



COLUMN

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Effective food security management leads to sustainable development

ACK OF access to adequate food is closely linked to poverty, war, disease, environmental degradation and a host of other issues limit people's access to enough nourishment to live a healthy life. According to the US Department of Agriculture 850 million people in 77 lower-income countries are food insecure across the world. The majority of undernourished people reside in developing countries, most of which are on the continents of Africa and Asia. The growth of the world's population presents the biggest challenge. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), global food production will have to rise 70 per cent by 2050 as the world population expands to 9.1 billion from about 6.8 billion in 2010. Hence, effective food security management is necessary for sustainable development.

The FAO's Food Price Index, rose one per cent in February 2012. The increase in the February Index was mostly driven by higher prices of sugar, oils and cereals while dairy prices fell slightly after a marked rise in January. At its current level, the Index was 10 per cent below its peak in February 2011. Increased imports and plunging freight rates have also been felt in the world markets since the beginning of 2012. This, combined with unfavourable weather conditions in major exporting countries has supported world prices in recent weeks.

Without strong adaptation and mitigation measures climate change will reduce food crop yields by 16 per cent worldwide over the next fifty years. It is likely that price and yield volatility will continue to rise as extreme weather continues, further hurting livelihoods and putting food security at risk. We can no longer look at food security, poverty and climate change separately. Climate-Smart Agriculture is a driver for green growth. There are opportunities to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and increase soil carbon sequestration while still helping meet food security objectives.

The key measures to promote food security include "integrating food security and sustainable agriculture into both global and national policies, raising the level of agricultural investment, sustainably increasing agricultural pro-



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duction while reducing the environmental impact. Assisting vulnerable populations to adapt to climate change and food insecurity, reshaping food access and consumption patterns, ensure basic nutritional needs are met, reducing the amount of food lost or wasted in production and establishing comprehensive, shared and integrated information systems to track changes in land use, food production and climate change."

For the GCC states the wake up call for food security was the 2007-2008 global food price crisis. Rising oil prices, increasing demand for biofuels, and trade restrictions drove up food prices. GCC are classified by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation as suffering from absolute water scarcity. The GCC states, however, are

drawing several times over their natural replenishment rates. As a result, water reserves are becoming saline and depleted.

In recent times the GCC states are working on various measures in relation to food security. Kuwait and Bahrain have given cash handouts and free food rations to nationals, the UAE has managed to temporarily freeze the consumer prices of major commodities. The GCC states have also begun to plan and debate the need for longer-term strategic food reserves: Abu Dhabi is planning a 6-month reserve and Saudi businesses have called for a similar one.

Food consumption will reach 51.5 million tonnes by 2015, growing at a CAGR of 4.6 per cent over the period 2011-15, while the food consumption per capita

70%
production of food will have to rise by 2050

will increase at a CAGR of 2.1 per cent over the period 2011-15. Food consumption in Qatar is projected to grow at 6.3 per cent during 2011-15. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), population in the GCC region is likely to increase further and cross the 50 million-mark by 2020 from the current level of 40.6 million. When it comes to food sufficiency, due to water shortage and lack of arable land, the GCC countries need to import almost 90 per cent of their food requirements. Due to high dependence on imports, the region is also susceptible to external food price shocks

The Qatar National Food Security Programme (QNFSPP) is currently developing a long-term strategy that will enable Qatar to increase its domestic food production significantly in the coming decades and strengthen the security of its remaining imports. Developments are being focused in four key areas including renewable energy, agricultural development, water management and food processing. Renewable energy in the form of solar desalination is being placed at the forefront of QNFSPP's plans. In addition to helping Qatar reduce its carbon footprint this will reduce the country's dependence on non-renewable hydrocarbon resources.

World-class research and development centres are being established to develop and test the technology in Qatar. The water from these sustainably powered desalination plants will be used in agriculture and used to recharge the depleted aquifers in Qatar.

The writer is the Group CEO at Doha Bank. Views expressed by the author are his own and do not reflect the newspaper's policy