

## CONCEPT NOTE

Multiple crises disrupted the global food system in 2022. These include the protracted COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, civil unrest, and political instability, the growing impacts of climate change, and the global repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war. Traditional crisis response focuses on humanitarian and emergency food aid, but a more systematic and sustainable approach is required to address more frequent, compounding, and extended crises, and build greater resilience to food system shocks. Many tools and innovations are already available to predict, monitor, and respond to crises, as well as to govern long-term resilience and equity, though more solutions need to be explored. Identifying the most promising options and integrating them into a more permanent response to food crises can mitigate the short- and long-term impacts of shocks to food systems.

To contribute to this critical effort, the 2023 *Global Food Policy Report – Rethinking Food Crisis Response*, draws on the wealth of evidence built over the years by colleagues at IFPRI and other centers of excellence on policies and programming that can reduce hunger and poverty and promote sustainable development and women's empowerment, including during the times of crises. The thematic chapters of the report look at critical tools and approaches for better crisis response. The section on South Asia considers how crises have affected the region in recent years, and how these developments signal new challenges and opportunities.

### **Vulnerability of Food Systems and Food Security**

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a serious blow to the strong economic and social performance maintained by South Asia for two decades. As the regional economy struggled to recover from the pandemic, further shocks contributed to higher prices and disrupted the food production and distribution systems. The recovery and development of regional food systems face multiple challenges. Although the spill over effects from the Russia-Ukraine war on the region was limited, South Asia has been affected by the global rise in food, fuel, and fertilizer prices. Food prices have risen sharply, contributing to food insecurity. In September 2022, the year-on-year consumer inflation rate for food was 66 percent in Sri Lanka, 36 percent in Pakistan, and about 8 percent in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Inflation in Pakistan and Sri Lanka is attributed mainly to macroeconomic instability and mismanagement, especially the sharp devaluation of their currencies, and the fertilizer ban in Sri Lanka.

Climate change is another significant threat. Diverse geophysical settings and climatic conditions make this region one of the most vulnerable to various environmental shocks. Natural calamities related to climate change have become increasingly frequent over the past two decades, with a corresponding increase in the number of people affected. Several extreme weather events occurred in 2022, compounding other shocks to the region. Record-breaking heatwaves in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, southern Nepal, and Pakistan—which also suffered from devastating floods—posed a serious threat to life, livelihoods, and economies.

Political instability and violence also threaten food security in the region. Since their independence, many South Asian countries have experienced political instability caused by civil wars and ethnic and sectarian conflicts. As a result, a sizable number of people have been displaced.

## Possible Options to Deal with Food Crises

During recent crises, food systems in South Asia proved to be resilient in many ways, and a range of promising approaches have been tried out to promote greater resilience along with other development goals. Understanding these strengths can help stakeholders rethink the way forward and build on what works, as they respond to new crises. In this context, panel discussions on various aspects of *'Building Resilient Food Crisis Response in South Asia'* have been planned for June 19-20, 2023, during the South Asia launch of the 2023 GFPR.

The major objectives of the panel discussions include the following:

- Identify gaps in the current monitoring systems and add new processes to existing systems that allow for faster identification and responses to food crisis situations in South Asia.
- Suggest mechanisms to support accountable governance, effective institutions, and policy programming that can facilitate the long-term resilience of food systems in the region.
- Examine the effectiveness of different humanitarian assistance approaches and anticipatory action programs for protecting food and nutrition security — particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- Understand how economic vulnerability affects different population groups in South Asia (including women, children, elderly, disabled persons, and other vulnerable groups) and how to develop social protection systems to be more targeted and shock responsive.
- Assess repurposing existing investments to help expand and prioritize efficient crisis response funding and leveraging private sector funds to bolster investment in long-term resilience.