



PAKISTAN'S FOOD SECURITY A HUMAN SECURITY THREAT

Dr. Shabana Fayyaz
Chairperson & Associate Professor
Defence and Strategic Studies Department
Quaid-i-Azam University
Islamabad – Pakistan
sfayyaz@qau.edu.pk

Abstract

This paper attempts to study the current status of food security situation in Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of the catastrophic floods 2022. The study is aimed at highlighting the nexus between food security, human security and national security concerns of Pakistan. The recently introduced National Security Policy of Pakistan (2022-2026) manifest the transformative trend in Pakistan's national security agenda. With a more people-centric approach, Pakistan's national security interest envisages the vision that "security of Pakistan rests in the security of its citizens". In this regard, food security as a facet of human security is turning into a national security concern in terms of state development and progress. While the humanitarian aspect of food insecurity concept is quintessentially inherent, this study assesses that how much Pakistan has effectively attended to the challenges inflicted by the food security.

Keywords: Food Security, Pakistan, Human Security.

Introduction

Pakistan being the fifth populous low income developing country, with an approximate population of over 220 million, is one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of food security. According to the National Nutrition Survey (2018) by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Pakistan, on the FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale) measure an estimate of over 36.9% face food insecurity. The most severe food insecure regions are Baluchistan (50.3%) and KP-NMD (54.6%). Similarly, out of 120 districts in Pakistan, 80 have been reported as food insecure. Food and nutrition security, as a human security concern, is not only theoretically vital to the discourse of security-sustainability nexus, but also finds its critical significance regarding human capital development and economic growth in policy context.

Food security is inherently and historically linked with the sustenance, development, and economic growth of human population. While Malthus' research (1798) on populations' food security is the keystone in the academic study of food security, food security as a concept started taking root in



1970's when the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) took the initiative to report and highlight the worldwide issue of hunger. Food security, as an international political and humanitarian agenda was prioritized in the aftermath of the 2008 global food crisis, as it highlighted the fragilities in the international food system that could have severe consequences in terms of poverty and conflict on various system levels. ((Natalini, 2019)

The increased pace of urbanization and technology evolution, as corollary to the growing global population and economic globalization, have further thwarted the growing concerns and global trends in food security. Food security, as a concept, not only concerns the ways how the food is produced, distributed, and consumed on various levels but also insists on thinking about hunger, malnutrition and the adverse impacts of food insecurity. This is because the global food system is a multifaceted system of interdependent sectors including physical (e.g., production of food), social (e.g., consumption of food), economic (e.g., price of food) and political (e.g., policies for food systems). Disruptions in one sector can potentially impact one or more of the other sectors. (Natalini, 2019)

Several factors identified for food insecurity in Pakistan include climate change, population growth, urbanization, inflation and low purchasing power, irregular food production/distribution pattern. Other factors like Covid-19 Pandemic, floods and infestation of locust, have further aggravated the pre-existing food crises, leading to the highest inflation rate 11%. In 2020, Pakistan witnessed an acute shortage of wheat which also turned into a major political issue. In 2019, the pandemic and locust outbreak resulted in agricultural losses in production lands of over 115 thousand hectares in Baluchistan, Punjab, and Sindh provinces. This resulted in price hikes, shortages, and unavailability of other food items.

Impact of 2022 Floods on Pakistan's Food Security

Pakistan has been facing the brunt of global warming and climate change, the inconsistent monsoon and rain patterns have been the main cause of devastating floods and severe droughts in recent years. In 2022, the monsoon season caused significant damage to the southern regions of Pakistan, including South Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan. As a result, one-third of the country was submerged in water, and over 16,000 people lost their lives, while more than 33 million were affected. Despite Pakistan's low contribution of less than one percent to global carbon footprints, it remains one of the most vulnerable countries to climate-related disasters, as per the Global Climate Risk Index 2021. This highlights the enormous climatic challenges that Pakistan faces. The overall damage estimated to be more than \$30 billion, including 2 million homes, 4 million acres of crops land and food stock comprising 15 percent of Pakistan's rice crop and 40 percent of cotton crop. (Ahmed, and Farooq, 2022)“ Similarly, due to erratic whether and rain patterns, drought has become a frequent phenomenon since 2013.

The impact of 2022 Floods on Pakistan's food and human security have been devastating despite being an agro-based economy and employing 39% of the country's labour force. Pakistan has



experienced over 67% of the average rainfall and coupled with hill torrents, large areas of pastures have been submerged, while crops, wheat reserves, homes, and livelihoods have been destroyed. The rehabilitation process has become an enormous challenge for Pakistan, especially as the most vulnerable section of society, mainly farmers and unskilled laborers, have been displaced. The estimated cost of rehabilitation is at least USD 16.3 billion. (Ministry of Planning, D. & S. I. 'P. block P.-S. 2022). Moreover, Pakistan is also experiencing a food shortage, and have resulted in a significant increase in food prices, with food inflation currently at 47%. According to the Human Development Index (HDI) 2020 report Pakistan is currently ranked at 154 out of 189 countries and it is feared Pakistan's ranking will fall even further. (Khan, & Siddiqui, 2022).

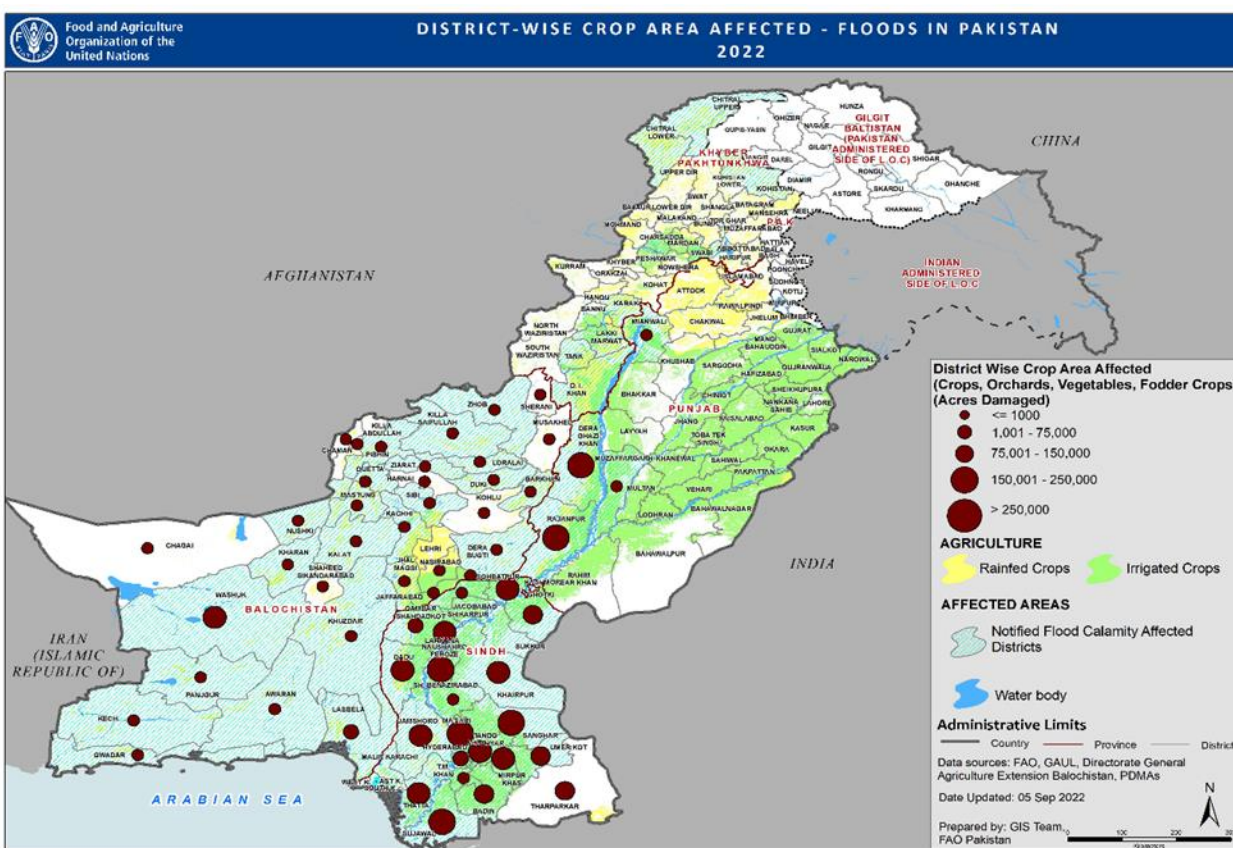


Figure 2. Flood situation map Crop Losses - Pakistan 5 September, 2022 | Food Security Cluster. Fcluster.org. (2022) <https://fcluster.org/pakistan/document/flood-situation-map-crop-losses-pakistan-1>.

Flood-hit Pakistan's food imports have surged up to 65% during the first two months of the 2023 Fiscal Year. (Dilawar & Mangi, 2022). Approximately 800,000 livestock animals having perished; a critical source of nourishment and livelihoods for rural communities. In addition to that, 2 million



acres of crops and orchids have been destroyed; the situation is further exacerbated by the severe damage caused to the infrastructure with nearly 3,500 km of roads and 149 bridges destroyed. (Kugelman, 2022).

The map below shows district wise crop devastation caused by floods.

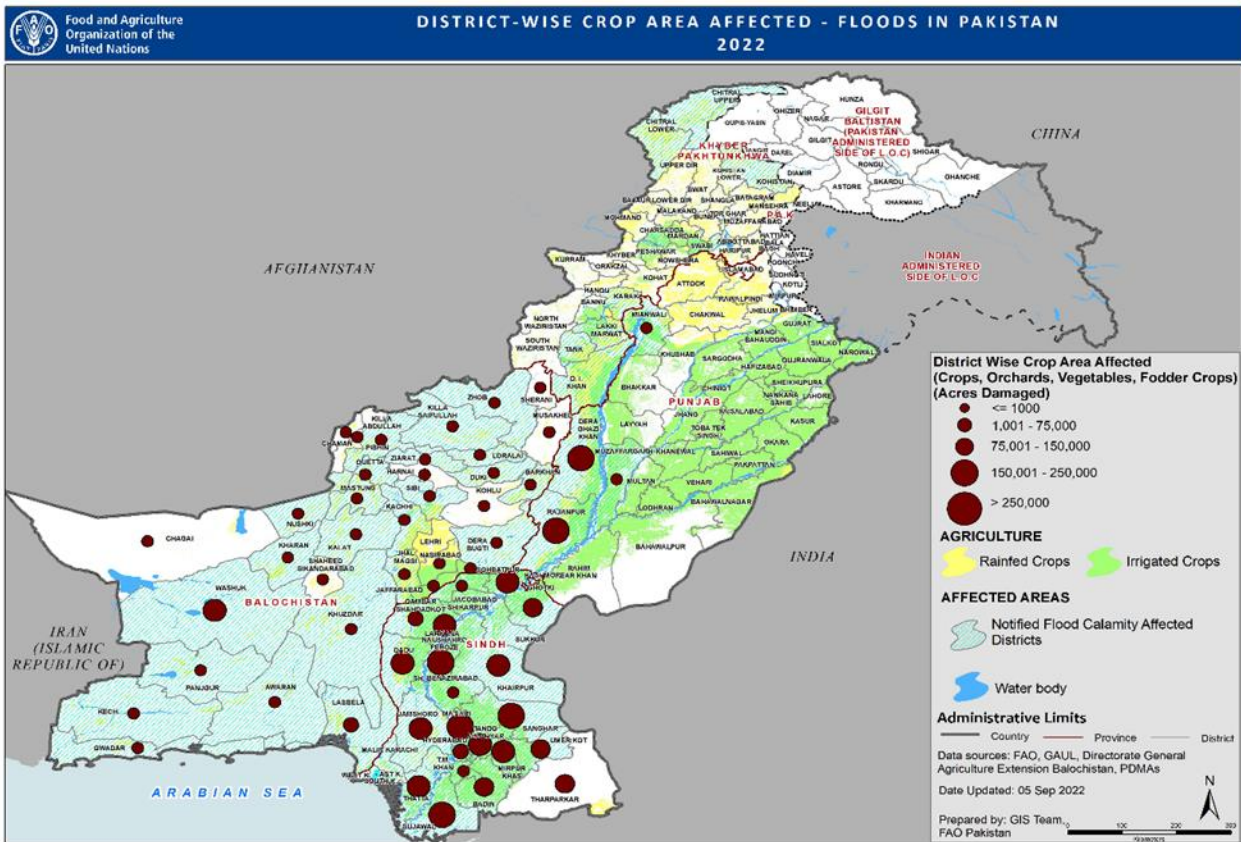


Figure 2. Flood situation map Crop Losses - Pakistan 5 September, 2022 | Food Security Cluster. Fcluster.org. (2022). <https://fcluster.org/pakistan/document/flood-situation-map-crop-losses-pakistan-1>.

Due to the floods in Pakistan, the destruction of crops and food supply chains could result in the country becoming increasingly reliant on food commodity imports. The national food deficit is expected to increase the current account deficit by \$4.4 billion (1% of GDP) and CPI (Consumer Price Index) basket is expected to rise by 30%. (Economic Times, 2022)

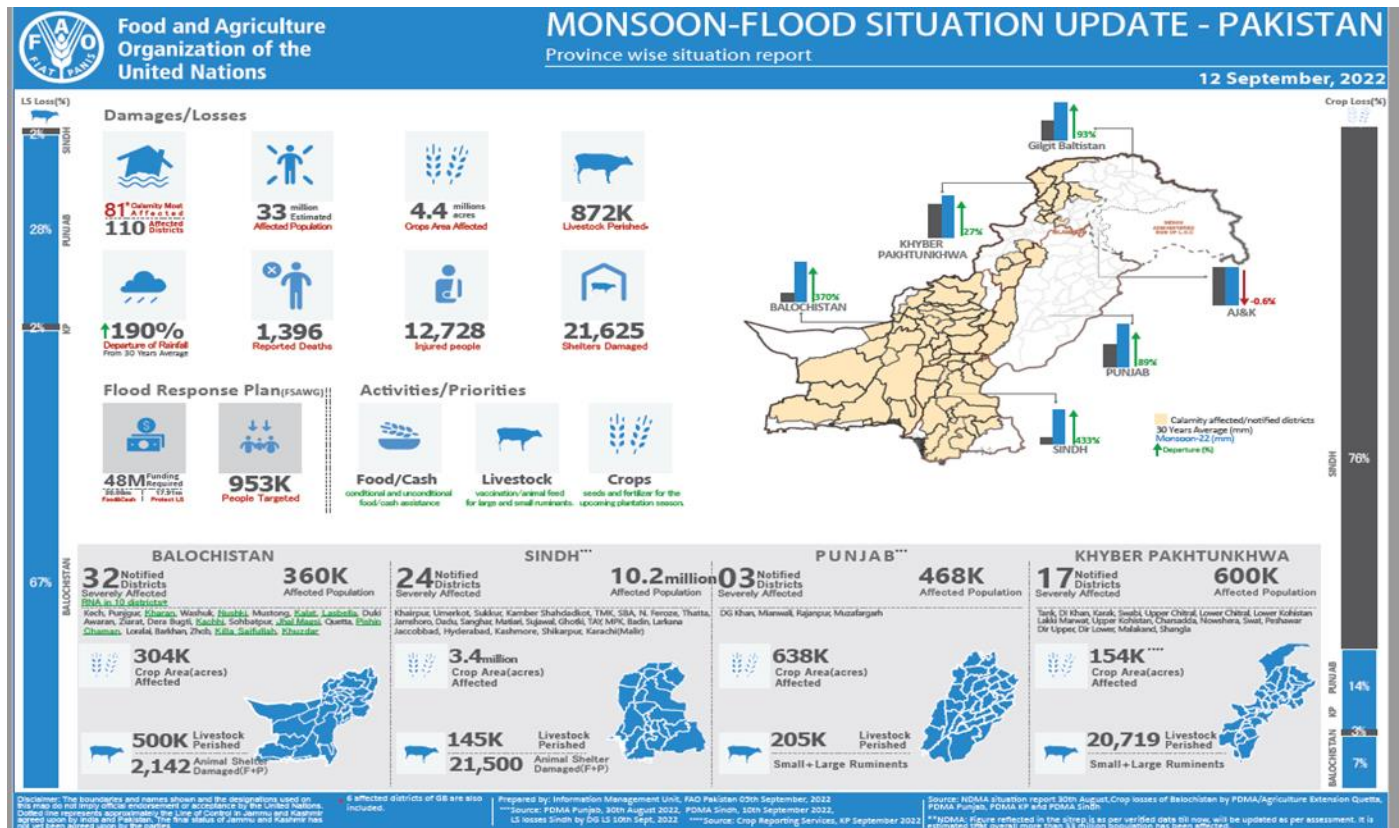


Figure 3. Pakistan: Monsoon 2022, Situation Update Dashboard 12th September, 2022 | Food Security Cluster. Fcluster.org. (2022). <https://fcluster.org/pakistan/document/pakistan-monsoon-2022-situation-update-2>.

The provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan have been hit particularly hard. Flash floods have reportedly destroyed an estimated 65% of Pakistan's primary rotational crops, including around 10-15% of its rice production. As one of the world's leading cotton producers and suppliers, with a 5% share of the global demand, and the fourth-largest rice exporter, Pakistan's diminished cotton and rice production will lead to increased national food insecurity. Additionally, Pakistan is already facing a shortfall of 2.6 metric tonnes of wheat even before the floods. (Khan, & Siddiqui, 2022). Pakistan's wheat import is up by 2,435 percent in the first two months of the 2023 fiscal year and Pakistan is expected to import 800,000 tonnes of wheat. (Kugelman, 2022).

Pakistan possesses more than 40% of arable land, yet due to years of mismanagement of resources, a lack of futuristic vision by the governing authorities in the past, and inadequate checks and balances, the country has experienced food and economic insecurity. Additionally, a significant amount of agricultural land has been converted to the real estate sector, along with extensive illegal construction along the river beds and canals in KPK, South Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan, increasing Pakistan's



susceptibility to flash floods. This highlights the local governments' insufficient capacity to counteract illegal construction, which has now resulted in a full-blown food security crisis.

There has been widespread debate on Pakistan's response to the devastating floods, with some arguing that the country failed to address its weak governance system, investment in food-human security and climate-resilient infrastructure. Others maintain that Pakistan could not have prevented the extensive damage caused by this natural disaster. In reality, a combination of mismanagement lack of focus on food and human security coupled with climate change has fuelled the crisis, disproportionately impacting the poorest and middle classes. As a result, it is essential to adopt an inclusive and holistic approach to address these challenges and aid in the rehabilitation and food insecurity of the most vulnerable populations in Pakistan. This can be achieved by adopting human and food security nexus, investing in a climate-smart economy and addressing the key policy-making gaps.

Food Security vis-à-vis Human Security: A Renewed National Security Concern for Pakistan

Human Security infographic: ¹ Based on the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994 and the HSU-OCHA



The concept of human security emerged in 2012, with the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 66/290. Human security was introduced as an approach comprising three interlinked pillars of the United Nations including development, human rights, and peace and security. Human Security is defined as “the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, free



from poverty and despair”, that “all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential.” Three core objectives of human security are ensuring people’s survival, livelihood, and dignity in the face of persisting and emerging threats. These threats are widespread in nature and are expansive beyond poverty or conflict. (United Nations General Assembly, 2012)

Human security and food security conjointly shares the realization of the right to adequate food as the basic human right. The right to adequate food is further defined in terms of physical and economic accessibility to food for on both individual and collective levels. (ECOSOC, 1999) Human security necessitates for a people-centered, proactive, and a context-oriented approach towards the risks and threats that can hamper the resilience of the society at large. Food security is, thus, one of such human security interest. On global level, SDGs 1 and 2 are the major collective approach to address key issues of food security that is, hunger and poverty under the 2030 Agenda. In response to the persisting food security concerns, Pakistan’s Parliament passed a National Assembly Resolution in February 2016 to address the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Pakistan became the first country to adopt 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its own national development goals and to establish an SDG Unit particularly for the attainment of these goals. Moreover, Pakistan has formulated its country strategic plan for achieving Vision 2025. (Pakistan’s *Implementation of the 2030*) Pakistan’s Vision 2025, a national development plan, is aimed to fast track human and economic development in the country. With a people-centric approach, the five key enablers and 7 pillars development plan seeks to improve human and social capital and ensure food security and nutrition. Pillar IV recognizes that “sufficient, reliable, clean and cost-effective availability of energy, water and food is indispensable to ensure sustainable economic growth and development.” Pillar IV not only presses to fill the gaps in the existing policy objectives, but also seeks for making efforts to effectively respond to the imminent threats emanating from climate change. Additionally, pillar IV also aims to invest new resources through public and private sector collaboration for “conservation, efficient distribution and usage of resources, and preventing contamination and environmental degradation”. (*Pakistan Vision 2025*)

The National Security Policy 2022-2026 document is the milestone in translating Pakistan’s reoriented security policy. With a citizen-centric approach, the ultimate purpose of the Comprehensive National Security’ framework aims to “ensure the safety, security, dignity, and prosperity” of Pakistani citizens. With regards to food security in particular, the government commits to the effective implementation of the National Food Security Policy 2018 for ensuring a sustainable food basket as well as institutionalizing food security. The challenges faced, as highlighted in the policy document, include:

ensuring production of food rich in micronutrients, changing consumption patterns towards a healthier food basket, increasing cultivable land, increasing yield per acre



for major cash crops through high yield seeds, undertaking fresh agricultural zoning, introducing import substitution for commodities and products that contribute disproportionately to the import bill, and legislating against illegal market practices including hoarding and smuggling. Challenges pertaining to socio-economic access to food include improving people's purchasing power and strengthening social safety nets. In terms of food utilization, enhanced provision of drinking water and sanitation facilities is necessary. (National Security Division 2022),

The national security and food security policy as well as developmental/sustainable visions charted by the government, no doubt, manifest a categorical framework for attending to the persisting challenges of food insecurity in the country. In policy terms, a much more comprehensive human security approach is needed to address the root causes of threats to peace and sustainable development. Proactive measures and preparedness are required in order to withstand vulnerability to natural disasters and the effects of climate change. In the pre-conflict/disaster and post-conflict/disaster phase, agricultural systems need to be rebuilt so as to restore social cohesion and reconciliation, among and within different sectors including family farmers and small-scale producers. This in turn may help address food security issues concerning poverty, resource scarcity and violence in terms of food and hunger riots and in the long run both human security and national security concerns.

Conclusion

The overleaf discussion notes that close to a billion people across the globe experience the effects of food insecurity with the largest proportion of undernourished people living in Asia and the Pacific Islands, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa. The situation in Pakistan is quite alarming as well. It is a documented fact that Pakistan suffers from the largest food gap in whole of South Asian region. World Food Program documents, around 82 per cent of children in Pakistan have been deprived of a meal when they need one, and has the second highest rate of malnutrition in the region.

This research study stresses an alarmist and a pro-active perspective to underscore the need to have comprehensive 'Food insecurity Mitigation Plan' whereby, 'people' security is paralleled with the 'state' security. The state is envisioned as a regulator of people's aspirations and well-being. It is argued that people are the critical source of state security within and beyond. Thus, it is argued that food insecurity can be a tinder box for the peace and stability within the country. Pakistan has experienced 'Food Riots' that has caused unrest, infrastructure loss, black marketing, loss of lives and so on.

In crux, the present research study contemplates that, Food insecurity should not be perceived as a mere shortage of food, it also includes people's inability to purchase the required amount of food to sustain a day. Plus, food insecurity has a trickle down impact in the society. That is, all segments of society are impacted often leading to socio-economic inequalities and increase in the number of food-



insecure households. Here, policymakers must design and implement policies that ensure an equitable economic growth and wealth distribution in the country. Given this situation, creating job opportunities for the larger proportion of people, so that they can have income to access food also – should a major thrust of the state's response to mitigate the challenge 'Food Stressed' nation.

In crux, this study sensitizes about the gravity of 'Food Insecurity' as a real threat to the livelihood and sustainability of the people of Pakistan – that must be perceived as a critical challenge for the 'state' security!



References

- Ahmed, M. and Farooq, M. (2022) "Pakistan Floods Raise Fears of Hunger After Crops Wrecked," *The Diplomat*, September 26, , <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/pakistan-floods-raise-fears-of-hunger-after-crops-wrecked/>
- Davide Natalini, Giangiacomo Bravo and Aled Wynne Jones, "Global Food Security And Food Riots – An Agent-Based Modelling Approach," *Food Sec.* 11, (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-017-0693-z>
- Dilawar, I., & Mangi, F. (2022). *Deadly Floods Inundate Farms in Pakistan, Flushing Away Crops*. Bloomberg.com. Retrieved 22 September 2022, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-31/deadly-floods-inundate-farms-in-pakistan-flushing-away-crops?>
- ECOSOC (1999) Substantive issues arising in the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: General Comment 12 "The Right to adequate Food", (art.11), ECOSOC 1999.
- Economic Times (2022) *Floods to cause USD 4 billion loss to Pakistan's economy: Report, The Economic Times*. Available at: <https://economictimes.com/news/international/world-news/floods-to-cause-usd-4-bn-loss-to-pakistans-economy-report/articleshow/93821119.cms?from=mdr>
- Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
- Khan, S., & Siddiqui, J. (2022). *Why Pakistan Is Drowning*. United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved 22 September 2022. <http://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/why-pakistan-drowning>.
- Kugelman, M. (2022). *Pakistan's Flood Crisis Could Become a Food Crisis*. Foreign Policy. Retrieved 22 September 2022. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/08/pakistan-floods-food-security-crisis/>.
- National Security Division (2022), Government of Pakistan, "National Security Policy of Pakistan: 2022-2026", January 14, 45-46. <http://www.nsd.gov.pk>
- Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Vision 2025 'One Nation – One Vision'*, <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/vision2025/Vision-2025-Executive-Summary.pdf>



Ministry of Planning, D. & S. I. 'P. block P.-S. (2022). *Flood damages & economic losses are estimates over USD 30 billion and reconstruction needs over USD 16 billion*. Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives. https://www.pc.gov.pk/web/press/get_press/837

United Nations General Assembly, (2012) 66/290. *Follow-up to paragraph 143 on Human Security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome*, GA Res A/RES/66/290, Sixty-sixth Session Agenda items 14 and 117, (October 25, , <https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/HSU/Publications%20and%20Products/GA%20Resolutions%20and%20Debate%20Summaries/GA%20Resolutions.pdf>