

By Maryam Naseer

**T**HOUGH the colonial masters left a good model of agricultural research behind them, it is a pity that successive policy-makers at the helm the country's affairs failed to keep pace with the times and agricultural research – the importance of which cannot be overstressed in a country like Pakistan – gradually became next to nothing at least at the official level.

All the provinces of Pakistan are naturally blessed with fertile soil, minerals, natural resources, suitable environment and favourable weather. The fertile province of Punjab has always been the breadbasket of Pakistan. Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are also contributing well towards the national economy.

The growth in our agricultural sector is being stagnated by inefficient and outdated farming and production techniques, ineffective use of land and water resources, resulting in poor hygiene and low food standards. The main reason of poor agricultural growth is the lack of research.

Agricultural research is the key to food security, but we have hardly paid any attention to it. As said earlier, the British left a good model of agricultural research for Pakistan. Way before Partition, they set up Cotton Research Station at Multan, Agriculture College in Faisalabad and Basmati Research Station in Kala Shah Kaku.

After independence, the system effectively played its role in agriculture development in rural areas by generating farm-specific high-yielding and low-cost technologies. The system, however, lost its coherence and coordination among various intuitions. This badly affected the flow of innovations in the agriculture sector, and, resultantly, the sector lost its competitiveness in the national and international markets.

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**If we knew what it was we were**

# The search for re

**With minimal research, the country is not headed in the right direction. The danger of climate change is causing nightmares to scientists around the globe who are working on improving resistant varieties to ensure food security. Pakistan should keep in mind the losses that it suffered due to heavy rains and floods in the last two years**

Other problems included lack of planning and monitoring mechanisms, dwindling research investments, increasing share of research budget being spent on salaries, missing international collaboration, and the lack of incentive to be innovators.

Pakistan has enormous potential to significantly increase its agricultural production, but the growth is being stagnated by inefficient and outdated farming and production techniques, ineffective use of land and water resources resulting in poor hygiene and low food standards.

The government, like its predecessors, has not accorded any priority to research. Instability and changing policies are major obstacles in promoting research. Agricultural research can alleviate poverty and hunger, and, ideally, the government should strive to develop a research culture in the country with an emphasis to work hand in hand with the private sector.

Scientists should be given resources, infrastructure and incentives to work for the prosperity of the stakeholders. The typical thought among the

*Agriculture Research*



More research means a better future for the entire nation

product for those who know its worth. We are willing to lose billions crop losses, but remain reluctant to spend a part of it on develop resistant varieties. We must ensure national and international collaboration in research projects.

The public-private partnership approach in research has not been very encouraging in Pakistan. The private sector has the fear of the much-maligned typical attitude of government institutions, so they feel uncomfortable working with them. The government has to develop strategic plan, sign MOUs with private and international departments as well as build their confidence.

The danger of climate change is causing nightmares to scientists around the globe. They are working hard to develop resistant varieties to ensure food security. Pakistan should keep in mind the recent losses due to heavy rains and floods in the last two years. Apart from agriculture, the livestock sector has also suffered a lot in these calamities, as a large number of animals became the victim of floods, while many others died due to the non-availability of fodder.

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It is abundantly clear from the experiences of China, Brazil, Turkey and many other countries that without going for innovations, no country can progress and move forward. We need to strengthen our own local research system and import technologies where local innovation takes too long or is too costly. It will save us billions of rupees that we spent annually for the import of technology which

is not always needed or serve the purpose in our own specific environment.

We have qualified scientists, resources, cheap labour, naturally-blessed environment, the need of the hour is to focus on output-oriented research, enhance international collaboration and involve the industry so that we can increase our productivity.

Food war may be the next world war among many countries. Food security is on top agenda of every nation as it is necessary for our existence. We should spend more on research and development (R&D, and encourage scientists at all levels. Practical themes have to be prioritised and a strict monitoring and evaluation process should be observed during the implementation of any project.

The government should make transparent monitoring and strict actions should be taken against institutions showing irresponsible behaviour. These practices have to be taken very seriously if we want to revolutionise the agriculture sector along scientific lines.

Importing goods without working on increasing the yield is an attitude that has caused the country massive losses. The pace of inflation and shades of poverty can be minimised only when we pay practical attention on agricultural research. Let us not commit the crime of turning our backs on our future generations by ignoring agriculture research. ■