

Sustainable agriculture and eradication of rural poverty in Pakistan

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Abstract

Poverty is rampant in the rural areas of Pakistan, where people are in a state of deprivation with regard to incomes, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, sanitary facilities and human rights. Agriculture generates nearly 20.9 percent of the country's GDP and provides employment for 43.4 percent of its workforce. Most importantly, 65.9 percent of the population living in rural areas is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Rising population, shrinking agricultural land, increasing demand for water resources, widespread land degradation and inadequate infrastructure appear to be major concerns of the agriculture sector in Pakistan. An attempt has been made to examine the population growth–agriculture growth–poverty alleviation linkage. It is argued that agriculture will continue to be one of the most important sectors of Pakistan's economy for years to come. To alleviate poverty, it is suggested that Pakistan enhance the productivity of the agriculture sector through the provision of a series of inputs including provision of easy credit to the small farmer, availability of quality fertilizers and pesticides, tractor and harvester services, improvement in the effectiveness of the vast irrigation system and, finally, farmer education. It is concluded that the high rate of population growth needs to be curbed for increased agricultural productivity to have any significant effect on poverty in rural areas of Pakistan.

Keywords: Rural poverty; Agriculture sector; Population growth–agriculture growth–poverty alleviation linkage; Pakistan.

1. Introduction

In Pakistan the increasing rate of poverty in rural areas has prompted debate on growth and productivity trends in the agriculture sector. The average annual growth in agriculture was over 3.52% from 1995–96 to 2004–05; however over the last five years agriculture growth has witnessed mixed trends (See Table 1). Consequently, the rate of poverty in rural areas reached 38.65% in 2002–03. Poverty is rampant in rural areas, where people are in a state of deprivation with regard to incomes, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, sanitary facilities and human rights. Due to increasing population, natural resources are gradually depleting, putting major constraints on the efforts to eradicate poverty. The complex and enormous problems include declining availability of agricultural land and workforce, marginal producers with small land holdings, decreasing per capita land availability, conflicting demand for scarce water resources, urbanization and youth evading traditional farming. In the coming years,

Pakistan will require food production for larger populations from less and less land. The biggest challenge is how to increase output from the shrinking agricultural sector, while sustaining the productivity potential of the available natural resources.

2. Role of agriculture in economy

Early classical theory viewed economic development as a growth process requiring the systematic reallocation of production factors from a primary sector characterized by low productivity, traditional technology, and decreasing returns to a modern industrial sector with higher productivity and increasing profits (Adelman, 2001). Agriculture was seen as a low-productivity, traditional sector that only passively contributed to development by providing food and employment.

Beginning in the 1960s, a major revision in development thinking contended that agriculture had a central role as a driver of growth, especially in the early stages of industrialization. This strategy was later labeled agricultural-demand-led-industrialization (ADLI) (Johnston and Mellor, 1961; Schultz, 1964; Adelman, 1984). The ADLI strategy stressed the central role of increased agricultural

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