PAKISTAN

Year 3 findings from the Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility Study

HARIS GAZDAR
COLLECTIVE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH (CSSR)

HUSSAIN BUX MALLAH
COLLECTIVE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH (CSSR)

AYESHA MYSOREWA
COLLECTIVE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH (CSSR)

IDS Institute of Development Studies
COLLECTIVE for Social Science Research
GROW FOOD. LIFE. PLANET. OXFAM

www.ids.ac.uk www.researchcollective.org www.oxfam.org

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

ACF	Action Against Hunger
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
CPI	Consumer Price Index
EFF	Extended Fund Facility
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPV	Food Price Volatility
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
IDS	**I**nstitute of Development Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MNA	Member of National Assembly
MT	Metric tonnes
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PBS	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

GLOSSARY

Biryani	spicy rice and meat dish
Cholay	chickpeas, usually served with spices and other condiments
Lassi	a yoghurt-based drink
Majboori	lack of choice
Niyaz	food distributed as a religious act
Pakora	deep-fried gram flour fritters
Roti	flat bread
Samosa	deep fried pastry with savory filling
Ramazan	Muslim month of fasting
Year 1	2012 round of fieldwork
Year 2	2013 round of fieldwork
Year 3	2014 round of fieldwork

EXCHANGE RATES[1]

October 2012 – 1 GBP = 153.14 rupees
September 2013 – 1 GBP = 166.74 rupees
December 2014 – 1 GBP = 157.53 rupees

[1] State Bank of Pakistan, monthly average exchange rate

1 INTRODUCTION

Major shifts in food prices are significant events in people's lives; in 2012 researchers at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex (IDS) and Oxfam started a four-year project to track the impacts of this volatility. This project, Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility, aims to monitor and record how Food Price Volatility (FPV) changes everyday life because so many of the social costs of managing change are invisible to policy makers. Nutritional or poverty measures may indicate that people living in poverty have coped well and appear to be 'resilient', but only because such measures often neglect the costs of this apparent resilience, including the increased time and effort required to feed and look after people; the non-monetary effects on family, social, or gender relations; mental health costs, such as stress; reductions in quality of life; and cultural issues, such as the pressure to eat 'foreign' fare, or food considered inferior. These issues tend to be neglected in nutrition and poverty impact studies, but they tend to matter a great deal to those affected (see Espey et al. 2010; Elson 2010; and Heltberg et al. 2012).

The Pakistan component of the Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility project has conducted three rounds of qualitative fieldwork in a rural site (villages in Dadu district) and an urban site (a low-income neighbourhood in Karachi, the largest city in the country). The first round of fieldwork was carried out in October 2012 and the same communities were revisited in September-October 2013, and then again in December 2014. Besides using the fieldwork sites as 'listening posts' for issues relating to food prices, livelihoods and coping strategies of the poor, each round of fieldwork also addressed one special topic. In the first two years the topics were 'future farmers' and 'right to food' respectively. The special topic in the 2014 fieldwork was food quality and safety. A report that summarized the findings of the first two years and laid the basis for our understanding of the food economy of the poor in the fieldwork sites was prepared in 2014 (Balagamwala and Gazdar 2014).

The present report builds on that earlier work, and updates it with reference to new findings as well as fresh research on food safety and quality. Section 2 provides a summary of the major economic and political trends which might be relevant to food prices, food security and poverty in Pakistan. Qualitative findings are reported thematically in Section 3 using the 2014 fieldwork and documenting change over the duration of the study. Section 4 provides an analysis of the findings, while conclusions and implications for people living in poverty and for institutions are offered in Section 5.

2 COUNTRY CONTEXT

2.1 Economic overview

Following years of sluggish economic growth, 2014-2015 was viewed as a better fiscal year for Pakistan's economy. Two factors were important. First, the initiation of Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 2013 helped to stabilize the economy through support to the exchange rate. The 36-month arrangement for US $6.64 billion aimed to promote inclusive growth and to reduce overall inflation rates through restricting fiscal deficits. The fiscal deficit to GDP ratio which was over 8 per cent in 2012-2013 was brought down to 5 per cent in 2014-15. Second, the price of

crude oil took a plunge globally by nearly 60 per cent which decreased the price of fuel in Pakistan. In November 2014, the price of High Speed Diesel and petrol were lower by 16 and 13 per cent respectively, as compared to the same time last year.[2] This worked in tandem with the IMF programme in easing inflationary pressures and stabilizing food prices. Economic growth which averaged at 3 per cent per year in the last five years has improved to 4.1 per cent in the fiscal year 2013-14 and was expected to improve further. Growth was driven mainly by the agriculture and construction sectors.[3]

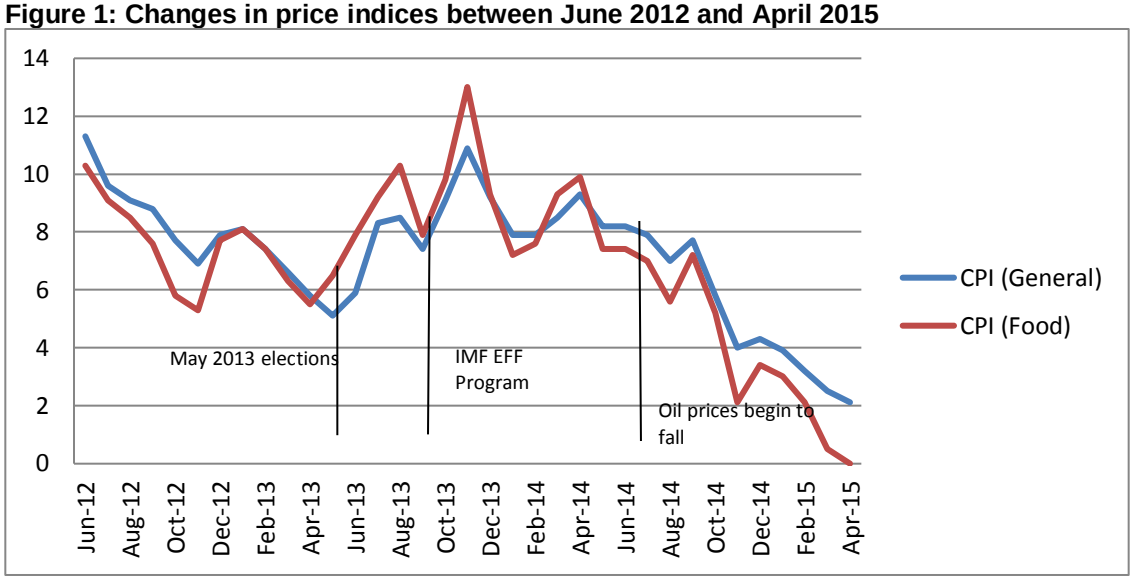
2.2 Political developments

The period saw significant developments on the political front. Elections were held in May 2013, which marked the first ever instance in the country's history of a change of government from one elected administration to the next. Moreover, the new government enjoyed an absolute majority in the national assembly, unlike the outgoing one which was an unweildy coalition. While this signalled greater political stability, these perceptions were disturbed through much of 2014 by protests against alleged vote rigging. The year also saw an escalation in military operations against Taliban militants and their allies who launched terrorist attacks on security forces and civilian population centres. Insecurity and political certainty, therefore, continued to cast a shadow on the sustainability of economic stabilisaton.

2.3 Inflation and food prices

As seen by Figure 1, year-on-year inflation peaked at 10.9 per cent in November 2013, but fell to 2.1 per cent by April 2015. Food price inflation which has been fluctuating greatly in the period has been on a downward trent since it peaked at 13 percent in November 2013.

Figure 1: Changes in price indices between June 2012 and April 2015



Source: Compiled from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS 2013, 2014 and 2015)

[2] World Food Programme Pakistan, Pakistan Market Price Bulletin – December 2014 issue
[3] Pakistan Economic Survey 2013-2014

The prices of cereals, in particular the staple wheat-flour, decreased for the present study period December 2013-2014, which is roughly the period between years two and three of the fieldwork (Table 1).[4] In contrast to the price of cereals, the prices of other commodities, such as chicken, pulses, milk and potatoes increased in the year. There was some decrease in the price of cooking oil, whereas the price of sugar remained the same.

Table 1: Average prices (in rupees) of selected food items

Item	Unit	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	Dec 2014	Change Dec 14 over Dec 13 (per cent)
Wheat flour	1 kg	34.4	42.5	40.0	-5.8
Rice (Irri)	1 kg	49.2	54.2	51.9	-4.2
Chicken Farm, Broiler, Live	1 kg	143.9	160.4	161.2	0.5
Milk, Fresh, Unboiled	1 ltr	65.0	69.1	76.3	10.4
Pulse Mash, Washed	1 kg	132.3	132.6	161.5	21.8
Potatoes	1 kg	26.8	38.9	38.9	0.4
Sugar	1 kg	53.0	54.1	54.1	0.0
Cooking Oil	2.5 ltr	527.9	537.2	530.0	-1.3

Source: Compiled from Monthly Review of Prices, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS 2012, 2013, 2014)

2.4 Social safety nets

The main social protection programme of the federal government, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), which provides a targeted cash transfer to women in poor households, continued despite apprehensions that the new government might have lesser political commitment to it, due to the programme's association with the outgoing administration. In the event the new administration expanded the coverage of the programme (from 4.7 million[5] to 5.2 million[6]) and also increased the nominal amount of the transfer (from 1,000 rupees to 1,500 rupees monthly)[7]. This was, in part, a result of the IMF stabilisation programme which included monitoring the progress of the BISP as part of its conditionalities.

2.5 Agriculture and food security

Pakistan enjoyed a good harvest of its staple, wheat in 2014 with an estimated production of 25.3 million metric tonnes (MT). This was approximately 5 per cent higher than the output in 2013. Despite heavy floods in September 2014, rice production was at around 6.7 million MT, which was only slighltly less than that of last year. In spite of adequate production levels and falling prices, food insecurity remained a significant concern for many. According Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicators, average calories consumed per adult equivalent remained above the daily requirement of 2,100 calories.[8]

[4] Monthly Review of Prices, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2013c and 2014)
[5] Pakistan Economic Survey 2012-2013
[6] Pakistan Economic Survey 2013-2014
[7] The monthly stipend was 1,000 rupees (6.53 GBP) in October 2012, 1,200 rupees (7.33 GBP) in September 2013 and 1,500 rupees (9.52 GBP) in December 2014.
[8] According to the FAO, the average dietary energy requirement was 2,265 kCal/capita/day. The average of the individual's dietary energy requirement, ADER, is a proper normative reference for adequate nutrition in the population.

To see the changes over time on a household level, data from the last four rounds of Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) were examined (Table 2). The average household in Pakistan spends under half of its overall budget on food. This ratio went up briefly in 2010-11, possibly reflecting the lagged effect of the global food and fuel price volatility in the preceding years. Rural households spent more of their budget on food that their urban counterparts, as did poorer households in comparison with richer ones. The poorest households in urban and rural Sindh (the province where qualitative fieldwork was conducted for this study) used up 54 and 61 per cent of their total budgets respectively on food.

Table 2: Proportion of household expenditure on food (per cent)

	2007-8	**2010-11**	**2011-12**	**2013-14**
Pakistan (All)	44	49	45	44
Sindh Urban (All)	37	41	40	42
Sindh Rural (All)	53	60	56	58
Pakistan (Poorest)	55	59	56	55
Sindh Urban (Poorest)	52	58	54	54
Sindh Rural (Poorest)	58	63	60	61

Source: Compiled from HIES 2007-08 (FBS 2009), HIES 2010-11, 2011-12 (PBS 2011, 2013a) and HIES 2013-14 (PBS 2015)

For the poorest quintile in the country the distribution of expenditure within food changed little over the course of the three survey years (2012 to 2014). There was a small increase in the share of cereals which are sometimes regarded as 'empty' calories, but also in the shares of more nutrition foods such as milk products and meat, at the expense of edible oils and fats (Table 3). A relatively small (under three per cent) but growing proportion of reported food expenditure was on readymade food products.

Table 3: Proportion of household expenditure on food groups by Pakistan's poorest quintile (per cent)

	2010-11	**2011-12**	**2013-14**
Cereals	27.03	25.45	27.72
Pulses	2.71	2.50	2.14
Milk Products	18.16	20.18	19.72
Meat	5.36	5.55	6.90
Potatoes, Tomatoes, Onions	6.36	6.47	7.40
Other vegetables	3.62	3.88	3.92
Fruits	1.91	1.63	1.97
Edible Oils and fats	11.62	12.75	10.14
Readymade food products	1.86	2.08	2.63
Others	20.77	18.81	16.54

Compiled from HIES 2010-11, 2011-12 (PBS 2011, 2013a) and HIES 2013-14 (PBS 2015)

The overall trends in food consumption among in the poorest quintile are confirmed by data on the quantity consumed per capita every month (Table 4). While the per capita consumption of wheat and wheat flour declined by around 9 per cent between 2010-11 and 2013-14, this was not necessarily a sign

of increasing food insecurity, since the same period saw a rise in the consumption of more expensive foods such as rice and meat.

Table 4: Monthly per capita consumption of selected food items by Pakistan's poorest quintile

	Unit	2010-11	2011-12	2013-14
Wheat and wheat flour	Kg	6.99	6.74	6.35
Rice and rice flour	Kg	0.74	0.68	0.87
Meat	Kg	0.20	0.22	0.28
Milk	Ltr	3.49	3.65	3.55
Pulses	Kg	0.19	0.22	0.23
Potatoes	Kg	0.85	0.94	0.93
Cooking Oil	Ltr	0.04	0.03	0.06

Compiled from HIES 2010-11, 2011-12 (PBS 2011, 2013a) and HIES 2013-14 (PBS 2015)

3 FIELDWORK FINDINGS

What did the 'listening posts' in rural and urban areas of Pakistan tell us about the situation of poor and vulnerable households and individuals with respect to food consumption and security from 2012 to 2014? An analysis of 2012 and 2013 fieldwork findings (Balagamwala and Gazdar 2014) provides a useful starting point for an understanding of the overall situation of some of the poorest households and individuals and drivers of volatility and change in that situation.

Poor and vulnerable individuals and households experience hunger at least on some days in a year. Food security is seen by the poor in terms of having enough *roti* or bread to eat. It does not extend to the dietary diversity or the ability to eat nutritious foods. For many of the poorest livelihood activities revolve around their food economy or the primacy of food access and acquisition in the livelihood strategies. In agricultural rural areas food economy arrangements include self-production, in-kind wages, non-price denominated exchange, and general circulation of food items in reciprocity, vertical patronage and begging, as well as food markets. In urban areas too where there is much greater reliance on markets there are significant numbers of people who routinely or often rely on the non-price denominated circulation of food items. Poor and vulnerable households move back and forth from self-sufficiency to being recipients of assistance (usually from their peer group) and charity (from patrons), to outright begging for alms, depending on their particular circumstances (Balagamwala and Gazdar 2014).

Against this institutional backdrop we had two sources of information about change from the 'listening posts' over the three years of survey. One, respondents, particularly in the setting of focus groups, reflected on their perceptions of change with respect to food consumption and insecurity, price volatility, economic conditions and social norms. These perceptions were not necessarily limited to changes over the three survey years but spoke of general trends. Two, we were able to document actual instances of change in the households that we studied and returned to over the course of the three years. We utilize both these sources of information to construct a picture of change in some of the key factors of interest.

3.1 Wellbeing

3.1.1 What they are eating

Households which had reliable and multiple sources of income had moved beyond worrying about acquiring the staples to aiming for diversity in their diets and feeding their children healthier and more nutritious foods such as chicken and leafy vegetables. Mrs. G in Karachi had established a fixed schedule of food for the week and was concerned about whether her children were getting the right foods. She ensured that chicken was cooked at least twice a week and different vegetables were cooked each day. These households also reported opting for better qualities of rice and pulses. Households such as Mrs. G's had begun to share food with their poorer neighbours and distributing food on a larger scale (for example, *niyaz* –food distributed as a religious act) every other week.

Households could easily be categorized as those who were cooking once a day, and those who were cooking more than once a day. The latter would also opt for more diversity, that is alternate between cooking rice and *roti,* and cooked different accompaniments each day. For these households, cheaper vegetables such as potatoes would be consumed in the worst of times.

In poorer households, such as those depending on daily wages, accompaniments to the basic *roti* included cheaper vegetables such as potatoes on a daily basis. Food would be cooked once a day and leftovers would be eaten at night. Other vegetables such as spinach and tomatoes were perceived to be expensive and purchased according to the availability of cash and whenever the prices dropped. Perceptions of good times and good food remained the same with poor households listing chicken, meat, fish, desserts and fruits as food they aspire to eat but are forced to avoid due to budget constraints.

In the rural site, a number of houses had livestock which they owned completely or on a shared basis. This enabled them to have access to milk and *lassi* (yoghurt-based drink), which would be consumed mostly by children. Households in urban areas were more dependent on the market for milk, which was considered necessary where there were younger children. Milk would also be used for tea in almost every household, especially when there were guests.

3.1.2 Work

In both the urban and rural field sites it was widely perceived that more women were starting to work for income. Many of the younger female Focus Group Discussion (FGD) respondents had started home-based work such as stitching and giving tuitions over the years so they could contribute in times of illnesses and have money to spend on themselves. They reported that a number of training centres had opened up in their areas to teach girls skills such as stitching, embroidery and beauty parlour work. Security concerns and men in the family would limit them from finding work outside. In a FGD in Karachi, older women explained that there was a stigma associated with girls working outside of their homes but they would argue with their husbands to let girls find work and contribute to the household income. A lot of these women would find part time domestic work nearby to help make ends meet.

According to Mrs. F from Karachi: "Among us Sindhis, men do not let women go out to work. It is my *majboori* (lack of choice) that I work. The community says bad things about women who work. I say to my uncles and brothers-in-law, do you give us food that you are telling me and my daughters not to work? Give me rations for the entire month and I will keep my daughter at home. They are rustic people with backward ideas."

In the rural site, almost every household which was interviewed had women doing home-based stitching or sewing work for commercial purposes. Some households had no male bread-winner and were entirely run by women's income. This was the case in two rural households, where the situation had worsened over the years due to unreliable income and illnesses. In these households, begging had become a regular practice to obtain food and households were completely dependent on informal support and charity.

In some households where women's work was an additional source of income, women would hold on to the money and not tell the men about it. This would be kept aside as savings or spent on themselves and their children.

Households which had members who managed to get government employment or jobs in the police and armed forces saw an improvement in their social status over the years. Mrs. Q, who lives in our rural site noted that her relatives had started to treat her better ever since her husband got a job in the police. She said she was able to share food with them instead of just borrowing when she had nothing to eat. These households were more food secure than those who relied on daily wages or self-employment and their economic focus had shifted from the food economy to issues such as their children's schooling.

For those reliant on casual labour, the daily wage rate had remained stagnant over the three years of the survey at around 400-500 rupees. They remained vulnerable to the unavailability of work, and also to more serious adverse shocks such as such as a bread-winner falling ill or, or someone losing her or his job. Pulling children out of school was a common coping mechanism in the face of such adverse shock.

Rural households in traditional occupations such as drum-beating and pottery-making were also becoming worse off and facing greater hardship in securing food as the demand for their services declined due to social and economic change. We found that these households had become more reliant on charity to obtain food even during the course of the study.

One of our respondents who is a tenant farmer said his yield of wheat had improved in year three. This was because of the quality of seed, pesticides and fertilizers had become better. He had started using a new variety of imported seed. He said that availability of irrigation water determines the amount of wheat he is able to harvest. If water from the community barrage flows regularly, he gets a better crop.

3.1.3 Family and society

Among the more conspicuous changes that affected the food consumption and security among our case study households were those concerning relationships within the household and connections and social ties beyond. As focus group respondents explained, it was a natural part of the life cycle that married couples would move out or separate their kitchen accounts from the parents. This was not always a smooth process. In year two (2013), one of our urban respondents reported instances of domestic violence as her family grew and budgets became strained. When we revisited her in year three (2014), she had managed to separate her kitchen and was keeping her own account of groceries. She felt that this independence had reduced quarreling in the household and she was no longer being beaten by her in-laws.

Even after families grew and dispersed, they remained the most important source of support in times of crises. We saw this in the case of one of our poorer rural households which underwent several changes between the first and third rounds of fieldwork. Mrs. M's son who had moved out in year one (2012) rejoined the family two years later due to illness and inability to support his wife and children. A number of other households also had married daughters returning to their parents due to failed marriages or their husbands' deaths over the course of the three years that we visited them.

Many of the poor households in our urban site are rural-urban migrants. These and other urban households tend to be even more mobile compared to the households in the rural fieldwork site. Urban households move in response to changes in job opportunities, but also to their ability to pay rent in a particular locality. Although our urban fieldwork site was itself a relatively low-income (and low rent) locality, a number of the original case study households had moved to areas with even lower rents. Mrs. S for example, had been evicted thrice since she migrated to Karachi seven years ago. She felt that landlords treat poor and marginalized people like animals and ask them to leave whenever they find someone who can pay higher rent.

Some respondents had moved to industrial areas where household members were able to find employment in factories, which stabilized their incomes. They felt, however, that the improvement in income was counter-balanced by decreased support in the form of food from neighbours in the new areas where people did not know them.

One of our respondents, Mr. R had recently moved to Karachi in search of better work opportunities when we visited him in year one (2012). At this point, he was completely reliant on daily wages and charity food for survival. When we revisited him in year two (2013), his family had joined him from the village and their wellbeing seemed to have improved as his brothers were also working in the city. Over the course of the year the family scattered to different urban and rural areas due to their inability to cope and pay rent. In year three (2014), we found that the household had resorted to begging and informal support from an uncle in the village.

3.2 Coping

3.2.1 Food choices

Perceptions about food prices and inflation were at great variance from how prices had actually changed over the survey period. This point was most conspicuous in year three (2014) when, according to official statistics as well as local key informants, prices of many food items such as wheat-flour, rice and vegetables had declined compared to the preceding year. Individual and group respondents, however, were of the view that prices had risen.

In fact, for both urban and rural respondents, the main source of vulnerability was around livelihoods and not prices. What they ate on any particular day, therefore, was directly related to whether or how much they earned on that day. There were a number of cases among our respondents of households that faced hunger on days when they were unable to work. A common strategy on those days was to send children to relatives or neighbours to eat or ask for food. Mrs. T from Karachi said that she and her husband go hungry 2-3 days in a month, but she finds a pretext for sending her children to her mother's house to eat: "I do not let my children go hungry." Hungry days come when her husband, who is a rickshaw driver, is unable to earn a surplus above the daily rental for the vehicle. They would rather go hungry than have the rickshaw taken away.

Seasonality was an important factor in food consumption and security in the rural site, not only for farmer and tenants, but also for labourers and those who relied on charity. The wheat harvest is a time when households replenish their stock of the main staple, and those who take part in harvest labour can expect to earn up to half their annual wheat requirement during this season. Even those who are unable to work receive grain at this time. Many farmers keep a separate store specifically for the purpose of charity due to the common belief that giving to the needy reaps greater rewards in the future. The harvest season is

not only a good time for acquiring the staple food, but is generally a period of higher incomes and respondents report eating better foods such as chicken and fish.

Poor households cope with hungry days in various ways. A common strategy is to maintain the consumption of the staple (*roti*) but to revert to the cheapest possible accompaniments such as crushed chillies. On particularly difficult days even the requirement of the staple may not be met and households end up cutting down on the number of meals. In some seasons rural households could fall back on freely available vegetables such as mustard leaves as accompaniments to *roti* – Mr. U reported, for example, that they only ate mustard leaves with *roti* for several weeks on end when there was an illness in the family and they could not afford to buy any vegetables. Households also admitted to reducing the quality of food or buying stale vegetables on difficult days.

3.2.2 Investments

Partnerships on domestic animals were found in every other household in the rural site, and a few households in the urban site as well. People who could not afford buying animals would care for them for their owners for a monthly fee. They would sell or consume the milk produced by the animal and share in the income of any offspring.

Income earned by women would usually be saved if men were making enough to run the household. Women in both urban and rural field sites reported that they participated in informal savings groups called 'committees' with their neighbours. These savings were intended to be set aside for marriage, dowry or emergencies.

3.2.3 Unpaid care

Household chores such as fuel collection, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning home were reported to have always been done by female members. As women particularly in the urban site started to work outside, care of young children and sick people in home fell on younger girls. Having additional female members was always seen as an opportunity to divide the burden of household chores.

3.3 Support and social protection

Informal support systems were integral to the food economy of the rural and urban poor. The family was the mainstay, but wider social networks based on kinship, locality and patronage were also active, particularly with respect to preventing hunger. Formal social protection in the shape of the BISP cash transfer had better coverage in the rural fieldwork site where it was reported that up to half the households were beneficiaries.

The formal social protection system marked an important departure from past practice, but had not changed very much during the course of the study. It was already in place in year one (2012) and had continued since, temporary interruptions and payment delays notwithstanding. Women noted that the amount of stipend had increased in the last year. The issuance of ATM cards seemed to have improved the timeliness of the payments. There were reports, however, of middlemen charging a commission to help obtain the money from the ATMs.

Unlike the urban sites, NGOs were active in the rural site. Over the three years, two NGOs seemed to have had major impacts on a number of households. One cemented latrines for numerous households in year two. Another organization called Action Against Hunger (ACF), whose project had been in its pilot

phase during the first two years of our visit, had fully launched its intervention by year three. It targeted stunted children and weak pregnant women by giving them vouchers of 3,000 rupees to buy food from the shop inside the village to improve their access to food. The NGO also provided fortified chocolates free of charge.

On changes in informal systems of support there were two types of responses. There was a view that some systems of support and solidarity had declined over time due to economic constraints as well as the changing nature of the economy. Although the sharing of food between neighbours remained common, there were some indications of longer term changes. Rural respondents lamented that *lassi* and butter which were made from surplus milk and were freely shared among neighbours in the past were now scarce commodities.

There were also specific changes in circumstances over the course of the study which showed how individuals interacted with informal support systems. Some respondents who had been continuously asking their families for money and food noted that relationships come under stress over the years. Mrs. T said she could not ask her brother to support her after he got married because her sister-in-law would disapprove. Mrs. B reported instances of domestic violence because of increased dependency on her in-laws. Both these women were in the urban site. A rural respondent, Mrs. Z, who had relied on help from her mother to cope with food insecurity, said that her brother had recently started saying that she should receive loans rather than outright gifts.

3.4 Out-of-kitchen foods

3.4.1 What kinds of food

Much of the policy thinking and academic research on food security in Pakistan implicitly assumes that the home kitchen is the primary, if not exclusive, source of food consumed by individuals. We found a range of out-of-kitchen foods consumed in poor urban and rural communities. Many people felt that the consumption of these foods had increased over time. Older respondents talked about the bygone days when food was only cooked at home and was 'richer and more real' as compared to that which is available in the market now. We found four types of these foods to be most common.

First, we found all households in both rural and urban sites routinely buy wheat-flour rusks from local retailers. It is the most common breakfast food and is also consumed throughout the day with tea. It was said to be cheaper than *roti*, good in taste and considered to be a filling meal or snack.

Second, other snacks and junk food are widely consumed by children on a daily basis. All children are given pocket money regardless of the poverty status of the household. This is usually spent on low price snacks such as chips and biscuits from corner shops. Also common were cooked snacks such as *samosas* (deep fried pastries with potato filling), *pakoras* (gram flour fritters), *cholay* (chickpeas with spicy condiments), and poppadum. These food items cost as little as 5 rupees per portion and are consumed by children while they are out playing or at school.

Third, mostly in the urban site but also in the rural site, it was reported that males eat lunch and have tea at small restaurants during work hours. It is worth noting that female respondents had little information about what is sold at these restaurants as norms prohibit women from visiting these restaurants. There were some respondents who have male relatives buy cooked food such as *biryani* (spicy rice and meat dish) at least once a week as a treat for the entire household. Mrs. G, who was one of our better off respondents in Karachi told us that her family goes out to eat at a restaurant at least once a month.

Finally, charity is a common source of out-of-kitchen food. In both urban and rural sites, there is an established hierarchy of rich and poor households and a reliable network to depend on in times of crises. While almost all households exchange food with their neighbours in some way or the other, we found a greater stigma in asking for cooked food rather than uncooked items such as tomatoes, onions and sugar. Households consuming cooked food from other kitchens were the poorest amongst our sample.

3.4.2 Why are they chosen

Respondents were able to identify a number of reasons that foods from outside the kitchen are being consumed. These reasons were not only useful in understanding why people choose them on a daily basis but also helped to explain why their consumption was increasing over time. Three factors stood out: taste, convenience and cost.

Food from outside is more popular amongst children because they like its taste. This is true for both foods from restaurants as well as cooked snacks bought from the street. In almost all households, there were reports of children throwing tantrums and demanding money to be able to eat outside. According to the respondents, food is packaged and marketed in a way to appear particularly appealing to children. They see their peers buy packaged food such as biscuits and chips and ask for the same. Mrs. G, from the urban site, said her son watches advertisements on televisions and aspires to eat all kinds of branded and packaged food. Most parents give in eventually since the snacks are relatively cheap.

Convenience was an important factor in eating out-of-kitchen food in many cases. Single men who had migrated to the urban site for work opportunities would eat all their meals at small restaurants. Even those men who lived with their families sometimes brought home cooked meals. Mrs. S explained that being elderly and frail she was no longer about to do a lot of house work like cooking and cleaning, and her son would buy cooked food from outside every other day. What was more commonplace, of course, was the fact that men who worked away from home ate their daytime meal at local restaurants. Quite often women respondents did not have a precise idea about what the men ate.

The convenience factor worked in tandem with the cost of the food available in these areas. As one respondent told us, “my neighbours say that they save oil, meat, fuel and cooking. It is only 20-30 rupees for the gravy and meat bought from the local restaurant.” There appeared to be scale economies at work – in smaller households with fewer members it was argued that buying cooked curry was cheaper than spending money on fuel, cooking oil, and condiments which are essential requirements of running a kitchen regardless of whether a simple or elaborate meal is cooked. Similarly, buying rusk for breakfast was convenient as well as cost efficient. Elimination of an entire meal saved money as well time spent on cooking.

3.4.3 What are people’s worries

The biggest concern regarding these foods was the unhygienic conditions in which they are cooked and the implications for health. Respondents also worried that excessive spices, reused oil, and other low quality ingredients are used in the preparation which causes illnesses such as diarrhea and throat infection. There was also concern that these foods are unhealthy and cause children to be too full to eat regular meals thus causing weaknesses and illnesses in the future. Mrs. T said, “I don’t buy cooked curry from outside. Will a meal for 20 rupees be good for you? If I feed them food for 20 rupees, I will have to spend 20,000 rupees on their healthcare.” Many respondents felt that cooked food sold in low income areas was of worse quality than that sold in good restaurants and rich neighborhoods.

Interestingly, such concerns were rarely raised with regard to more durable foods such as rusks and packaged or dry snacks such as the ones consumed by children. There was a sense that these foods while not necessarily wholesome or healthy compared to fresh produce, would not cause actual ill health.

3.4.4 Regulation

People seemed to be well aware of the substandard quality of ingredients and the compromised hygienic conditions in which food outside is prepared. Many of the packaged and processed food items sold in the market were unbranded while the brands sold in poor urban and rural communities were not recognised labels produced by officially-regulated large-scale manufacturers. Although there are various regulations concerning food safety they are dispersed with and poorly enforced. Market regulators see price controls – which too are unevenly enforced – as their main responsibility. Conspicuous cases of food hazards which get reported in the media from time to time have not been followed up with a coherent policy response. In the fieldwork communities we found no evidence of any formal food safety regulation on the ground.

3.5 Community feedback on previous report

Urban

The participants had various comments regarding which findings they agree with and were able to provide their insights on what has changed and needs to be reevaluated. Although there was general consent on the validity of the findings, there was some debate on the wages earned by the typical member of that community; particularly female domestic workers. It was also suggested that changes in fuel prices should be given special focus, especially since some of residents of that area work in public transportation. The participants expressed their concerns about the government's inability to control rising inflation and commented on the impacts of it on various aspects of their lives. For example, they said their diet still consists of the same items such as tomatoes and potatoes, but they now purchase smaller sized ones due to the rise in prices. They were similarly converting to purchasing lower quality flour, rice and milk.

Rural

A discussion took place on various findings on the study, where participants were given time to raise their concerns and provide their insights. The participants agreed with the majority of the findings such as the livelihoods and wage rates of the residents and commented that there has been only a slight increase since last year. They also suggested it is important to note that most households have only one male who is given a salaried job by the Member of National Assembly (MNA) of the village.

There was extensive debate with regards to changes in food prices-some participants argued that food prices have decreased over the last year, especially of vegetables such as potatoes which have gone down to 30 rupees per kg. Others argued that food prices are ever increasing. Some participants were of the opinion that prices fluctuate according to season rather than on a yearly basis. Causes of change in food prices were attributed to decline in oil (petrol) prices but the participants were uncertain if the prices will sustain at a low level.

It was pointed out that there have been many developments in the infrastructure of the village, such as a new school building for girls, maintenance of boys' school, pavement of streets, gas supply to all households and re-establishment of the milk collection point in the village. One participant mentioned that

the infrastructure development, employment and food security is the responsibility of the elected representatives because they have opted reputable positions by their vote. “Elected representatives are like our guardians or parents so they have to be responsible our up and downs”.

Younger research participants also validated our findings and added that they have hope for permanent employment in the government sector and small industries to bring change in their lives. Some participants also pointed out missing information such as BHP’s (oil and gas exploration company) unsatisfactory role in development of their area. There were 52 oil and gas wells in total with five operational wells but almost no employment and infrastructure development offered by BHP to the local population.

Both men and women had many comments to share regarding the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). There was general consensus that it is a great source of support to a large number of households in the village. However, a lot of women commented on how their support has been ‘cut off from above’, while others stated that they have started to receive support when they previously did not. There was lack of awareness as to why the support has been discontinued to some women.

4 ANALYSIS

4.1 Links between local, national and global conditions and actions

Global economic conditions and governance systems have had a strong impact on Pakistan’s national economy through commodity prices and assistance for economic management. The agreement with the IMF underpinned, through boosting the foreign exchange reserves, the stabilization of the country’s exchange rate, which in turn stabilized rupee prices. In a country that relies largely on imports for its fuel oil, the decline in global oil prices reduced inflationary pressures. It also reduced the fiscal burden of energy subsidies on government. While these pressures eased, continuing political uncertainty and insecurity at the national and sub-national levels meant that questions remained about the prospects for sustained economic investment, growth and job creation.

The food economy, or the diverse ways in which they acquired essential food and staved off hunger, dominated the lives and livelihoods of the most poor and vulnerable. The food economy consists of multiple strategies and paths, many of them not dependent on market transactions, but reliant on proximate arrangements for credit, reciprocity, sharing and giving. The links between global conditions and actions and the national economic outlook are direct and strong, but social arrangements play an important part in mediating the links between what happens in the national economy and the situation of households and individuals at the local level.

Price changes are transmitted relatively quickly from global to local markets, but the food economy of the poorest is not always denominated in money terms. In the rural areas there is much reliance on agriculture as well as patronage-based relations for the acquisition of a store of grain for at least part of the year. In urban areas, the poorest rely on various forms of giving or on daily wage labour to acquire basic staple foods. Local factors such as climatic conditions and factional conflict are important in rural areas, while in urban areas strikes, market shut downs and other local or city-wide events can have a more immediate impact on food security than global or national events.

4.2 Changes over three years

The last three years witnessed a rise in food prices followed by stabilisation and then a decline, particularly for staples. While economic growth has increased somewhat, it is not clear if this has translated, as yet, into faster job growth. Social protection systems have not undergone any major changes.

The changes that affect the lives and food security of the poorest are mostly of an idiosyncratic nature – though some of these have linkages with broader economic and political trends. Illness, injury, the loss of a job, finding new employment, rural-urban migration, changing residence within the city, changes in family composition, family disputes and disruptions in social arrangements, are the types of events which have driven changes in the lives of our respondents. In many cases these events or circumstances are correlated. The loss of a job, for example, can be associated with domestic violence and family breakdown. A dispute with a better-off relative can lead to the loss of livelihood and other forms of support, and even eviction from rent-free accommodation. Migration to the city for a job can be associated with the breakdown of a family, its later consolidation, and then its dispersal once again. A family member gaining public sector employment can lead to immediate improvements in creditworthiness and a rise in social stature among close relatives. All of these are actual examples from our respondents over the period that we have visited them.

The ability of the local patron in the rural site to intercede on the behalf of some of his clients for public sector jobs, by virtue of his position as a legislator, is part and parcel of the broader political-economy of patronage at the national and sub-national levels. The fact that individuals from among our respondent household got jobs in the security sector is in line with national and sub-national priorities – new government jobs are more likely to be created or filled in the police and security forces than in other departments.

There was a perception of a rising trend of women doing paid work within and outside the home. While this was mostly attributed to increasing hardship or economic need, some of the work that women reported did also suggest rising demand. There were implications for the burden of unpaid care work within the home as well as the choice of foods consumed by households. These trends are not captured, yet, in the broader national narrative of economic growth or labour market changes.

4.3 Unsafe and processed foods

This year's special topic focused on unsafe and processed foods, which include food that is purchased and consumed outside of the household, packaged or processed food and cooked food that is received as gift or as charity.

Analyses of household expenditures on different food groups in Section 2 showed an increasing trend of purchasing readymade food items over the years. This was in line with the perception of the respondents from our targeted households and focus groups, who noticed a trend towards out-of-kitchen foods. Some of the factors linked to the rise in the consumption of out-of-kitchen foods were linked to the greater penetration of markets through television advertising, peer group pressures and innovative packaging. In poor localities the market for many packaged foods was dominated by unbranded products or imitation brands manufactured by unregulated companies.

Children from even the poorest households were consuming low cost snacks available at shops and the street on a daily basis. This had more to do with socialization rather than hunger or lack of availability of

food at home. In both urban and rural areas, it was common to find that local outlets for such snacks had become established spaces for recreation where children and adolescents thronged.

Taste, convenience and cost were cited as reasons for the increasing consumption of out-of-kitchen foods. In some ways these three reasons were interconnected. Households with busy adults (particularly if women were engaged in paid work) found it expedient to give pocket money to children to keep them entertained with cheap and popular out-of-kitchen snacks they could buy from local shops. Cost and convenience in terms of time-saving were also cited as common reasons for the increasing use of foods such as rusks for some meals.

5 CONCLUSION

Global economic events and trends are transmitted quickly to the national economy and manifested in price levels, inflation, and growth. The poor and the vulnerable appear to be insulated from these events and trends due to the mediating effect of the local food economy which consists of monetized but also non-monetized transactions and transfers including self-production, in-kind payments, wage labour, sharing of food between households, charity and begging. Some trends, such as the increasing prevalence of women's paid work noticeable among poor communities, might be driven by global processes but are not yet part of the broader national economic narrative.

The insulation from wider economic shocks and prices is not surprising if the food economy, and to a great extent the social networks, of the rural and urban poor are constructed around the need to avoid hunger. We have shown, moreover, that vulnerability to hunger among the poor is driven by challenges to and breakdowns (usually temporary) in the food economy. Local economic and social conditions, inter-personal relations and idiosyncratic shocks lead the factors associated with food insecurity, which the poor see exclusively as the risk of hunger rather than a broader concern about the quality of the diet.

There is social and market segmentation too with respect to food quality, particularly but not only in the consumption of out-of-kitchen foods. Lower quality products are sold in poorer localities, which is driven by demand as well as supply factors. The poor knowingly choose lower quality produce because it is cheaper. Retailers and manufacturers specifically market products of lower quality in poorer localities.

5.1 Implications for people living in poverty

While the food economy of the poor, which includes not only livelihood strategies but also social networks, provides protection from chronic hunger it has three sets of salient implications. First, vulnerability to hunger never really goes away and individuals and household do experience temporary bouts of reduced staple consumption. Second, the food economy of the poor holds individuals and households in economic, social and political situations which they might otherwise opt out of. Mostly avoiding hunger, while remaining vulnerable to it, restricts options in all spheres of life, including intra-household relations. Third, the overriding focus on avoiding hunger means that there remains a significant segment of the population for which concerns such as dietary diversity and the consumption of nutritious foods assume a lower priority.

5.2 Implications for institutions

The payment modality of the main social protection programme of the federal government (BISP) is based on quarterly payments. Hunger and food insecurity as experienced by the poorest are at moments of crisis triggered by seasonality, individual or household contingencies such as ill-health or injury, loss of job, and disruptions in intra-household and wider social relations. While the food economy of the poor generally ensures the avoidance of hunger, it does not fully insure them against a hungry day. The design of formal social protection systems needs to better reflect these realities. The appropriate answer may well not be the redesigning of the cash transfer programme, but other more direct interventions that insure individuals against hunger. Insurance against hunger through the formal social protection system can significantly alter the food economy of the poor, and allow them to greater choices to pursue their well-being in the economic as well as social spheres.

Subjectively, poor individuals and households focus primarily on the avoidance of hunger as the measure of food security. Insurance against hunger can allow for a more encompassing approach to food security which focuses not only on the acquisition and consumption of basic staples but on nutrition and health diets.

There is need for much greater attention to out-of-kitchen foods, particularly manufactured ones, not only for issues of food safety and quality, but also as potential openings for pro-nutrition policy interventions. Presently, the data on which much of poverty and food consumption analysis are based are not attuned to the possibility that out-of-kitchen foods play any significant role in individual diets. The consumption and expenditure on out-of-kitchen foods is likely to under-estimated in household budget surveys. Qualitative results indicate that various types of out-of-kitchen foods are widely consumed by adults and children alike, and some foods such as rusks constitute entire meals for the whole household. The safety and quality of food in general, and out-of-kitchen foods in particular, needs regulatory attention as well as public awareness. The popularity, let alone acceptance, of manufactured food like rusks among the poor implies that such foods might be effective vehicles not only for insuring against hunger but introducing micronutrients into the diets of the poor and the vulnerable.

Women's increasing involvement with paid work needs to be understood better and taken into account in the design of social protection and food security policies including interventions which might rely on convenience foods.

REFERENCES

Balagamwala, M. and Gazdar, H. (2014) 'Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility: Evidence from Two Communities in Pakistan'. Working Paper 449, IDS

Elson, D. (2010) 'Gender and the Global Economic Crisis in Developing Countries: A Framework for Analysis', *Gender and Development* 18.5: 201–12

Espey, J.; Harper, C. and Jones, N. (2010) 'Crisis, Care and Childhood: The Impact of Economic Crisis on Care Work in Poor Households in the Developing World', *Gender and Development* 18.2: 291–307

FAO, *Food Security Indicators, www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/ess-fadata/en* (accessed 22 May 2015)

FBS (2009) *Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2007-08*, Islamabad: Federal Bureau of Statistics (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics)

Heltberg, R.; Hossain, N.; Reva, A. and Turk, C. (2012) 'Coping and Resilience during the Food, Fuel, and Financial Crises', *Journal of Development Studies* 49.5: 705–18

Pakistan Ministry of Finance (2014) *Economic Survey of Pakistan 2013-14*, Islamabad: Government of Pakistan

Pakistan Ministry of Finance (2013) *Economic Survey of Pakistan 2012-13*, Islamabad: Government of Pakistan

PBS (2015) *Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2013-14*, Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2015) *Macro Economic Indicators,* Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2014b) *Macro Economic Indicators,* Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2014c) *Monthly Review on Price Indices*, Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2013) *Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2011-12*, Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2013b) *Macro Economic Indicators,* Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2013c) *Monthly Review on Price Indices*, Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2012b) *Macro Economic Indicators,* Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2012c) *Monthly Review on Price Indices*, Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PBS (2011) *Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) 2010-11*, Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

State Bank of Pakistan (2014) *Annual Report 2013-2014*, Karachi: State Bank of Pakistan

WFP Pakistan (2014a) *Pakistan Market Price Bulletin – December 2014 Issue,* Islamabad: Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Unit, World Food Programme Pakistan

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by the Institute of Development Studies under ISBN 978-1-78118-279-6 in December 2015.

OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in 94 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. For further information, visit www.oxfam.org

IDS

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a leading global institution for development research, teaching and learning, and impact and communications, based at the University of Sussex. For further information, visit www.ids.ac.uk

Funded by

UKaid from the British people

Department for International Development

Irish Aid
Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha

IDS Institute of Development Studies

GROW FOOD. LIFE. PLANET.

OXFAM

www.ids.ac.uk www.oxfam.org