**Sustainable agriculture**

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Part - II

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Pakistan needs to look at possible actions which can help the country achieve sustainable agriculture and food security.

All our actions should have the sole objective of lifting our productivity levels. Some suggested actions are as follows: First, solutions should be home-grown. Agriculture is the most dynamic of all the sectors in the country. But it is laced with more uncharted territories than any other sectors. It is also quite vulnerable to climate change.

In their book ‘Fixing the Climate’, writers Sable and Victor say: “In climate change and decarbonization – as in education, health care, and the provision of electric power – the problems are general, but the solutions are always local. What works in one place doesn’t work the same way or at all in another. Innovations at the frontier have to be adapted and sometimes transformed to suit the peculiarities of the place in point.

“And because place-specific conditions are constantly changing, local adaptation rarely comes to an end. This ongoing adaptation of innovations to the economic, social, and political circumstances of a particular place contextualization.” Contextualization is the starting point for finding any effective and efficient specific tailor-made solutions at both macro and micro levels.

Second, solutions should be all-inclusive and fully encompassing. Climate action and sustainable agriculture need 360-degree inclusivity and collaboration. This should start from the government’s direct intervention and go all the way to giving leeway to the private sector to create markets and to the provincial and federal governments recognizing the role and contribution of the middleman, research institution and experts.

Human development needs to become a major driver of policymaking in the context of food security. Each sub-sector – livestock, farming, aquaculture, etc – requires specific attention and policies for nurturing these sectors and enhancing their contributions to the economy.

Third, efforts to control food waste can be strengthened through setting up community-level storage facilities and distribution networks, coupled with educational campaigns to promote responsible consumer behaviour. This approach ensures that the food produced reaches its intended consumers, reducing waste and enhancing overall food security through the use of technology as is being done in Europe and the UK.

Food waste technologies cover a broad spectrum. Investors are showing a keen interest, especially in ventures like biogas production from food and agricultural waste. But it is important to recognize that while science can make strides, changing human behaviour remains a tough nut to crack.

As we navigate this journey, we learn that the challenge lies not only in technological innovation but also in fostering a shift in our mindset towards food consumption and waste. Fourth, lastly and most importantly, we need a thorough review and fixing of subsidies. We need to pay immediate attention to this flaw – moving away from trickle-down to bottom-up approach in the transmission of subsidies (targeted subsidy through the use of the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) scorecard).

With this paradigm shift in subsidy allocation, agriculture by default becomes the biggest beneficiary, and rightly so, as the most poor and vulnerable are attached to this sector. The subsidies should be aimed at providing advice to farmers and then following through on the right amounts and quality of chemicals and inputs, particularly seed, in case of crops, and dietary, in case of livestock, with the aim of achieving maximum productivity.

The concessional financing facilities and insurance offering must be revisited and restructured in consultation with the relevant stakeholders to make them even more meaningful. Budget allocation towards R&D is an absolute must for better seed production and other inputs like liquid chemical injection through drip irrigation.

It is important to note that climate and to some extent agriculture and its various branches are by and large a socialist agenda, particularly in a country like ours, where markets are still not fully developed. On a side note, it is essential to point out that the developed OECD countries, whose productivity and markets are much mature, gave an average annualized agriculture subsidy of $349 billion during 2020-22 with a purpose to shield their consumers from high inflation and farmers from farm losses, thus creating market distortions especially for the Global South.

Agriculture, is therefore, intricately and directly connected with people and nation’s welfare, not only nationally but also internationally, in comparison to perhaps any other sector. Therefore, government support and subsidies will remain an integral part for quite some time to achieve better productivity and overall economic good.

The government should not shy away for supporting the sector, But it should do so in a smart and targeted manner, through a private-public partnership framework to achieve much-needed sustainable agriculture and food security for the people of Pakistan.

Concluded

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