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## Research Article



### Self perceived role of rural youth in ensuring food security in Tehsil Rawalpindi

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#### Abstract

Pakistan has an agriculture based economy. More than 70% of the population resides in rural areas. Sixty three percent of the total population consists of youth. They are facing various problems for improving their livelihood and food security. Food security ensures equal access to healthy and nutritious food by all the individuals, at all the time and in all conditions economically and physically. Youth are the main working force of any nation but in Pakistan, unfortunately in spite of utilizing their capacities in ensuring food security of the nation; they themselves are the victim of it. The present study was conducted in tehsil Rawalpindi to explore the self-perceived role of rural youth in ensuring food security. Out of four centers of Tehsil Rawalpindi, three rural centers were selected. From each center two union councils were selected. Two villages were selected from each union council and ten farmers from each village through simple random sampling. Total 120 respondents were interviewed. All the respondents were ambiguous about the actual paradigm of food security. Less than half (46.7 and 40.8%) very often rely on indigenous knowledge and friends/neighbors/relatives respectively. Most to majority (35.0, 45.0, 61.7 and 72.5%) of the respondents never relied on radio, NGOs, Nutrition specialist and social welfare officer respectively. Majority (69.17%) of the respondents said that they could play their role actively in ensuring food security. Fair majority (57.5, 54.2, 53.3, 51.7, and 50%) of the respondents were strongly agree that they encountered high food prices, unavailability of nutrition specialist, unavailability of quality inputs, lack of mobility, credit unavailability and insufficient knowledge about processing, storage and consumption of nutritional food respectively.

**Keywords:** Food security, role, rural youth

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#### Introduction

Developing world has been encountering the threats of overpopulation, degradation of agricultural land, water scarcity and financial pressure resulting in poverty and food insecurity. Poverty provides the baseline to food insecurity. Amount and quality of food is determined by the income of the family. A poor family spent about 70% of its income on purchasing food items to full fill its family food requirements (FAO, 2010b). Unavailability of enough nutritious food leads to malnourishment, illness and loss of the ability of the nations to develop. With the increase of global population at an alarming rate especially in the

developing world put pressure on the agriculture sector to produce enough food to feed more mouths (UN, 2007). Food security is associated with poverty and depends upon agriculture sector (FAO, 2012). Food security is defined that all the people have equal economic and physical access to healthy and nutritious food at all time. Food security has four pillars to ensure

1. Food availability
2. Food accessibility
3. Food utilization
4. Food stability

Food availability means that enough and considerable amount of food is available to all individuals. This is ensured by increasing food production, reducing post harvest losses, increasing the shelf life of the food, improving export and import systems of the food and ensuring the availability of food at the time of need. Accessibility of food is referred to enough physical and economic access of all members of a household to a healthy and nutritious food. This can be achieved by improving market conditions, transporting food in the needy areas, focusing on the purchasing power of the consumer and providing subsidies in the poor areas. Sufficient knowledge about nutritious and healthy food and hygienic practices, appropriate food processing and storage can ensure food utilization. This is acquired by conducting workshops on safe and healthy food intake and quality principles and developing food choices. Food stability is achieved by continuous availability of food at individual, household and national levels. This can be maintain through increase food production, using innovation and new technologies, concentrating on the demand & supply and adopting alternative energy resources (World Food Day, 2011).

Pakistan has benefitted a versatile land and climate, best fitted for agriculture. Agriculture is the only sector that provides raw material for food and fiber production and helps in improving the livelihood of the farmers. Its share in GDP was 38% in 1970, 28% in 2001-02 and now is 24% in 2011-2012 (Govt. of Pak., 2011). The main reasons for declining in its share is Pakistan's unstable climatic conditions, feudalism system and socio political situation. About 25% increase in fuel prices was reported in 2012 that resulted an increase in unemployment and the rise of transportation cost leading to boost up of food prices. Food production is enough but the cause to enhance the situation of food insecurity is of food access. Small scale farmers are more victim of food insecurity. Their own food production is not enough to meet their demand and they have to buy food from the market. This puts pressure on their household economy and in spite of sufficient food production people suffer to food insecurity (WFP, 2011).

UNESCO (2004) called youth as not only the future but is also the present. Youth is considered as an asset for the development of a country. They are more receptive to any innovation as compare to old people. More than 68% population of Pakistan is consisting of

youth (Labor Force Survey, 2010). Individuals between the ages of 15 to 29 years are called youth. Every country and organization has its own criteria to describe youth. Similarly, Ministry of Youth Affairs Pakistan, defined individuals between the ages of 15-29 years referred as youth (cited in UNDP, 2010). Due to rapid increase in population, youth are more victim of food insecurity. Youth includes both male and female and are characterized as urban and rural. Rural youth are more vulnerable to malnutrition and unemployment. Participation of youth in the agriculture sector is declining because farming is a laborious, less profitable and risk taking job. Rural youth also suffers from the knowledge source deficiency to upgrade their skills, lack of incentives on agricultural inputs, lack of financial resources and poor market conditions. These all factors makes the agriculture unattractive for the young people to adopt as a profession (FAO, 2012). Rural youth migrate towards cities for better work and the remaining do not have sufficient skills to cope with modern agricultural technologies and post harvest techniques. They have limited knowledge due to which production is low and much of the produce is wasted after harvest. Youth lack career counseling to enhance their knowledge and skills. They are reluctant to adopt agriculture as an employment career due to lack of quick cash from farming. Youth are susceptible to deficiency in vitamin A, iron and iodine due to malnutrition. Youth that migrated to the urban settings for income generation cannot earn enough money to meet their household needs and meet food security (Feighery *et al.*, 2011).

Out of total literate (54%) population of Pakistan, 63% of total youth was literate remaining 37% were illiterate and of which 65% are female. Out of total population, 49% was reported as labor force of which 37% were involved in agriculture labor force (Govt. of Pak., 2006). Generally, rural youth lack technical skills, they work more but earn less. Farmer youth involving in agriculture are in underemployment. Most of the farmers are small scale farmers with marginal land holdings. Trend of shifting from agriculture to other income generation activities is more prevalent in Pakistan (IFAD, 2012). By keeping in view this situation, Government of Pakistan had formulated policy for youth in 2006 to mainstream youth, utilize their potential and address challenges faced by them.

**Materials and Methods**

Rawalpindi tehsil was selected for study by utilizing purposive sampling techniques. It has four centers namely: Basali, Chountra, Rawalpindi and Sehal. Rawalpindi center comprised of both rural and urban areas, urban center was excluded and the remaining three centers were selected because our target population was rural youth. From each selected center, two union councils were selected by utilizing simple random sampling technique and from each selected union council two villages were selected by employing the same technique. From each village ten young farmers comprising both male and female those having their age between 15 to 29 years was selected and interviewed through structured and semi structured interview schedule. Total number of respondents was 120. Interview schedule consisting of open and close ended questions was designed and pre-tested. Data collected and analyzed through SPSS.

**Results and Discussion**

Food security exists when all the individuals have equal physical and economic access to healthy and nutritious food at all the times. Most (43.33%) of the respondents pointed out that “having resources to buy desired food” is food security. More than one-third (37.5%) of the respondents explained that “eating whatever you want” is food security, almost one-fifth (19.17%) of the respondents respond that “eating everything” is food security (**Table-1**).

Less than half (46.7 and 40%) very often and often rely on indigenous knowledge while less than fifty (40.8 and 45%) very often and often rely on friends/neighbors/relatives. However, about one-third (31.7-33%) of the respondents very often and often rely on agriculture staff for their information regarding improved agricultural practices. Only a quarter (25%) of the respondents showed their often and very often reliance on TV. The data further indicate that most to majority (35- 72.5%) of the respondents never relied on radio, NGOs, Nutrition specialist and Social Welfare Officer respectively (**Table 2**). Furthermore, majority (69.17%) of the respondents were of the view that they could perform better to produce enough produce for consumption of the people if they had subsidized inputs and resources. However, less than one-third (30.83%) of the respondents had reported nil response. Problems of the rural youth like technical knowledge and training to ensure food security, unavailability of nutrition specialist, insufficient knowledge got 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> position in the ranked order respectively and fell in between agree and strongly agree categories but showed inclination towards strongly agree with the weighted score (236, 219, and 214) and has  $x = 1.97, 1.82$  and  $1.78$  respectively. However, credit unavailability, mobility problem, high food prices and unavailability of quality inputs got the bottom position in the ranked order with the least weighted score (155,151, 150 and 147) and mean 1.94, 1.92, 1.82 and 1.87 respectively which shows inclination towards strongly agree (**Table-3**).

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents according to their response

Response	F	%
Eating whenever you want	45	37.5%
Eating everything	23	19.17
Having resources to buy desired food	52	43.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>120.0</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 2:** Frequency distribution of the respondents according to their reliance on various information sources

Source of information	Very often		Often		Rarely		Never		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Indigenous knowledge	56	46.7	48	40.0	16	13.3	0	.0	120	100.0
Friends/neighbors/relatives	49	40.8	54	45.0	17	14.2	0	.0	120	100.0
Agric. Staff	38	31.7	40	33.3	31	25.8	11	9.2	120	100.0
Nutrition specialist	9	7.5	6	5.0	31	25.8	74	61.7	120	100.0
SWO	5	4.2	9	7.5	19	15.8	87	72.5	120	100.0
Radio	18	15.0	17	14.2	43	35.8	42	35.0	120	100.0
TV	30	25.0	30	25.0	34	28.3	26	21.7	120	100.0
NGO	1	.8	14	11.7	51	42.5	54	45.0	120	100.0

## Conclusion

It is concluded that the respondents were unaware about the actual definition of the food security. There sources of information were weak and mostly they relied on the indigenous knowledge. Majority of the respondents are willing to play their role in ensuring food security but they need guidance, counseling and a leadership. They have certain problems like lack of knowledge and training to ensure food security, unavailability of Nutrition Specialist, lack of market access, unavailability of owned land for agric. production, rain fed agriculture, credit unavailability, mobility problem, high food prices and unavailability of quality inputs.

## Recommendations

Plate form should be designed by the private and public agencies for guidance, counseling and capacity building of the youth including both male and female. Pakistan is rich in agricultural produce so cottage industry should be promoted and marketing channels are improved to boost up the economy of the small scale farmers. Bridge between research and farmers needs to strengthen. Open health centers with free medical facilities and guidance need to be opened as well as the information sources of the youth should also be improved.

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