

Institutional Failures and Reform Pathways: Addressing the Governance Deficit in Food Security Policy

Shoaib Akhtar^{1,*}, Muhammad Asad ur Rehman Naseer¹, Ashir Kamal¹ & Maryam Nawaz¹

¹Department of Agricultural Business and Marketing, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

*Corresponding author's email: shoaibakhtar@bzu.edu.pk

Abstract

Pakistan faces a paradox typical of most developing economies of a nation that has significant agriculture resources and a population traditionally dependent on agriculture, and yet, food insecurity has become entrenched in the system and is being reproduced by institutions. In 2024, Pakistan is ranked at 109th position out of 127 countries on the Global Hunger Index, where 36.9 per cent of the population is facing moderate or severe food insecurity and 82 per cent are unable to afford a healthy diet. This chapter contends that this crisis is not just limited to lack of resources or deficit in food production but is due to the cumulative failure of food security governance, overlapping constitutional mandates after 18th constitutional amendment, deep-rooted corruption in procurement institutions like Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO), chronic under investment in agricultural research and development, and the persistent failure to translate policy design into implementation. The chapter constructs a typology of institutional failure in four dimensions (design, coordination, accountability and adaptation) based on comparative evidence from Bangladesh, India, Brazil and Ethiopia and then outlines a multi-horizon reform pathway that is structured around Pakistan's political economy. The analysis proposes that durable food security in developing countries is an institutional accomplishment, and that, without ongoing governance reform, technical and financial interventions have limited lasting impact with each successive intervention having a smaller effect.

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1. Introduction: The Governance Paradox in Food Security

Food security as defined by its four cornerstones of availability, access, utilization, and stability (FAO, 2006) is much more of a political and institutional than an agronomic issue. In the developing world, governments have committed to ambitious food security agendas, signed international agreements such as Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and invested heavily in agricultural and nutrition initiatives. But there is a worrying disconnect between policy aspirations and policy impacts. This gap is not coincidental but is structurally created and reinforced by governance shortcomings on all levels of the food system in countries with weak institutional environments.

Pakistan is a great example of such a paradox. It has one of the best lands for agriculture in Asia, an ancient system of irrigation based on the Indus River Basin, and a farming community that in the past ensured self-sufficiency in cereals. Despite these assets, Pakistan in 2024 is ranked 109th out of 127 countries according to Global Hunger Index (WFP, 2024) which was 88th in 2020. Almost half of the average household monthly spending is on food, while 82 percent of the population is unable to access food that is nutritionally adequate (WFP, 2024). The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimated that 11.8 million people in the country's three most vulnerable provinces (Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) would be in Phase 4 acute food insecurity from November 2023 to January 2024 (IPC, 2024).

The prevailing narratives highlight climate shocks such as the 2022 floods displacing millions of people and wiping out standing crops, macroeconomic turmoil as the food price inflation stood at 38.2 percent on average in 2023, and a population that grows faster than the agricultural sector's productivity. All of these

explanations have some merit, but they are inadequate. They do not explain why neighboring Bangladesh, which has even fewer natural resources, a higher concentration of people and similar levels of climate change exposure, has seen stunting levels drop sharply over the same period, or why Brazil, once considered a country with endemic hunger, has off its hunger map by 2014. The gap is not so much in the agronomy but in governance.

This chapter provides a systematic analysis of the failure of the food security architecture in Pakistan and, in keeping with the theme of policy reform in the rest of the book, conceals actionable directions for institutional change. The analysis is organized into five substantive parts: a theoretical perspective on the nature of institutional failures, an empirical account of the Pakistani governance deficits, a comparative survey of institutional reform experiences in selected developing countries, a critical look at the political economy constraints and a structured roadmap of institutional reform.

2. Theoretical Framework: Institutional Failures in Food Security Governance

Building on the pioneering work by North (1990) and the extensive work by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), the institutional economics literature has strengthened the case that the rules of the game that shape economic and social life (formal rules, regulatory institutions, procurement regimes) can shape whether individuals or organizations have incentive to promote or undermine the collective welfare. Extrapolated to food security, this tradition implies that hunger is seldom a result of absolute food shortages, but instead of the way in which food is produced, stored and distributed by institutional arrangements, as well as from the absence of or failure to invest in productive activities. Taking this starting point, this chapter uses a typology of four different types of institutional failure that can be discerned at the level of food security systems in developing economies:

2.1. Design Failure

Policies and institutional mandates are poorly drafted, are sometimes contradictory, lack clear authority or are difficult to implement. The food governance system in Pakistan after 18th Amendment is also a design failure as the federal government is keeping 26 out of 39 food ministry functions while ostensibly devolved the food sector to provinces.

2.2. Coordination Failure

More than one institution may have overlapped or competing mandates and not coordinate, resulting in disjointed policy and duplication of efforts. It can be seen as the kind of failure that occurred in the case of cotton, where the responsibility for the policy is split between the textile ministry, fisheries under Ports and Shipping and food safety among various regulatory bodies.

2.3. Accountability Failure

Lack of effective monitoring and control systems can result in rent-seeking, corruption and elite capture undermining the goal of food security. The case of PASSCO procurement scandals, as described in Section 3 below, is a long case of accountability failure.

2.4. Adaptive Failure

Institutions are unable to make the organizational, data or political changes required to adapt the policy to suit the new conditions, be climate change shocks, commodity price fluctuations, or changing nutritional requirements. In Pakistan, R&D Investment in agriculture has been continuously declining, which is a kind of adaptive failure of a particular long-term consequence.

This typology is consistent with the broader literature on state capacity in the Global South (Evans, 1995; Besley & Persson, 2011) and fits with the Pressure-State-Response-Impact (PSRI) framework adapted by the recent food security scholarship that states institutional and governance factors, including corruption, as key structural pressures on food systems. Unlike technocratic strategies for food security reform, it sees governance itself as the target of intervention, rather just a facilitating factor in agricultural development.

3. Pakistan's Institutional Landscape: Anatomy of a Governance Deficit

Pakistan's food security governance architecture is the product of layered historical decisions, constitutional reforms, and political compromises that have, in aggregate, produced precisely the conditions that the typology in Section 2 identifies as conducive to food insecurity. The following sub-sections examine each failure mode as manifested in Pakistan's institutional landscape.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment, which was passed unanimously by the parliament in April 2010, was one of the greatest structural changes in the history of Pakistan since its independence in 1947. It transferred 17 key federal subjects such as education, health and, in theory, food and agriculture to the provinces. The architects of the amendment wanted to overcome decades of over-centralization and revive the subsidiarity principle in Pakistan's governance system (Rana, 2020).

But there was a design error in devolution of food and agriculture that was built into it from the start. Later when MNFS&R was re-established, the federal government kept 26 out of the 39 functions of the previous Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock, and delegated 11 to the provinces (Business Recorder, 2026). This resulted in a partial devolution that left an institutional gap with accountability being weakened and not mentally redistributed. The federal government had the words (food security) but the provincial governments had the responsibility (service delivery), without the financial or technical means.

This outcome was inevitable. Agricultural policy became disjointed and spread between institutional boundaries, which were not necessarily aligned with the functional reality of food systems. The functions of the Cotton regulation shifted to the Ministry of Textile Industry while the fisheries continued to be under Ports and Shipping; the food safety functions moved from one department to another and finally came under one National Agri-Trade and Food Safety Authority (NAFSA), which has also been criticized for having overlapping mandates, inadequate scientific and technical capability, and unclear operational authority (Business Recorder, 2026). According to the Pakistan Business Forum (PBF), in May 2026, policy fragmentation and the lack of a cohesive national agricultural strategy may have contributed to the fallout as cotton production dropped to around five million bales, down from around 12 million bales before the amendment.

Agricultural performance for the decade of the 2010s was also found to be the lowest in the last few decades of Pakistan in terms of agricultural growth rate at 2.2 percent due to the fluctuating performance of major crops (Business Recorder, 2020). This is no accident: it's the natural result of a failure of design at the constitutional level and a coordination failure in implementation.

3.1. PASSCO and the Accountability Failure in Procurement

There is no better example of Pakistan's lack of accountability in food governance than the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO). PASSCO was set up in 1973 to purchase wheat from farmers at the price fixed by Government called Minimum Support Price (MSP), and to hold strategic stocks from which to sell to the deficit Provinces and Armed Forces. As late as 2022, PASSCO was buying several million metric tonnes of wheat every year and was the key player in Pakistan's food reserve system.

PASSCO has also been a place of institutional failure over and over again. In 2024, the Federal Investigation Agency arrested the corporation's former General Manager after it was found out that wheat was being bought from middlemen instead of directly from farmers, a violation of the MSP's supposed protection of farmers. Intelligence reports in Bahawalnagar revealed that records of all 22 PASSCO centers in the district were not complete and that gunny bags (bardana) were irregularly distributed by seven procurement center in-charges (Dawn, 2024). Complainants claimed that around 80 per cent of the gunny bags allotted to 19 procurement centers in Mailsi were allotted illegally to commission agents, ineligible persons and politically connected middlemen at an illegal rate of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 (The Express Tribune, February 2026). The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Multan approved an inquiry in August 2024 into the matter after receiving complaints from farmers and later widened its probe to include 58 PASSCO centers in south

Punjab, where the estimated number of irregularities was found to be over Rs. Profit by Pakistan Today, Feb 2026: 500 million.

The MSP system was supposed to safeguard farmers, but they were systematically cut out of the procurement process. It failed in its original distributional role and was also a means of redistributing agricultural rents upwards towards connected political actors. The government of Pakistan declared in 2025, as part of the requirements of the IMF Extended Fund Facility, that wheat procurement would be terminated and PASSCO would be dissolved (Rural Voice, 2025). This resolution will eliminate a vector of corruption but the distributional impact on smallholder farmers and national food security will need to be carefully managed during the transition period.

3.2. Food Insecurity Statistics: The Data Profile

The key institutional actors in Pakistan's food security system, their mandates and the more common pattern of institutional failures are listed in Table 4.1. This report outlines the main food security and nutrition indicators from 2015 to 2023/24 in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Key Institutional Actors in Pakistan's Food Security Architecture

Institution	Mandate	Key Failure	Governance Level
MNFS&R	Food security policy, research coordination	Overlapping mandate post-18th Amendment	Federal
PASSCO	Wheat procurement & strategic reserves	Systemic corruption, middlemen capture	Federal/Provincial
Provincial Agriculture Depts.	Crop production, extension services	Under-resourcing, political patronage	Provincial
NARC / PARC	Agricultural R&D, seed development	R&D underfunding (<0.5% of Ag-GDP)	Federal
BISP / NSER	Social protection, food access	Coverage gaps, targeting inefficiency	Federal
NAFSA	Agri-trade & food safety regulation	Unclear authority, weak capacity	Federal

Sources: Business Recorder (2026); MNFS&R (2023); WFP (2024); FAO *et al.* (2024).

Table 4.2: Pakistan Food Security and Nutrition Indicators, 2015–2024

Indicator	2015	2020	2023/24
Global Hunger Index Rank	93 / 117	88 / 107	109 / 127
Food Insecurity (Mod. or Severe) %	~28%	~31%	36.9%
Stunting (Children <5 yrs) %	45%	40.2%	~38%
Wasting (Children <5 yrs) %	10.5%	17.7%	~18%
Food Price Inflation (Annual Avg.) %	3.2%	14.6%	38.2%
Agric. R&D Spending (% of AgGDP)	0.49%	0.42%	<0.40%
Population without Healthy Diet %	~70%	~75%	82%

Sources: WFP (2024); FAO *et al.* (2024); IPC (2023); Global Hunger Index (2024); National Nutrition Survey (2018); Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023); Agri Economist (2025).

The trend identified in Table 4.2 is of a decline in just about every measure. The percentage of the population facing moderate or severe food insecurity in Pakistan has increased from about 31 percent in 2020 to 36.9 percent in 2024, as Pakistan's GHI rank has dropped from 88th place in 2020 to 109th in 2024. After holding in single digits through the mid-2010s, food price inflation has jumped significantly to 38.2 percent on average in 2023, squeezing food access of the most economically vulnerable households (Agri Economist, 2025). Agricultural R&D expenditure, which is already far lower than the regional and global averages, continued to shrink as a share of agricultural GDP, thus limiting the sector's ability to adjust to changing circumstances (Legatum Prosperity Index, 2023).

3.3. Land ownership and agrarian structure and adaptive failure

A second facet of institutional failure that has deep implications on food security in Pakistan is the land tenure system. Despite the fact the farming population occupied around 42 percent of the total rural

household population in Pakistan, the land ownership is highly concentrated, with a small group of landowners controlling a large share of the agricultural resources while the majority of the farming households are small farmers with land holdings under five hectares or tenant cultivators (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). There are several institutional implications of this agricultural system. Second, informal and potentially exploitative contracts between tenants and landlords mean that tenant farmers have weak incentives to invest in soil health, water management, and adoption of better practices, as much of the benefit may accrue to the landowners. Such a distortion of property rights and residual returns is a typical institutional impediment to agricultural intensification (Binswanger-Mkhize *et al.*, 1995).

Second, despite the introduction of digital land record systems (LRMIS) in Punjab and other provinces, these are still not fully covered and have been challenged in the courts. Third, smallholders and tailenders in the irrigation hierarchy suffer institutional discrimination in the allocation of water entitlements, which is a direct result of the method of allocation by the provincial irrigation departments based on historical rights that has a direct impact on agricultural productivity and food availability. These structural characteristics of Pakistan's agrarian economy combine with the design and accountability failures mentioned above to create an adaptive capacity deficit, the inability to reconfigure production systems in response to climate shocks, market signals and new nutritional needs. This systemic adaptive failure is witnessed in the serial crises of wheat shortage and surplus and the policy improvisations that ensued.

4. The Developing World: Comparative Perspectives (Reform Experiences).

Systematic comparisons with other developing countries with similar governance shortcomings, and in some instances, significant gains from ongoing institutional reforms, provide further insights into institutional failures in Pakistan. Four comparative cases are discussed in this section: Bangladesh, India, Brazil and Ethiopia.

4.1. Bangladesh: Famine Vulnerability to Nutritional Progress

Given the shared colonial and post-partition history, population density and exposure to climate extremes, perhaps Bangladesh offers the most instructive contrast to Pakistan. In 1971, independence and in 1974, a devastating famine, Bangladesh experienced major institutional breakdown in the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS) in terms of leakage, targeting errors and logistical inefficiency.

Yet, the Bangladeshi reform evolution was different from that of Pakistan, because of continuous investigation on institutions and programmatic innovation. The creation of the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) created an evidence-based policy planning unit which gradually enhanced the targeting and efficiency of food distribution programs. The Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programs established institutional channels of access to food for the chronically poor (World Bank, 2024). Most important, Bangladesh invested in decentralized implementation structures that could connect with the village level realities as opposed to the centrally run implementation systems which are vulnerable and politically weak in Pakistan. The nutritional results are impressive: In Bangladesh, the rate of child stunting dropped from around 55 per cent in 2000 to 28 per cent in 2019, one of the fastest rates of improvements in nutrition in the developing world (UNICEF, 2016). However, this success was not only economic, as Bangladesh's per capita income is still lower than Pakistan's, but by the effectiveness of the institutions in targeting nutrition interventions to the vulnerable people.

4.2. India: Targeted intervention via Aadhaar-based targeting is not part of the National Food Security Act.

The implementation of food security reform in India provides some lessons learnt and examples to inspire Pakistan. Prior to the reform period, India's Public Distribution System (PDS) was plagued by the problem of massive leakage where estimates placed as high as 40 per cent of food grains being sold subsidized end up being diverted from those they were meant to benefit. It was an example of 'accountability failure' (systematic corruption in distribution networks) and 'design failure' (universal rather than targeted coverage).

The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 was a design-level intervention which provided legal entitlements for subsidized food grains for about two-thirds of India's population. In terms of institutions, however, more transformative was the progressive integration of the Aadhaar biometric identification system into PDS delivery, allowing electronic point-of-sale authentication which drastically cut impersonation fraud and diversion of rations to ghost beneficiaries. In the early 2020s, estimates indicate that this technological-institutional intervention has decreased leakage to 15 percent as compared to 40 percent in many states, which has allowed fiscal savings that can be used for program expansion.

The National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) database, which BISP in Pakistan uses, incorporated features of this model and NADRA's biometric capacities hold similar potential for better targeting. The Indian experience shows that institutional reform can lead to significant resource efficiency improvements in the absence of extra spending – a significant political lesson in Pakistan's limited fiscal space.

4.3. Brazil: Fome Zero and the Architecture of Multi-Stakeholder Governance

The shift of Brazil from one of the world's most food insecure countries to one that took itself off the FAO's hunger map by 2014 is considered one of the greatest successes in food security governance in the early twenty-first century. The Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) program, introduced by the Lula government in 2003, was architecturally unique for combining social protection (Bolsa Familia conditional cash transfers), food access (popular restaurants, food banks) and agricultural development (the family farmer procurement programs) in one strategic approach. Most significantly, Fome Zero was accompanied by the formalization of multi-stakeholder governance, in the case of Fome Zero, through the creation of a constitutional multi-stakeholder body the National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA), which afforded civil society organizations, farmer organizations and nutrition experts a formal role in food policy debate alongside the government ministers (Rocha, 2009). This institutional innovation has solved the problem of many food systems in developing countries and absence of a system of accountability whereby citizens can hold food policy to account.

It has serious consequences for Pakistan. There is nothing like an institutionalized mechanism of CSO participation in food policy in Pakistan. The Ministry of National Food Security and Research works in a more administrative than deliberative manner and formal accountability to agricultural communities (smallholder farmers, pastoralists and nutritionally vulnerable urban households) is weak. CONSEA is a model that can be replicated in Brazil and in other countries to provide an institutional innovation that can correct for the lack of accountability as well as create the political leverage to keep reform on track in the face of resistance from elites.

4.4. Ethiopia: Productive Safety Net Program and Community Based Adaptation

Ethiopia, the most food-insecure country in the world for most of the post-war era, is a partial and illustrative success story in terms of institutional reform. The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) was introduced in 2005 with the support of the World Bank, to move away from food aid, which had been the main form of international response to hunger in Ethiopia, to a more predictable and system-based approach to social protection for chronically food-insecure households. PSNP's institutional design was based on the community-based targeting to identify beneficiaries, which was a conscious decision to embed the program in local knowledge and accountability systems not previously used in other top-down programs. As of 2024, the program had reached 8.3 million beneficiaries and was among the largest social protection programs in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2024). Previous program evaluations have shown improvement in household food security, asset accumulation and nutritional status of children (Berhane *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, sustained political stability is a prerequisite for institutional reform, which, as seen in the case of Ethiopia, can be undermined even by well-designed institutional systems, when a conflict erupted in Tigray in 2020 and climate shocks hit more recently. Building resilience and redundancy into food security governance structures is important, as observed in Pakistan during flooding in 2022.

5. Political Economy Constraints on Institutional Reform

An analytically sophisticated explanation of institutional failure should not only explore the technical aspects of designing programs and policies, but the political economy of resistance to reform. Food security governance institutional failures are not simply due to a lack of knowledge among policymakers regarding alternative institutional arrangements the comparison of evidence provided in Section 4 is widely available but rather because the current institutional arrangements provide rents for politically powerful actors who can resist institutional change.

5.1. Agrarian Political Economy and Elite Capture.

Pakistan's agrarian political economy has been influenced by a long-standing partnership of big landowners, rural intermediaries and certain other groups of the political and bureaucratic elite that has historically limited the scope of agricultural reform. Feudal or quasi-feudal land holding structure in the provinces of Sindh, southern Punjab and parts of Baluchistan has resulted in the policy of agriculture often being caught up by the landed elite, whose interests are quite different from those of smallholder farmers and landless laborers.

The wheat MSP and PASSCO procurement system, as detailed in Section 3.2, is a prime example of how elite capture works. The nominal design of the system was to give cultivators smallholder producers price guarantees. In practice it was a system whereby politically connected middlemen and commission agents were able to rent off the procurement system, aided by officials at various institutional levels. The Legatum Prosperity Index (2023) ranked Pakistan 136th among 167 countries overall and 118th on governance and these systemic failures in the domain of institutional accountability.

5.2. Civil-Military Relations and Agricultural Policy

The unique institutional landscape of civil-military dynamics in Pakistan has further complicated governance of food security. The significant military involvement in the agricultural sector (via defense authorities, agribusiness and land allocation) gives rise to institutional interests that do not necessarily fit with that of the food security policy for the general population. In addition, regular changes of civilian governments and the resulting lack of policy continuity have hindered the longer-term institutional investment needed for effective food security governance.

Political commitment is found in every reform literature as a precondition for institutional changes to be successful (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). In those places where political will is limited, hinges on the electoral cycle, and/or prioritizes military-bureaucratic interests, institutional reform is likely to be partial, reversible, and claimed by vested interests before any of its distributional gains can be realized.

5.3. IMF Conditionality and the Reform Paradox

The current IMF extended fund Facility (EFF) agreement under which Pakistan will receive US\$7.11 billion from July 2024 to December 2028 provides an additional dimension to the challenge of institutional reforms. The wheat procurement system has been eliminated and PASSCO is slated for disintegration, both on efficiency and fiscal grounds, but with good reasons, since these institutions have been proven to be dysfunctional (Rural Voice, 2025).

But state withdrawal from agricultural markets happens while replacement institutions are not in place, creating a reform paradox: the removal of the nonfunctional institution does not necessarily generate functional institutions. The farmers of south Punjab, already badly served by PASSCO, are now in a period of transition, where nominally they are no longer protected by farmers' price support mechanisms and the private market structures needed to replace them are not yet fully developed. In similar circumstances in the other parts of the developing world, the same dynamic of austerity-induced institutional withdrawal with no institutional replacement has resulted in food security deterioration (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999).

The challenge of this reform paradox is to think in terms of what the literature in development economics calls 'second-best' institutional thinking: the institutional question is not what is theoretically optimal, but

what is feasible and sustainable in a country at a particular point in history, given the prevailing political economy context (Rodrik, 2008).

6. Reform Pathways: Toward Governance Architecture for Food Security

Based on the theoretical framework presented in Section 2, the empirical analysis of the governance deficit in Pakistan presented in Section 3, and the comparative empirical evidence synthesized in Section 4, a structured multi-horizon reform agenda is presented in this section. The reform roadmap has been structured around three horizons: immediate (0-2 years), medium-term (2-5 years) and long-term (5-10 years) and is based on the political economy constraints identified in Section 5.

6.1. Immediate-Term Reforms: Coordination and Accountability

The most pressing institutional need of Pakistan is the creation of a National Food Security Council (NFSC) with a well-defined inter-ministerial coordination mandate, statutory authority and secretarial independence from MNFS&R. It is recommended that the Council convene the federal and provincial agriculture secretaries, the Finance Division, BISP and civil society representatives in a regularized deliberative forum, similar to the CONSEA in Brazil. It should be empowered to review the PSDP allocations of federal government to food and agriculture on an annual basis on the basis of evidence, produce an annual National Food Security Assessment, and have the authority to recommend PSDP allocations.

At the same time, market-based trading of grain should replace PASSCO-mediated procurement, with a fast and large-scale roll-out of digital safety net mechanisms. The coverage of BISP, which currently reaches around 9.3 million households, should be extended by taking advantage of the NSER data and the NADRA's biometric verification system – the very system that was successfully applied in the PDS reform in India. BISP transfers should consist of a food specific component linked to the price of a nutritionally adequate food basket, thus offering a price-indexed food entitlement, conditional on satisfactory targeting data.

6.2. Medium-Term Reforms: Agricultural R&D, Land Tenure and Nutritional Governance

One of the most significant adaptive failures in the food security system is the chronic under-investment in Pakistan's AgR&D system, which spent less than 0.4 percent of AgGDP, as compared with the recommended level of 1 percent and the developing country average of 0.5 percent (IFPRI, 2022). PARC's institutional mandate needs to be redefined, specifically for climate resistant variety development, soil health management in smallholder settings and water use efficient technologies.

Land tenure reform is politically controversial but is essential for sustainable enhancement of agricultural productivity and food security of smallholders and tenant cultivators. Completing the nationwide Land Records Management and Information System (LRMIS), which is already working in Punjab, is to be seen as an investment in food security and not only as an administrative exercise. A formalizing of the sharecropping contracts, as advocated by Binswanger-Mkhize *et al.* (1995) for similar situations, would start to overcome incentives to under-invest in Pakistan's informal tenancy system.

The nutritional governance system in Pakistan should be strengthened with the establishment of a dedicated National Nutrition Authority with cross-ministerial coordination authority, institutionalizing School Nutrition Program and increasing the mandate of LHP's nutritional counselling. The Lady Health Visitor program in Bangladesh has proved through its experience that health and nutrition workers in the community, working under an institutionalized referral mechanism, can improve child nutritional outcomes in a low resource setting to a great extent.

6.3. Constitutional clarity and climate-smart systems are the two key focus areas for long-term reforms.

If Pakistan's food security structure needs to be sustained in the longer term, the confusion caused by the 18th amendment needs to be addressed. This does not have to imply a re-centralization of the food and agriculture policy, with the principle of provincial autonomy maintaining its constitutional legitimacy and practical value for responsive service delivery. Instead, it demands a clear constitutional settlement in which

the roles of federal and provincial governments in food security governance are negotiated; there are enforceable inter-governmental cooperation obligations; and a formula for federal and provincial allocation of fiscal resources to agricultural investment that matches provincial mandates.

Climate change is structurally distinct from the governance challenges outlined in previous sections and is a qualitative threat to Pakistan's food security: it cannot be addressed merely by institutional reform but can be significantly mitigated by institutional adaptation. Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change and its ranking as the eighth most climate-vulnerable country in the world (WFP, 2024; Khan *et al.*, 2024) necessitates embedding climate-smart agriculture (CSA) principles across the institutional framework of food production, at all levels. This has involved integrating climate adaptation goals into PARC's research program; requiring the Agricultural Departments of the provinces to mainstream climate adaptation extension approaches; and setting up a Climate and Food Security Early Warning System based on the IPC methodology developed through Pakistan's partnership with FAO and WFP.

Table 4.3: Multi-Horizon Reform Pathway for Pakistan's Food Security Governance

Time Horizon	Priority Reform	Lead Institution	Expected Outcome
Immediate (0–2 yrs)	Establish National Food Security Council; mandate inter-ministerial coordination	PM Secretariat / MNFS&R	Reduce federal-provincial policy gaps; single policy framework
Immediate (0–2 yrs)	Digitize procurement & safety nets (BISP expansion, e-targeting)	BISP, ECP, NADRA	Reduce leakage; improve beneficiary targeting accuracy
Medium-term (2–5 yrs)	Reform land tenure; operationalize land record digitization nationwide	Provincial govts. + World Bank support	Smallholder investment security; reduced tenancy exploitation
Medium-term (2–5 yrs)	Raise agricultural R&D to 1% of AgGDP; strengthen PARC mandate	PARC, HEC, MNFS&R	Climate-resilient varieties; productivity gains for smallholders
Long-term (5–10 yrs)	Implement constitutional clarity on food governance (post-18th Amend. rationalization)	Parliament, NFC Commission	Eliminate overlapping mandates; clear accountability chains
Long-term (5–10 yrs)	Scale climate-smart agriculture (CSA); integrate food systems approach	MNFS&R, FAO, WFP	Improved GHI ranking; SDG 2 progress by 2035

Author's synthesis drawing on World Bank (2024), IFPRI (2022), FAO *et al.* (2024), and comparative case evidence.

7. Conclusion

The chapter demonstrates that Pakistan’s food insecurity crisis is fundamentally a governance crisis rather than merely a production or resource problem. While the country possesses considerable agricultural potential, institutional fragmentation, overlapping constitutional mandates, weak accountability mechanisms, corruption in procurement systems, inadequate investment in agricultural research, and limited adaptive capacity have collectively undermined the effectiveness of food security policies. Comparative experiences from Bangladesh, India, Brazil, and Ethiopia illustrate that sustained institutional reforms, evidence-based policymaking, and inclusive governance structures can significantly improve food security outcomes even under resource constraints. The analysis further highlights that technical interventions and financial investments alone cannot generate lasting progress unless they are supported by transparent, coordinated, and accountable institutions. Moving forward, Pakistan requires a phased reform agenda that strengthens federal-provincial coordination, modernizes social protection and procurement systems, expands agricultural research and innovation, clarifies constitutional responsibilities, and mainstreams climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive policies. Ultimately, achieving sustainable food security and meeting SDG 2 will depend on the country’s ability to transform its governance architecture into one that is adaptive, participatory, and resilient. Durable food security is not simply the outcome of higher agricultural output; it is the product of institutions capable of translating resources into equitable, efficient, and inclusive development.

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