The Senegalese official continued to emphasize the need for the region of West Africa to modernize their agriculture sector with modern equipment and use fertilizer to increase production. Furthermore, he stressed that Africa should not be lured into dietary changes. Most African people do not consume wheat and do not need wheat exportation. Therefore, African people, with cultural and culinary history must consume local agriculture products. The African continent has the potential for such production in huge quantities due to the immense availability of arable land. Food shortages can be eradicated in West Africa and across the continent when officials make serious decisions concerning food production. They should adopt public policy decisions based on local food and alimentation directives. These decisions must focus on traditional African consumption. Policies to fight hunger or food shortages must not be based on the importation of food or on changing the dietary traditions of the region and the continent.

In summary, the Sahel region did not experience food insecurity before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. The region’s food problem stems from a management issue concerning the transportation of products and their circulation among countries in the area. Food shortages in the Sahel also depend on the high price of food in the market and the instability of the weak regional currency in the international currency exchange rate. This leads to the instability of food prices and other important commodities. This situation is very detrimental to businesses in Africa in dealing with international partners. Increasing local
food production and helping farmers acquire modern agricultural equipment and fertilizer constitutes a tool that will propel West Africa’s agriculture to become the grain basket of production on the continent.

Conclusions

The Sahel did not have a food insecurity problem during the past decades. The region has experienced several years of rainfall deficits from the end of the 1960s to the mid-1980s. During that period, experts argued that the causes might be attributed to the irregularity in rainfall. Others described the bad policies adopted by regional leaders with respect to land management or the lack of modern agricultural equipment in the farmers’ disposition. Wars and political uncertainty in the region have generated a population movement from the farm and villages to the cities. This leads to an increase in instability with respect to food production and a threat to the safety of the people across the region. Regional cooperation and increased funding in agriculture are the best ways to meet the demands of an increased population in the near future.

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Appendix


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Research Idea

Comparative Analysis of Food Assistance Policy in Canada and the United States

Liam Monahan

Abstract: Food insecurity affects millions of people in Canada and the United States, despite those countries’ status as wealthy, developed countries. To help improve access to adequate food, Canada and the United States have implemented various food assistance policies and programs. This research addresses the questions: (1) how do the food assistance policies of Canada and the United States differ? and (2) why are these policies different? The article compares the structure of the food assistance programs, the national cultures, and economic conditions and social policy affecting food insecurity. The starkest contrast is that the United States offers food stamps and Canada does not. In general, the United States government offers more food assistance programs while in Canada, food assistance is largely provided by charitable organizations.

Introduction

Access to food is often taken for granted in developed countries, but many people in Canada and the United States cannot always access adequate food. Food insecurity is “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020). Millions of Canadians and Americans are food insecure. This may be surprising, considering that Canada and the United States are relatively large, prosperous countries. Food insecurity is closely associated with individual and national economic conditions, though there are other factors that affect food insecurity. To help those struggling, both countries have networks of charitable food assistance programs, but only the United States government has multiple programs to directly provide food assistance. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, people question if the current food assistance systems are sufficient. This analysis compares the food assistance systems of Canada and the United States—how they help get food to people who are struggling to get food on their own. It compares the current food assistance programs before examining the national cultures and economic conditions which can help understand the two countries’ food assistance policies. The most distinct difference in the food assistance policies is that the United States provides more direct assistance. Direct food assistance may not be needed or desired in systems with more economic social policy.

6 MPA, Northeastern University, monahan.l@northeastern.edu
Analytic Summary

This comparative policy analysis aims to answer the general research questions how policies differ across contexts, and why they are different (Gupta, 2012). This research will explain the nuances that distinguish Canadian and American food assistance policies from each other. This comparative analysis employs a most similar system design (MSSD) to isolate what are the most relevant variables affecting food assistance policy. In communicating the comparisons, the analysis uses a head-to-head approach.

The United States and Canada are two of the most similar countries globally, so comparing their policy outputs should elicit informative findings. The United States and Canada are large, neighboring countries in North America that share similar histories. The government models and political systems of the United States and Canada are similar in many ways, which is one key reason they are suitable for comparing their respective food assistance policies.

Defining Food Insecurity

Although food insecurity is undoubtedly a global problem, experts disagree on how exactly to define it. The United States Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020). The Canadian government has a similar definition: “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (Health Canada, 2020). Even though these definitions are similar, there is disagreement when it comes to measuring food insecurity because “adequate diet” is up to interpretation (Wilde, 2018).

There is an ongoing debate on how to conceptualize food insecurity. Most recently, American health experts have proposed “nutrition security” as a more useful term, because it emphasizes the nutritional quality of food, not just the quantity (Reinhardt, 2021; Rosenbloom, 2021).

Canada and the United States are wealthy, developed countries, yet millions of their residents are food insecure. Their gross domestic product values are among the highest in the world. According to the most recent data available, 8.8% (1.2 million) of households in Canada experienced food insecurity in 2017/2018 (Polsky & Gilmour, 2020). In the United States, 10.5% (13.7 million) of households were food insecure at some time in 2019 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020) (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Security, 2001-2019
The dominant discourse of food insecurity has focused on how best to provide poor, hungry people food. Increasingly, people are exploring the underlying causes of food insecurity and proposing solutions to treat the causes rather than the symptoms, per se. American society accepts a market-driven economic system that results in inequalities, while at the same time American political and social institutions try to promote and protect political rights and equality for citizens (Gordon, 1975 in Bosso, 2019). These conflicting motives may result in food insecurity.

Practitioners and academics debate the extent to which government is responsible for helping provide food to citizens. Many developed countries have recognized the right to adequate food by ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Canada ratified ICESCR in 1976. The United States has never ratified it (Pollard & Booth, 2019). The right to adequate food is also enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. The right to adequate food includes the right to be fed and “a right to feed oneself and to have access to food” (Raponi, 2016, p. 13). Some observers argue that the developed countries, including Canada and the United States, are not fulfilling this right.

Comparison Point 1: Structure of Food Assistance Programs

Food Stamps and Other Government Programs

The most striking difference between Canadian and American food assistance programs is that the United States government provides people with food stamps, money which can only be spent on groceries, and the Canadian government does not. In the United States, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is the federal government’s largest food assistance program (Wilde, 2018). The government spends about $65 billion on SNAP each year (Fernald & Gosliner, 2019). Spending increased to nearly $90 billion in 2020 (Bottemiller Evich, 2021). Food stamps were first provided in the 1930s to distribute surplus agricultural commodities while addressing hunger in the Great Depression era (Bosso, 2019). Congress revived the Food Stamp Program in 1964. The government is required to provide SNAP benefits to all eligible Americans because it is a mandatory entitlement program (Wilde, 2018).

In addition to SNAP, the United States federal government has other food assistance programs. The federal government allocates
money to subsidize school lunches through the National School Lunch Program. The Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program provides coupons to eligible families so they can obtain specific, nutritious commodities. Lastly, the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provides surplus commodities to food banks. These programs are administered by the Department of Agriculture (Bosso, 2019). These are the largest and most significant programs, but there are many other smaller means-tested programs including the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) in select low-income elementary schools, and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which provides meals to low-income children when school is not in session (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

In Canada, there is no food stamp program (Power et al., 2015). In fact, “there is no federal program to augment the supplies of food charities through commodity surplus redistribution; nor are there publicly funded, government-run food assistance programs” (Tarasuk et al., 2014, p. 1405). While there is not specific programming, some laws have indirectly supported the food bank system. Also, the Canadian government developed Food Policy for Canada, a roadmap for helping the country build “a healthier and more sustainable food system” (Beyranevand & Leib, 2021). This was intended to be a holistic strategy that crossed sectors. The United States does not have an equivalent policy.

**Food Banks**

Both Canada and the United States have networks of food banks and food pantries that provide food to people in need. In the United States, the national food bank network, Feeding America, estimates that its 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries fed more than 40 million people in 2020 (Feeding America, 2020). Food banks received donations from wholesalers, government through TEFAP, and individual donations. The importance of food banks in the United States became very evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more and more people turned to them for help. Food banks and food pantries struggled to meet the demand, which is why some scholars suggest the food system is broken (Beyranevand & Leib, 2021; Bublitz et al., 2021; Chan & Taylor, 2020). Food banks are a critical part of food assistance in the United States, but government programs also help specific populations.

Community food programs, the emergency food system, are the main response to food insecurity in Canada (PROOF, n.d.-a). Food banks and other community food programs rely on charitable donations from individuals and corporations. In 2020, there were “1.1 million visits” to 3,000 food banks and community agencies. Tarasuk et al. (2020) found that only a small proportion of food-insecure households use food banks; in the study, “21.1% of food-insecure households reported using food banks” (p. 14). While the government does not directly support food programs, it facilitates them by allocating infrastructure funding, grants for specific programs, and legislation to incentivize donations. For example, some provinces created tax credits for producers that donate...
surplus food to food banks (Tarasuk et al., 2020).

Comparison Point 2: National Culture

As neighbouring countries, Canada and the United States have similar cultures, but some attributes set them apart, which could affect how the public perceives how food assistance should be handled. Hofstede Insights provides the 6-D Model to compare national cultures of different states (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Hofstede Insights 6-D Model Comparison
(Hofstede Insights, n.d.)

American culture is defined by certain values, including egalitarianism, individualism, equality of opportunity, and political rights. In the 6-D Model, The United States received a low power distance score and one of the highest individualism scores—notably higher than that of Canada. The first dimension is power distance, defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Together, they suggest American society is loosely knit and Americans believe people should look after themselves and not rely on the government, while they believe in “equality and justice for all.” The United States ranks low in long-term orientation, meaning that society is practical, has strong opinions of “good” and “bad,” and values traditions and norms. This might explain why society prefers to have the government provide direct food assistance, because it is sceptical of how economic assistance would be spent.

The political culture and national culture of Canada are multidimensional. Canadians generally believe in majority rule and parliamentary democracy. While Canadians are dedicated voters, they are not active throughout the political process. Canadians also rely on government for services, rather than the private sector, though that does not mean they trust the government. In fact, some regions have a long-standing sense alienation from the federal government. This tension may make it difficult for legislators to agree on national food policy. Political culture is further complicated by the legacies of Canada’s founding cultural groups, the French and the British (Zussman, 2013). Canada received a low power distance score, indicating that Canadians value egalitarianism and interdependence among residents. Canadian society does not have strong status or class distinctions. Canada has a high individualism
score of 80, so it has an individualist culture in which people are meant to only look after themselves and their families. Canada received a low long-term orientation score, so it is a normative society. This means Canadians value long-term traditions and norms, care about the truth, and are suspicious of societal change (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Canadian society is less individualistic than the United States and embraces more socialist policies, such as public healthcare and extensive social safety nets.

Comparison Point 3: Economic Conditions and Social Policy

Food insecurity is linked to economic indicators, including poverty and unemployment. Food is the most basic good people need, and they need money to get it. As Figure 4 illustrates, there is an inverse relationship between food insecurity and income (normalized by the poverty line); as household income increases, the probability of food insecurity decreases, at least in the United States (Gundersen et al., 2011). The latest official poverty rate in in Canada is 10.1% (3.7 million people) and the latest official poverty rate in the United States is 10.5% (34.0 million people) (Semega et al., 2020; Statistics Canada, 2021). In 2019, the unemployment rate was 5.7% in Canada and 3.68% in the United States (World Bank, 2020; StatCan, 2021). In both countries, poverty and unemployment rates decreased between 2010 and 2019 before drastically increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the same time period, food insecurity decreased in the United States while food insecurity increased in Canada (Figures 1 and 2) (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020; PROOF, n.d.-b).

Food insecurity has been exacerbated by the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to surveys, approximately 20% of American households were food insecure and a third of households with children were food insecure. Food insecurity rates peaked around December 2020 and have since decreased but are still higher than pre-COVID-19 rates. In early May 2021, approximately 16.6% of households were food insecure (The Future of SNAP, 2021). In Canada, approximately 14.6% of people lived in food insecure households in 2020 (Polsky & Gilmour, 2020). These figures are likely to decrease as more people are vaccinated and as the economies improve.

Figure 4: Relationship Between Food Insecurity and Income, 2009
(Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 288)

According to Gundersen et al. (2020), the price of food is a determinant of food insecurity. In the United States, unhealthy food is often cheaper than healthy, nutritious food. Known as “Big Ag,” large agricultural corporations have sizeable economic and political power. In combination with “Big Food,” large food
corporations, they guide the food system in ways that increase their profit, even if it is less healthy food. The United States government subsidizes agriculture in many ways. During COVID-19, the agriculture sector generally maintained its supply chains, so prices did not increase significantly, which is why the predicted level of food insecurity by Gundersen et al. (2020) was not higher. It is worth pointing out that in exchange for creating subsidies and supports for agriculture (which benefits rural communities), Congress allocates money for SNAP (which benefits urban communities). This mutually beneficial relationship plays out in the Farm Bill, a large piece of legislation covering agriculture and food programs roughly every five years (What Is the Farm Bill, 2018). In Canada, food prices are expected to increase. Canadian families were expected to pay an extra $560 for groceries in 2021 (Bundale, 2020). This will undoubtedly affect food insecurity rates. Food prices and access to food are also exacerbated by climate change. For example, remote indigenous people in Canada are having a more difficult time accessing traditional foods since the natural environment is changing with the climate. Other foods, including staples like sugar and flour, are relatively expensive, since they often must be flown in (Flanagan, 2020). How much government can control the food systems and food prices affects food insecurity.

Areas are known as food deserts, and they exist in Canada and the United States (Raponi, 2016; Slater et al., 2017). A related cause is that many places lack adequate public transportation for people to access affordable and healthy grocery stores. This particularly affects poorer people since they are less likely to own a personal vehicle. A lack of transportation affects people with disabilities or chronic diseases, residents in rural areas, and some minority groups (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2020). Decisions about where to locate grocery stores are guided by the free-market capitalism in Canada and the United States. Regarding transportation, Canada recently announced one of its largest ever investments in transportation and the United States Congress is debating an infrastructure bill presently (Infrastructure Canada, 2021). There are a variety of structural barriers to food security, though economic conditions are the leading factors.

While the Canadian government does relatively little in terms of direct food assistance, it offers several economic social policies to reduce poverty amongst its citizens. Provincial governments run income support program, and they go by different names depending on the province: Social Assistance, Employment and Income Assistance, Income Assistance, and Income Support. These programs provide direct payments to people as they are looking for work. They also provide employment assistance, like job training. Another economic support is the Goods and Services Tax/Harmonized Sales Tax (GST/HST) Credit, which is a quarterly payment to low- and moderate-income

Individual or household financial conditions are not the only factors restricting people’s adequate access to food. One cause is that there are not enough affordable and healthy grocery stores (which provide a variety of nutritious produce and other food, compared to junk food) in some neighborhoods. These
Canadians. It offsets the tax they pay each year (Raymond, 2020). Canada also has a publicly-funded health care system that provides all Canadians access to hospitals and physicians (Raymond, 2020).

The United States has several anti-poverty programs that have reduced the rate of poverty. However, the effective benefits have shifted focus to the disabled and elderly, rather than the unemployed and people with lowest income, according to research by the National Bureau of Economic Research (Ben-Shalom et al., 2011). The main means-tested programs are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The main social insurance programs include Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, Worker's Compensation, and Medicare (Ben-Shalom et al., 2011).

Conclusion

Even in Canada’s wealthy, developed countries and the United States, food insecurity is a problem. Canada is commonly perceived to have a more socialist society than the United States, as it provides stronger social policy. One would expect that Canada would have more food assistance than the United States, but as this analysis has shown, the United States government has more programs to address food insecurity. The responsibility for addressing food insecurity in Canada is largely left up to charitable food banks and food pantries. Even to experts, why Canada does not have food stamps is a bit of a mystery (Ralph, 2014). Perhaps the lack of citizens’ political involvement or the strong sense of individualism overrides their sense of interdependence. Economic conditions are a driving factor of food insecurity and have shaped food assistance policy. Canada has stronger economic social policies, such as Income Assistance, that provide direct cash support while the United States prefers food stamps or direct food support. Through deals with the agricultural sector, American food assistance policies have also been formed in legislation. As scholars have noted, and as was made clear by COVID-19, food assistance, whether through food banks or food stamps, is treated the symptoms without treating the cause. Problems of poverty and food access underly food insecurity and warrant further consideration to truly address food insecurity.

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Practitioner Perspectives

How Well Are We Feeding the Future? Data Limitations in Monitoring the Impact of the U.S. Global Food Security Initiative

Rianna Jansen, Heather Latta, Deirdre Sutula, Teresa Heger, Suzanne Kaasa, Steven Putansu, Judith Williams

Abstract: Food security is a growing global concern. The United Nations reports that at least 768 million people were undernourished in 2020, with the number of food-insecure people rising considerably from 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2010, the whole-of-government U.S. initiative Feed the Future (FTF) has been in place to coordinate U.S. global food security assistance and to monitor how the U.S. is progressing toward FTF’s goal of sustainably reducing global hunger, poverty and malnutrition. In August 2021, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported on a review of FTF, in which we examined how the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its FTF partner agencies monitor and publicly report FTF’s performance, among other topics (GAO, 2021). We found that USAID and its partner agencies have built a complex framework to guide performance monitoring for the initiative. However, we identified several limitations with this framework, including with its overall structure and performance indicators, which affect the ability to assess the initiative’s progress. In particular, the framework relies on impact indicators to measure medium- and long-term development outcomes, which does not allow USAID to monitor and report on FTF’s actual contributions to those outcomes. This paper provides an overview of FTF’s performance monitoring system and explores some of the challenges USAID and its partner agencies face in collecting, using, and reporting impact indicators, including the limitations of relying on these data to demonstrate FTF’s contribution toward the initiative’s goals.

Theoretical Framework

Performance monitoring provides information agencies can use to support decision-making and program improvement to reach goals. GAO has synthesized leading practices for effective performance monitoring from law; Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulation; prior audit work; surveys of federal managers; academic literature; private sector...
best practices; and expert and stakeholder contributions (Government Performance and Results Modernization Act, 2010; OMB, 2019; GAO, 1996; GAO, 2002; GAO, 2005; GAO, 2009; GAO, 2016; GAO, 2017; GAO, 2018).

In particular, OMB’s guidance on performance monitoring frameworks includes performance goals to allow for the meaningful monitoring of progress. A performance goal defines a specific, near-term achievable result that helps assess progress to longer-term strategic objectives or overarching goals.

Performance goals include a performance indicator, target, and timeline used to track progress by comparing actual performance against expected results. Agencies can use additional indicators that have a logical connection to the performance goal, such as outcome, output, or input indicators, to monitor progress toward performance goals (see Figure 1). As such, performance goals enable agencies to assess how projects and other efforts within initiatives such as FTF contribute to overall performance and inform progress toward longer-term strategic objectives and goals.

**Figure 1: Performance Goals and Their Role in a Performance Monitoring Framework**

![Performance Goals Diagram](image)

**Methodology**

For this report, we reviewed FTF documentation describing monitoring efforts and results, including its performance monitoring guidance and annual reports. We evaluated the extent to which FTF identified performance goals and indicators as defined by OMB and GAO leading practices. We assessed FTF’s annual reports against leading practices GAO identified on performance reporting (GAO, 1996; GAO, 2002). In addition, we held multiple interviews with USAID and its FTF partner agencies that are responsible for the most funding: the Departments of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury; the Inter-American Foundation; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; the Peace Corps; and the U.S. African Development Foundation. We also interviewed other entities that collect
FTF’s monitoring data, such as the World Bank, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, and nongovernmental implementing partners, and several food security experts from think tanks. Furthermore, we reviewed a 2016 evaluation of FTF conducted by Dexis Consulting Group (Feed the Future, 2016).

**Feed the Future and its Performance Monitoring Framework**

FTF, the U.S. government’s global food security initiative, aims to improve agricultural practices, strengthen resilience, and increase nutrition through projects, research, policy development, and other efforts. USAID leads this effort in coordination with 11 other U.S. federal departments and agencies. FTF agencies have global food security projects in many countries but have targeted their efforts in select countries for each phase of FTF, Phase 1 in 2010-2016 and Phase 2 in 2017-present. Within each country, the FTF agencies further focus their interventions in specific areas, called zones of influence. To track results across numerous agencies, countries, and projects, USAID and its partner agencies created a complex performance monitoring system, collecting data on over 50 indicators with which they intended to measure FTF’s outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

- **Output indicators**: Measure tangible and intended products or consequences of a project, such as the number of people trained.
- **Outcome indicators**: Measure short-term outcomes relevant to projects’ activities or results at the zone of influence level, such as the yield of agricultural commodities.
- **Impact indicators**: Measure medium- to long-term outcomes related to a portfolio of policies and projects that intend to change the development situation of the population in a country or an area within a country, such as the prevalence of poverty.

FTF agencies collect data on these indicators with the intent to inform progress across the initiative’s three strategic objectives—improving agricultural practices, strengthening resilience, and increasing nutrition—and on its overarching goal—sustainably reducing global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. Indicators also inform FTF’s lower-level intermediate results and crosscutting intermediate results that support at least one of the strategic objectives.

USAID and its partner agencies have also developed thorough data reliability checks to strengthen the accuracy of FTF’s data across projects, zones of influence, and countries. Implementing partners told us that these reviews helped their data collection on FTF indicators, and officials from USAID and its partner agencies told us that they were confident in the overall quality of FTF’s data for their project management purposes. However, despite the intentions of this performance monitoring framework, FTF agencies face several challenges in collecting, using, and reporting impact indicators, which limit the extent to which these data are able to assess progress toward the initiative’s goals.
Finding 1: Delayed collection of FTF’s impact indicators limits reliability

The apex of FTF’s performance monitoring framework is its overarching goal: sustainably reducing global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. USAID measures progress toward this goal using two impact indicators on poverty and child stunting (a measure of chronic undernutrition) across FTF zones of influence. However, USAID’s data on poverty and child stunting are limited by how frequently the data are available in FTF zones of influence, gathered through household surveys.

Phase 1 Surveys.
- USAID conducted baseline zone of influence surveys for Phase 1 in 2012-2013,
- interim surveys in 2015, and in a few instances used data from a national survey conducted in a recent year.
- Although USAID planned to conduct final surveys for Phase 1 of FTF three years following the interim surveys, USAID delayed the final surveys to attempt to align with Phase 2 baseline surveys, given the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 in 2017.

Phase 2 Surveys. Because USAID delayed the Phase 1 final and Phase 2 baseline surveys, it continued to use partial Phase 1 data throughout Phase 2, which ended in September 2021. USAID has conducted or is in the process of conducting final surveys for Phase 1 of FTF and baseline surveys for Phase 2, some of which USAID delayed further due to security concerns in-country or the COVID-19 pandemic. As of March 2022, USAID was still in the process of conducting Phase 2 baseline surveys, with three of at least 20 planned reports completed. USAID uses poverty and child stunting data from these surveys to set targets for FTF’s goal-level impact indicators. FTF’s original targets were to reduce poverty and child stunting across FTF’s zones of influence by 20 percent by 2017, which USAID and its partner agencies extended to 2019 because of delays in Phase 1 final survey data. In 2019, USAID and its partner agencies used changes between the Phase 1 baseline and interim data to revise and extend these Phase 1 targets to an average reduction in poverty by 26 percent and of child stunting by 35 percent by 2021. Because of limited data availability, USAID estimates changes in poverty and child stunting in FTF zones of influence by assuming constant rates of change in the periods before and after USAID collected data. For example, FTF’s public reports from 2018 to 2020 state that poverty and child stunting dropped by an average of 23 percent and 32 percent, respectively, from 2010 to 2017 in FTF’s zones of influence. To calculate these changes, USAID used poverty and child stunting data largely from 2012 to 2015, and used rates of change from this period to project changes to the 2010-2017 period.

Estimates that assume constant rates of change for multiple years have the potential to be inaccurate. This approach does not take into account factors that could affect poverty and child stunting levels from year to year; recent examples could include the 2020 locust...
outbreak in East Africa, COVID-19, or the expansion of social safety net programs.

Finding 2: FTF’s performance monitoring data does not show FTF’s impact

In addition to the data collection delays, we found that percentage changes in poverty and stunting in FTF zones of influence do not provide information about FTF’s impact. At the time of our review, USAID categorized FTF’s impact indicators as performance data, but USAID’s ability to link the contributions of FTF to reductions in poverty and stunting is limited for several reasons. These include insufficient data on FTF project coverage and the inability to account for the related efforts of other organizations and external factors. In particular,

- **FTF coverage.** USAID lacks sufficient or robust enough data on the coverage of FTF projects within countries’ zones of influence. USAID officials told us that when they tried to determine this level of coverage in the past, they found that either FTF projects did not have sufficient coverage to affect zone of influence-level changes, or they did not have data on which households participated in FTF projects. USAID plans to attempt to capture household participation in future zone of influence surveys. However, USAID would still need to ensure sufficient coverage of FTF projects in order to link projects to zone of influence changes.

- **Other efforts.** Other donors, governments, and local organizations are involved in efforts to address poverty and malnutrition in areas where FTF works. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between the influence of FTF projects and that of others’ efforts.

- **External factors.** Many external factors outside the scope of FTF’s projects can influence poverty and stunting in a region or country, such as gender inequality, drought, and civil unrest.

**Without ties to FTF projects and methods for controlling for external factors, these impact indicators do not demonstrate FTF’s contributions to its goals. Instead, these data show policymakers’ trends in poverty and child stunting, which are important context for FTF but do not speak to the impact of the initiative itself.**

Instead of relying on impact indicators to communicate initiative progress, FTF would benefit from having lower-level performance goals directly tied to indicators more within FTF’s direct control, such as outcome or output indicators. However, USAID and its partner agencies have not set any such performance goals for FTF.

USAID and its partner agencies instead have set intermediate results for FTF, but these are not performance goals because they are not measurable or quantifiable. For example, one of FTF’s intermediate results reads, “strengthened inclusive food and agriculture systems that are productive and profitable.” A related performance goal would demonstrate what progress toward that statement would look like, such as a certain percentage of
women, youth, and other marginalized groups supported in agriculture across the initiative within a specified time period. In addition, USAID and its partner agencies would need to explain how this performance goal is expected to influence the strategic objective that it supports—inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth—and therefore FTF’s overarching goal—sustainably reduce global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.

Having performance goals would increase the use of FTF’s output and outcome data by establishing a linkage between actual performance data and FTF’s higher-level strategic objectives and overarching goal. As they stand, FTF’s performance monitoring efforts are too reliant on impact indicators and factors outside of FTF’s control to show FTF’s progress.

Finding 3: FTF’s reporting contains misleading statements on impact indicators

Even though FTF’s impact indicators do not demonstrate FTF’s actual impact, FTF’s annual public reports contain unsupported statements claiming that FTF directly contributed to changes in poverty and stunting. For example, the 2018-2020 public reports state that poverty decreased by an estimated 23 percent and stunting decreased by an estimated 32 from 2010 to 2017 across FTF zones of influence. These statements are accompanied by language such as “FTF is making an impact” or “FTF has helped an estimated 23.4 million more people rise above the poverty line.” These statements are misleading to readers because, as previously discussed, changes in impact indicators like poverty and stunting cannot be attributed to FTF projects. Moreover, these data might not be accurate, because, also as noted earlier, USAID calculates them by estimating projected trends. In part, USAID has continued to report poverty and stunting impact indicators to meet demands from external audiences. USAID officials told us that there is pressure to report on progress toward FTF’s overarching goal of sustainably reducing global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. However, by including unsupported statements tying FTF’s impact to decreases in poverty and stunting, these public reports do not provide external audiences accurate information on progress made due to FTF efforts.

GAO Recommendations to Improve FTF’s Performance Monitoring

Successful monitoring of this initiative is vitally important to understand and learn from FTF’s progress, but FTF’s performance monitoring is limited by its use and reporting of impact indicators, including poverty and child stunting. In our August 2021 report, we made several recommendations to USAID to improve FTF’s performance monitoring and reporting, two of which specifically address challenges of impact indicators in performance monitoring. These included (1) establishing quantifiable and measurable performance goals, and (2) reporting the limitations of FTF’s impact indicators. By setting performance goals at levels closer to FTF’s projects, USAID and its partner agencies could more clearly define what the initiative is trying to achieve and be better
equipped to analyze how FTF projects contribute to the initiative’s progress. By reporting the limitations of FTF’s impact indicators, including removing unsupported statements on FTF’s contributions to reductions in poverty and stunting, USAID would no longer be misleading readers to believe that such reductions were due to the initiative’s efforts.

USAID generally agreed with our recommendations and has taken steps to address them. In October 2021, USAID and its partner agencies released an updated Global Food Security Strategy to guide FTF’s efforts for 2022-2026 (Feed the Future, 2021). This strategy touches on multiple ways in which FTF plans to address our recommendations. In particular, FTF agencies discussed monitoring progress through a combination of performance and tracking indicators, where tracking indicators would measure outcomes that would align with FTF’s goals but would not be within FTF’s direct control. Specifically, FTF agencies plan to track changes in goal- and strategic objective-level outcome and impact indicators, like poverty and child stunting, but will not use these indicators for performance monitoring or set targets for them. Instead, the FTF agencies will set performance targets for indicators at lower levels of FTF’s performance monitoring framework. For example, in November 2021, USAID established two performance goals for FTF in the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (Department of State & USAID, 2022). USAID plans to set additional performance goals to reflect average population-based outcomes achieved across the zones of influence in the FTF target countries. Such indicators and targets could be good candidates for performance goals, as they measure outcomes, are better linked to FTF projects, and support changes in FTF’s higher-level strategic objectives and overarching goal. As a development initiative, FTF is not alone in the challenge of having high-level goals far removed from its direct control. However, by addressing our recommendations, USAID and its FTF partner agencies will be better positioned to understand FTF’s progress and more meaningfully monitor and report FTF’s contributions toward its strategic objectives and overarching goal of sustainably reducing global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.

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U.S. Government Accountability Office


Practitioner Perspectives

Development as a Tool to Support Food Insecurity Interventions at Institutions of Higher Learning

Michael R. Ringenbach

Abstract: Food insecurity is a significant problem at higher education institutions in the United States. Estimates show that a third of college students experience food insecurity. While federal interventions exist, less than half of eligible students report awareness of federal assistance programs, and lower participation rates. State interventions are rare and often do not have the resources or capacity to address student food insecurity effectively. Therefore, it is prudent for university development officials and administrators to consider enhancing on-campus interventions. This paper highlights case examples of successful uses of fundraising to bolster food insecurity interventions. Practical recommendations are provided to those in higher education on how to best utilize development as a tool to solve this issue.

Food Insecurity in Higher Education

Estimates vary for the number of food-insecure students at colleges and universities within the United States. A 2018 General Accountability Office report reviewed 31 studies on collegiate food insecurity and showed a prevalence rate range from 9% to 50%, with most studies estimating that about a third of students were food insecure (GAO, 2018). The most extensive collegiate food insecurity study, with a sample size of 167,000, estimated that 39% of student respondents were food insecure in the prior month (Baker-Smith, et al., 2021). It should be noted that there are significant challenges to accurately measuring food insecurity, given variable definitions and response bias generated from the stigmatization of the issue (GAO, 2018). However, with approximately 20 million college students in the United States, it is reasonable to assume that food insecurity impacts many.

Food insecurity can have a profound effect on student success. Food insecure students are less likely to complete their degrees and report higher mental health issues (Stebleton et al., 2020). Eighty one percent of students who report being food insecure said that lack of food harmed their academic performance (Cady et al., 2016). Additionally, food insecurity disproportionally affects first-generation students and students of color (Dedman, 2017).

Individual student actions, such as working a job or relying on loans to combat food

14 Ph.D. Candidate, School of Public Affairs, Pennsylvania State University, mrr5148@gmail.com
insecurity, are not entirely practical, highlighting the need for more on-campus support. For example, the report *Hunger on Campus* showed that more than half of food-insecure students had paying jobs, more than half had received Pell Grants, and a quarter had received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Cady et al., 2021).

**Campus Food Insecurity Interventions**

Higher education administrators, non-profits, and student groups are increasingly working to assist food-insecure students. Interventions to help students facing food insecurity include meal plan supplements, nutrition and budgeting classes, food pantries, food drives, and emergency aid (Callahan, 2018). Campus interventions have shown to be effective in alleviating short-term food insecurity issues. More than 800 colleges and universities in the United States have an on-campus food pantry (SOH, 2021).

Federal interventions for campus food insecurity include allowing eligible college students to participate in nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP. However, there are significant barriers to awareness and stigma for federal programs. Only about half of eligible students know of federal assistance programs, and less than half of those students participate (GAO, 2018). State programs often do not include college students or make eligibility difficult, and only about a dozen states have put in place legislation to assist food-insecure college students (Laska et al., 2021).

On-campus food insecurity interventions such as food pantries are typically student-led. While they have institutional support, they often resort to fundraising and donations to support their efforts. Significant fundraising efforts can enhance the services offered to students. One university official said after receiving an unexpected $90,000 from a class gift “[the fundraising] took a ten-year plan and turned it into a ten-week plan” (EAB, 2018).

**Fundraising In Higher Education**

Fundraising is a driver of institutional advancement in colleges and universities throughout the United States. Typically, fundraising at universities is a large operation, with full-time employees dedicated to raising funds. Large universities can raise tens to hundreds of millions of dollars per year. Universities have used this fundraising to bolster resources for a wide range of activities, including but not limited to; student scholarships, building renovations, extracurricular activities, athletics, and research. Often, fundraising campaigns will align with university priorities set by university leadership. Funds are typically raised through individual gifts from alumni and friends of the institution, sponsorships through corporations, and grants from foundations. Studies show that alumni donors are more likely to engage when they can see and understand the impact of their giving (Schlesinger et al., 2015). Additionally, studies have shown that university donors tend to support causes that assist student success and extracurricular activities (Pedro et al., 2021).

Given that most universities already have development infrastructure and food insecurity interventions, it can be a prudent move for development offices to align to support food insecurity interventions. In addition, literature...
about alumni engagement shows that tangible projects, such as on-campus food pantries that support student success appeal to alumni, offering further credibility to using development to support these efforts. Fundraising efforts can be useful in higher education institutions with great need, yet limited financial resources, such as community colleges (Amour, 2021).

Global Context

There is evidence that colleges and universities outside the United States recognize that campus food insecurity may be a problem. For example, the number of campus food pantries in Canadian universities doubled from 2004 to 2016 (EAB, 2018). In France, universities have started requesting help from non-profit organizations to assist food-insecure students, a trend that has grown with the COVID-19 pandemic (Fournier, 2021). While the cases in this paper are from the United States, institutional interventions for food-insecure college students could be broadly applied. Given that recent research has shown that alumni university donors in Europe have similar preferences in giving to American universities, it is reasonable that fundraising for food insecurity interventions would work in a global context (Pedro et al., 2020). Additionally, universities outside of the United States can use campus interventions as a model to help assist students in need.

Development Case Examples

There are successful examples of how university-led development efforts can bolster the efforts of student food insecurity interventions. Often, these fundraising efforts provide significant resources to students in need.

Fundraising Competitions

In 2019, two large, public Big Ten Universities hosted a week-long head-to-head giving challenge in advance of a rivalry football game. The goal was to mobilize the alumni bases of both universities in a friendly competition. There were significant alumni and donor activation, with the winning university raising $213,830 from more than 10,000 donors (PSU News, 2019). Additionally, there was substantial media and social media coverage of the competition. The funds were used to support on-campus food pantries.

Swipe Drives

A national non-profit first started at a public California university started the “swipe drive” program in 2010, which encourages colleges and universities to bolster on-campus fundraising efforts. This occurs by allowing students with excess dollars on their meal cards to “swipe to donate” towards campus food insecurity programs (SOH, 2021). These programs now exist at nearly 400 colleges and universities. It is suggested that this program is not only a vital fundraiser for on-campus interventions but also raises significant awareness of food pantries and help available on campuses (SOH, 2021).

Major Gifts

The university president for a large public university in Pennsylvania pledged a $525,000 gift to form a campus food security
endowment (PSU News, 2021). This fund provides meal plans to students in need and signals to other university donors that food insecurity is a key institutional priority. Major gifts can also come from foundations, with an example being a $500,000 gift from a California foundation to the local community college system’s food insecurity efforts (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office News, 2019).

**Corporate Donors**

For corporate donors, food insecurity can be a compelling reason to give. A leading yogurt brand partnered with 23 higher education institutions and hosted a virtual student hunger summit in 2021. After the summit, more than $100,000 was pledged to support college food insecurity efforts (SOH, 2021). A mix of companies supported a California university's food pantry fundraising drive by providing $150,000 in matching funds, which catalyzed $327,275 in fundraising (FSN, 2021).

**Practitioner Recommendations**

Addressing food insecurity at institutions of higher education should be a multi-pronged approach. To maximize the impact of fundraising and food insecurity interventions, the following recommendations should be followed:

1. **Increase Institutional Support**

   Institutional leaders should signal their support for addressing food insecurity on campus. Collaboration with development offices across campus units, including administration, housing, and food services, student affairs, is vital to the success of fundraising campaigns. Fundraising for food insecurity should be worked into the development office priorities, and front-line staff should be familiar with the needs and resources available to food-insecure students. Consideration should be given to making large donations into endowments, providing on-campus intervention support into perpetuity.

2. **Storytelling**

   The most robust fundraising campaigns showcase student need and tangible interventions such as on-campus food pantries. They also display donor impact in easy-to-understand languages, such as "your contribution of $X will provide Y meals to hungry college students. The use of compelling campaigns, stories and imagery will enhance fundraising efforts, and the education of donors on student needs will allow for more effective marketing and utilization of resources.

3. **Alumni Engagement**

   Creative ways to engage donors can yield substantial fundraising success. Competitions, giving days, and matching opportunities can bolster strong support. These food interventions are often the opportunity for smaller-level donors to impact, so alumni outreach efforts should be targeted and considered differently than regular donation appeals. Alumni involved with diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts should be made aware of food insecurity programs, given the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on underrepresented populations.
4. **Federal Support**

Students are often unaware that federal nutrition assistance is available. Universities can use on-campus food pantries and marketing campaigns to increase students’ use of federal assistance programs. Coupling current interventions with resources to help students connect to federal resources can improve long-term success.

5. **Advocate for Expanded Federal and State Support**

Universities and their supporters who are passionate about solving the campus food insecurity problem should recognize that federal and state support is limited. Working with state legislatures to ensure that state rules allow for easier access to SNAP funds for college students can help maximize the effectiveness of existing federal programs. State interventions and programs are rare and generally modest.

**Conclusion**

Collegiate food insecurity is a significant issue. Aligning development efforts with existing food insecurity intervention efforts can catalyze enhanced support for students in need.

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Policy Brief

Impact of COVID-19 on India’s Mid-Day Meal Program

Anbu Arumugam, Ph.D.15

Abstract: The COVID19 pandemic has definitively impacted India’s school feeding program. The pandemic also affected years of progress towards eradicating poverty, classroom hunger, and undernourishment, especially among children across India. India’s school feeding program is a legal entitlement following the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013, covering 116 million school-going children. The latest National Family Health Survey-5 reveals a high prevalence of malnutrition among children in India. Interestingly, the first-ever Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) for the years 2016-2018 shows that 22 percent of school-going children are stunted, and 35 percent are underweight. This paper tries to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on the scheme in India.

Introduction

The United Nations, in its policy report on the ‘impact of COVID-19 on children’, states rising malnutrition is expected to affect around 370 million children across 143 countries who solely rely on a meal in schools for their daily nutrition (UN, 2020). Another vital report by UNICEF on ‘COVID-19: Missing More Than a Classroom The impact of school closures on children’s nutrition’ highlights the glaring impact of pandemic on children’s health. The school nutritional program covers about 370 million children globally, with the largest beneficiaries being India (100 million), followed by Brazil (48 million), China (44 million) and other countries (Borkowski, et al., 2021). The pandemic has led to a 30 percent reduction in nutritional coverage, which used to be achieved through school meal programs, and among others, India is severely affected (WFP, 2020).

The closure of Anganwadis16 and schools meant millions of children were left out of the system and had to support their mid-day meal or school lunch, which were provided by highly functional public schools, indirectly from other supplementary dry-ration schemes and direct cash benefit provisions and through the Public Distribution Systems across India. The impact of the loss of livelihoods, increase in household poverty, the incidence of child labor, indicators of a child’s growth, and

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15 Senior Assistant Professor, Presidency College, Indiaanbumani.a@gmail.com
16 Anganwadi is a type of rural childcare center in India. They were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition. Anganwadi means “courtyard shelter” in Hindi. Currently there are 1.37 million Anganwadis in India.
undernourishment are all interlinked (Borkowski, et al., 2021).

**Literature Review**

The state of hunger among children is a trend that will challenge the basic motto of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is 'Leave no one behind' (Desk, Express Web, 2021). India is ranked 101st among 116 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) for 2021 (von Grebmer, et al., 2021). The government of India has strongly committed to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). School-age children are beneficiaries of the world's most extensive school feeding program (CNNS, 2019). Despite substantial economic growth in India over the most recent decades, chronic malnutrition (stunting) in children under five years of age reduced by only one-third between 1992 and 2016 and remains alarmingly high, with 38.4% of children stunted in the country (CNNS, 2019). In December 2020, the findings of the first phase of the 5th National Family Health Survey (NFHS) were released (PRS India, 2021); the report also highlighted the state of children in India and their undernourishment (NFHS-5, 2020).

**Methodology**

This paper builds on secondary and primary research material published by several data sources. Additional data sources used in this publication were published by the World Bank, UNICEF, World Food Program (WFP) and Government of India, NITI (National Institute for Transforming India) Aayog, Press Information Bureau, etc. For the present analysis, data were obtained from publicly accessible and official sources of these national and international institutions.

**Importance of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and the Impact of COVID-19**

School feeding programs provide the safety net to children from classroom hunger, and undernourishment directly addressing SDG-2. Several evaluations of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) have reiterated the relevance of the MDMS as an important means of providing nutrition to children from vulnerable households and helping improve school enrolment (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019). The World Food Program (WFP) estimates that almost all countries have some form of school feeding program in place (WFP, 2013a) and are considered a common form of social safety net in the world (WB, 2018). Such schemes benefit 368 million children in developing and developed nations. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is one of the most successful social welfare schemes with comprehensive benefits in terms of school enrolment and nutrition, among others (Dreze & Khera, 2017).

MDMS provides one hot-cooked meal to children per the nutritional standards provided in the Schedule II of the National Food Security Act, 2013 (Arumugam, 2021). Under the program, a hot meal comprises 100 grams of food grains, 20 grams of pulses and 50 grams of vegetables to provide 450 calories and 12 grams of protein. At the upper primary level, the child is entitled to 150 grams of food grains, 30 grams of pulses and 75 grams of vegetables to provide 700 calories and 20
grams of protein, meeting at least one-third of the daily nutritional requirement. Many states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, and Puducherry also provide added nutrition from their resources.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the closure of educational institutions, the Government of India issued guidelines in March 2020. An appeal by UNICEF in July 2020 stated that 1.19 billion students in 150 countries continued to be affected by school closures. Vulnerable and hard-to-reach children, including adolescents, were in danger of dropping out of the education system altogether because of significant inequities in access to remote learning, widening the education gap, according to the appeal.

The guidelines advised all states and Union Territories in India about providing hot cooked meals or food security allowance comprising of food grains and cooking costs (or its equivalent pulses, oil, etc.) to all eligible children covered under MDMS during the closure of schools. A state-wise analysis of offtake of food grains by states, available in the monthly bulletin of the Food Corporation of India, shows a somber picture. Of the 36 states and UTs in India, 15, including large ones like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha reported a decline in their offtake of food grains under MDMS in the months of April and May 2020 compared to the same months in 2019. Moreover, 27 states and UTs reported lower offtake for primary children in 2020 compared to 2019.

See Figure 1. (Appendix)

Overall, across India, the school lunch program was affected severely by school closures and a lack of alternate mechanisms at the local and sub-national levels of governance. Periodical lockdowns at the national and state level during the first wave and second wave of the pandemic have meant that school-going children who are dependent on the school lunch program were mainly deprived of their food intake during this period.

State of Nutrition and Hunger in India

India’s demography is hugely challenged by the twin dimensions of hunger and nutrition. India will benefit hugely from a healthier population, but an unhealthy population becomes unable to contribute to the nation’s growth instead of becoming a burden. Beyond COVID19, India’s twin pandemics are currently poverty from a multi-dimensional standpoint and lack adequate nutrition. The following illustrations and policy mechanisms highlight the urgency shown by the government agencies to tackle the menace of hunger and raise the nutrition level of India’s population.

A. Global Hunger Index 2021:

Global indices have repeatedly highlighted the state of hunger and nutrition in India. These indices are credible markers for measuring the progress of India every year from an international viewpoint. India is ranked 101st among 116 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) for 2021 (von Grebmer, et al., 2021). This is a big drop compared to 2020, when India ranked 94th in the GHI. The
annual index mentioned the level of hunger in India as “alarming,” with its GHI score decelerating from 38.8 in 2000 to 28.8 – 27.5 between 2012 and 2021. According to the GHI 2021, the global prevalence of undernourishment is slowly increasing (von Grebmer, et al., 2021).

B. Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) 2016-2018:

The government of India has strongly committed to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To provide robust data on the shifting conditions of both undernutrition and overweight and obesity, the Ministry of Health conducted the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) to collect a comprehensive set of data on the nutritional status of Indian children from 0–19 years of age. Previous national surveys had not collected nationally representative data on children between the ages of 5 and 14. This population received less attention than those more vulnerable (pre-school children and adolescents). Despite substantial economic growth in India over the most recent decades, chronic malnutrition (stunting) in children under five years of age reduced by only one-third between 1992 and 2016 and remains alarmingly high, with 38.4% of children stunted in the country (CNNS, 2019).

C. National Family Health Survey – 5:

In December 2020, the findings of the first phase of the 5th National Family Health Survey (NFHS) were released (PRS India, 2021). The NFHS provides essential data on health and family welfare needed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India, for policy purposes. In the first phase of the fifth round, the findings for 22 states and union territories (17 states and five union territories) have been presented (NFHS-5, 2020).

See Figure 2. (Appendix)

The nutritional status of children below five years of age is worrying based on the data of the NFHS – 5 and NFHS – 4. Child Stunting (i.e., low height concerning age) has increased in 11 of the 17 states. Child wasting (i.e., low weight with respect to height) has increased in 13 of the 17 states17.

See Figure 3. (Appendix)

D. State Nutrition Profiles for India

On September 30, 2021, NITI Aayog and the International Food Policy Research Institute, the Indian Institute of Population Sciences, UNICEF and the Institute of Economic Growth launched a report entitled ‘The State Nutrition Profiles’ for nineteen of India’s states and Union territories. This report provides useful information on the prevalence of various nutrition outcomes, like wasting, stunting, anemia, etc., based on data from National...
Health Family Surveys (NFHS) four, conducted in 2015-2016, and five in 2019-2020. It is aimed at helping policymakers identify critical areas for urgent intervention among children, women, and men. According to the report, eleven out of nineteen states have reported an increase in the percentage of stunted children from NFHS 4 to NFHS 5.

Ten out of nineteen states have reported a rise in the percentage of wasted children between the two surveys. Thirteen of nineteen states reported a higher percentage of underweight under-five children from NFHS 4 to NFHS 5. For each state, the report describes the health statuses of children, women and men that are most common and need immediate attention. Second, the report describes the improvement needed in the most lagging determinants of these statuses and the districts where interventions should be focused (PIB, 2021).

In 2017, the NITI Aayog launched a ‘National Health Strategy’ which laid out a vision called “Kuposhan Mukt Bharat” i.e., Freedom from Malnutrition. It described a strategy to reduce the prevalence of underweight among children younger than three years by 3% per year and to reduce anemia among children and women by 33% (from NFHS 4 levels). The NFHS 5 data also gives policymakers many opportunities to design policies of varying rigor not just for different states but also for districts within those states.

Policy Implications

The Government of India recently came out with a stronger push for addressing the central concern in the growth of children, i.e., nutrition and nourishment. The PM Poshan will provide a one-hot cooked meal to children studying in grades 1 through 8 in Government and Government aided schools across India. The scheme has been approved by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) for the next five years beginning from 2021-22 to 2025-26 (PIB, 2021). The scheme which was previously known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme will cater to 11.80 crore children studying in 11.20 lakh schools across the country. Some major highlights of the scheme are:

- The PM Poshan scheme will also be extended to children studying in pre-primary classes
- Special focus on micro-nutrients through School Nutrition Gardens to give children first-hand experience with nature and gardening.
- Social Audit has been made mandatory in all districts where the scheme is being implemented
- The PM Poshan scheme is integrated with the Prime Minister’s Aspirational Districts Program, by which special provision is made for providing supplementary nutrition items to children in districts with a high prevalence of Anemia (PIB, 2021).

The total financial outlay of the scheme is $ 1.3 billion for the next five years beginning from

18 PM Poshan (Hindi) means “nutrition”
2021-22 to 2025-26, which includes the contributions from the national government budget outlay and the contributions from the state governments.

**Sub-National Responses**

In India, the Supreme Court observation on the possible large-scale undernourishment post-school closure and stoppage of the Mid-Day Meal Programme and a lack of uniform response upfront on this issue, sub-national governments have taken different approaches. Some state governments are using home delivery of meals, providing dry rations to the students to the equivalent of their daily intake allotted under the scheme and cash transfers of the component assigned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home delivery</th>
<th>Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take-Home Rations</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash Transfers</td>
<td>Bihar, Uttarakhand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Key Findings and Recommendations**

The pandemic has definitively highlighted the need for consistent policy design and delivery of this globally important program. Some of the key findings and recommendations of this paper are:

- There is a definitive need to re-examine the policy design for the Mid-Day Meal Program to include aspects such as quality of diets and food-fortification options.
- Policy delivery at the central and sub-national level needs a multi-prong approach that goes beyond Take-Home Rations and Cash Transfers.
- Policymakers need to re-strategize to include crisis responses in critical programs like the Mid-Day Meal Program.
- Data integration is essential to identify and reach out to vulnerable children facing greater risk of lack of nutrition due to school closures.
- Prioritize reopening schools and adapt traditional school feeding programs to cater to children who need it most to continue to receive this vital source of support and food.

**Conclusion**

The pandemic has reiterated the importance and inter-linkages of school feeding programs across the globe. Several studies and working papers internationally and nationally are steadily emphasizing the need for a more robust and adaptable design and delivery of school feeding programs to counter the future crisis. Among all steps taken to manage the crisis of the pandemic across the globe, school feeding programs have a significant role in shaping the lives of children in the coming decade. Hence, it is vital to reopen the schools and restart the school feeding programs in their entirety. India must rework and focus on
national policy implications to address the large-scale challenge of the undernourishment of its children. In the short-term universalization of the Public Distribution System (PDS), the continuation of provision of additional food rations under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (Prime Minister’s Food Security Scheme for the Poor) for another year, the revival of hot cooked meals under ICDS and Mid-Day Meal scheme are some of the policy suggestions. The national and sub-national governments need to plan faster and together for a better future for India’s children in the coming decade.

References


Appendix:

Figure 1


Figure 2: Proportion of Children Below Five Years Who Are Stunted

Source: Vital Stats NFHS-5 (https://prsindia.org/)
The proportion of children who are underweight (low weight with respect to age) has increased in 11 of the 17 states.
Policy Brief

Food (In)security in South Asia: Comparative Study of India and Bangladesh

Purusharth Chawla

Abstract: The 2030 Sustainable development goals for the world pave the way to deal with the dynamic world and the problems relating to the basic amenities of every individual in the world. One such goal is “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.” Food security is one of the significant global challenges in the world. In South Asia, the situation is one of the worst, with 13.4% of the population being undernourished in 2019, according to data by Statista, a decrease from 13.8% in 2018. However, the pandemic is believed to have derailed the improvement by further forcing nations into poverty.

Over the years, countries such as India and Bangladesh have tried to focus on the issue of food security. India introduced the Public Distribution System during World War II to ensure rations to the poor, which evolved after independence in several stages. In 1997, it was reintroduced with the targeted approach to benefit the poor. Similarly, India’s eastern neighbor, Bangladesh ensures food security in its region through various programs. The largest was launched in 2016 as the ‘Food Friendly Program.’ During the pandemic, India used its robust Public Distribution System to distribute ration kits to 800 million people under the ‘Pradhanmantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana,’ and Bangladesh also used the Food Friendly Program to ensure food to its citizens. However, both programs fell short of expectations, and loopholes were observed in the systems.

The paper includes a comparative study of the food security schemes of India and Bangladesh, their evolving nature, and the current situation. Additionally, there will be an assessment of the loopholes in the system for decades and the ground realities of these programs. Furthermore, the food distribution programs of India and Bangladesh during the pandemic will be analyzed with a few suggestions to improve the system.

Introduction

“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” is one of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, aiming at the target of zero hunger across the globe. Along with food security, the further goal is to modernize the farming sector, especially in
developing nations, providing easy access to resources to farmers to increase the income of low-income farmers. Food security is one of the significant global challenges in the world. In South Asia, the situation is one of the worst, with 13.4% of the population being undernourished in 2019, according to data by Statista, a decrease from 13.8% in 2018. However, the pandemic is believed to have derailed the improvement by further forcing nations into poverty. According to the Global Hunger Index 2021, India ranks 101 out of 116 participant nations, Pakistan 92, Bangladesh, and Nepal 76, performing only better than some African nations.

South Asia is home to one-fourth population of the world, with India alone having more than 1.4 billion people expected to overtake China as the most populous country in this decade.

A joint report by UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank, 'Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition 2021' found that nearly 32% of the children below the age of 5 were stunting in South Asia in 2020 which is a decline from 49% in 2000 but still far below the global average.

According to the report, “In 2020, more than half of all children under five affected by stunting lived in Asia and two out of five lived in Africa while more than two-thirds of all children under five affected by wasting lived in Asia and more than one quarter lived in Africa.” With such an overwhelming population and ever-increasing population trends, food security will be challenging for these nations to manage in the coming decades.

While the situation continues to be abysmal, countries such as India and Bangladesh, over the years, have tried to focus on the issue of food security. Both nations introduced various policies and schemes to ensure food security for the poorest of the poor. In line with these initiatives, the ones impacting the ground are India’s Public Distribution System (PDS) and Bangladesh’s Food Friendly Program (FFP). Both initiatives aim to ensure food security by enabling free-of-cost or subsidized food grains to the poor. While the objective is to achieve zero hunger, the two nations still have a long road to cover.

India introduced the Public Distribution System during World War II to ensure rations to the poor, which evolved after independence in several stages. In 1997, it was reintroduced with the targeted approach to benefit the poor. The scheme was divided into two categories, and the grains were distributed to citizens from below poverty line groups and above poverty line poor to reach over 60 million families. The scheme ensures seamless connectivity and the use of the country’s federal structure to maintain the food economy. Both the central and state governments provide the distribution of grains with the provision of a ration card to a family to avail of the scheme's benefits. Through the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the central government procures, stores, transports, and allocates the grains to the states. The responsibility to distribute grains among people, issue ration cards, and maintain Fair Price Shops (FPS) lies with the states. Every state has adopted a different strategy to make commodities available to their citizens depending on the cultural norms and
requirements. The center provides wheat, rice, sugar, and kerosene to states and union territories. Some states add commodities such as spices, edible oil, pulses, etc.

Similarly, India’s eastern neighbor, Bangladesh, ensures food security in its region through various programs. While there has been active participation of the NGOs working to ensure food security, Bangladesh’s government has experimented with several policies since independence to ensure food security. The largest was launched in 2016 as the ‘Food Friendly Program.’ Food Friendly Program aims to provide food security to 27.5 million people from the low and middle-income categories annually—the proposed provision of 30 kg of rice per month to all eligible families from March-April and September-November. While, in quantitative terms, Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in food production, its low ranking on the Global Hunger Index highlights the gap between production and delivery mechanisms along with the execution of the policies on the ground.

Loopholes in India’s PDS and Bangladesh’s FFP

During the pandemic, to provide food to the poor, India used its already established network of food economy through the public distribution system. However, it was launched in the form of a new program with a distinct feature.

The ration kits were made free for 800 million people rather than provided at subsidized rates. India used its robust

Public Distribution System to distribute ration kits under the ‘Pradhanmantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana’ from March 2020 to November 2020 and from April 2021 to November 2021.

During the second wave, Bangladesh also used the Food Friendly Program to ensure food to its citizens extending the scheme from March to May 2020 instead of the general provision of lean months of March-April. However, both programs fell short of expectations, and loopholes were observed in the systems. Though the country has utilized its federal structure to the fullest to ensure the success of the public distribution scheme, the decentralized model allows states to distribute grains on their terms leading to inequality within the country. While states like Tamil Nadu provide free grains to all with a ration card, others charge an amount lower than those the central government offers. Furthermore, the ration kits differ in nutritional value as states add some grains according to their food department policies leading to some states being on the backseat in providing proper nutritious food to their citizens. However, this issue was resolved during the pandemic when the central government offered free ration kits directly to the citizens, with states assisting in the distribution function.

Another loophole in the Public Distribution System was observed in the ration card mechanism. The ration cards, until recently, were not applicable inter-state. This disallowed the migrant population, mainly workers and laborers, to benefit from the PDS. However, the one nation-one ration card policy helped
resolve the issue. The Supreme Court of India mandated the procedure for all the states to comply with until July 31, 2021. Another problem that was observed was the quality of the grains provided. Several leakages have been reported in the system. The food grains do not reach the beneficiaries and are transported and sold in the black market. Furthermore, many have questioned the poor quality due to improper storage facilities.

Similarly, the Food Friendly Program of Bangladesh suffered during the pandemic when the demand for food grains rose above basic needs. The newly defined eligibility status remained ambiguous, and several households were unaware of the reason for not being the beneficiary of the scheme,

“A majority (36.7%) did not know the reason; another 23% thought they were removed without valid justification, and about 13% thought they were excluded because of disagreements with local officials.”

According to a survey conducted by International Food Policy Research Institute. Several other issues, such as supply chain disruptions, forced kitchens to run out of food. The food grains did not reach beneficiaries due to the nationwide lockdown and lack of proper infrastructure to deal with the unforeseeable shock, such as the pandemic. The IFPRI study revealed, “the survey results show the FFP program fell short. Just 64% of respondents reported receiving their full entitlement of 60 kg of rice in March-April, and 58% reported receiving less than 10 kg of the promised 30 kg in May." The loss of jobs further pushed people into poverty, creating new poor; however, they were unaccounted for.

Recommendations for Improvement in the PDS and FFP

A refined approach must be made to make these programs successful and survive shocks like the pandemic. India’s PDS should mandatorily stick to a minimum nutrition requirement in their ration kits and ensure a properly nutritious diet for the citizens. Within the PDS, according to standard needs, a separate provision for nutrition should be made for children and pregnant women. The center further needs to check the leakages and diversions due to fake ration cards, diversion of grains to ineligible populations, etc. A GPS-enabled transport of food grains is integral to end leakages and monitoring and control systems should be installed to stop the black marketing of these grains. Ration cards should work according to the national standards set for all states. This will ensure a common standard for determining eligible populations and prevent political interference in determining eligibility as per the vote bank politics. It is integral for India to ensure the quality of the grains provided. Proper quality checks should be carried out to ensure this, and storage infrastructure should be made more advanced with upgraded technologies. The digitalization of the food economy is a necessary reform to ensure transparency and availability of the service to the public. Lastly, the accessibility can be increased with initiatives such as doorstep delivery of rations or the number of Fair Price Shops district-wise.
Bangladesh’s Food Friendly Program needs to monitor and work consistently to accommodate those who fall into the poor population category. The eligibility status needs to be appropriately defined to remove loopholes. The leakages in the program, similar to India’s case, due to the diversion of food grains to ineligible populations must be rectified. It is necessary to build storage infrastructure and maintain supply chain infrastructure in every upazilla, accommodating the lowest level of government to facilitate last-mile connectivity. Bangladesh is focusing on Digital Bangladesh Program. Like India’s reform strategy, Bangladesh should include digitalizing the food-friendly program to monitor, strengthen, and avoid leakages, but this should be promoted with accessible digital infrastructure to the beneficiaries.

**Conclusion**

Even though several challenges persist, India’s and Bangladesh’s important food security initiatives have helped ensure food for most of the eligible population. The countries need to take a more proactive approach and resolve issues to help citizens benefit from the initiatives and remove loopholes, ensuring the initiatives are well-built-in infrastructure to accommodate unforeseeable shocks. While the pandemic tested the ground realities of the programs, the situation could have been way worse without the already established networks through these initiatives. Enabling the policy side measures and improving the infrastructure can help the two neighbors achieve the ambitious target of zero hunger by 2030.

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**Volume 4, Special Issue, August 2022, Page 75 of 76**


