

Human wellbeing in South Asia: an empirical analysis based on macro economic indicators affecting food security

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Food security at the national level, which is characterized by adequacy and stability of food supplies and physical and economic access to food on the part of vulnerable sections of the population, is considered as an important element in deciding the “magnitude” and “character” of socio-economic development of a country. If these components are lacking in a certain society, it leads to a situation of “food insecurity” – the condition in which people lack basic food intake to provide them with energy and nutrients for a fully productive life.

The purpose of this study was to examine empirically the dynamic impact of a number of important macro economic indicators that reflect the status of development of a country, including the growth and productivity of agriculture sector and its relative contribution to the economy, adult literacy rate and unemployment rate, and income inequality on the status of food security, which was measured by taking the percentage of undernourished population of the country. The case of South Asian region was examined using the panel data from 5 countries in the SAARC region (i.e. Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) for the period of 1990 to 2004. The data were analyzed using *Stata* statistical software, where the variables were specified in a Log-Log model and both the Random and Fixed Effect models were tested with the Hausman test.

The results show that these indicators have a significant relationship with the status of food security in the South Asia. The outcome of analysis suggests that individual countries in the region, being one of the hotspots of food insecurity in the world, must work individually as well as together through regional cooperation to develop their agricultural sectors. Also, they must build up the capacity of their human resources since that would have a positive and significant impact on wellbeing of people in South Asia. For that purpose, the role of regional cooperation's like SAARC and the activities and responsibilities of market and non-market (government/ NGOs) organizations that work on agriculture and other sectors must be defined and supported explicitly.

Key words: Agriculture sector, Food security, Malnutrition, Poverty, Socio-economic development, South Asia

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