

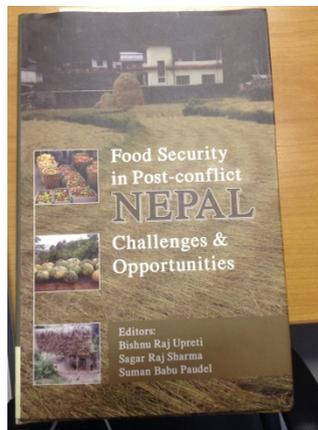
Food Security in Post-Conflict Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities

Bishnu Raj Upreti, Sagar Raj Sharma and Suman Babu Paudel, eds.

New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2016

ISBN: 978-81-87393-24-5

168 pp.



In the preface to this volume, the editors note that, under the interim constitution of 2007, a fundamental right of the Nepali people is the ‘right to food (p.5).’ Consequently, efforts to rebuild the country and its economy after a decade of conflict and then the devastating earthquakes of 2015 require a focus on food security – the situation in which all the people of a country, all of the time, have access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and which meets their food preferences for a healthy and active life (FAO, 1996). It does not matter whether the food is produced in the same country or not but it does mean that the country

involved has sufficiently efficient distribution networks and market mechanisms to ensure that food reaches everybody when it is required (Pinstrup-Anderson, 2009).

Food security depends on a range of different factors, including but not limited to the ability of farmers to grow enough food. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that food in excess of farm household use is distributed in time and in suitable formats to those people who need to buy and eat it and excess can be stored until required. When markets become involved, other problems take over: “Multi-national and national corporations influence production systems, changes in food habits, food composition, and control food supply chains by commoditization and privatization of resources. Commoditization and privatization processes create dependency, paralyse indigenous food systems, and alter the purchasing capacity of people. From the process, people should gradually lose their autonomy to decide what to grow, what to cook, and what to eat (Upreti & Butler, 2016).”

Clearly, there are numerous problems in respect to trying to ensure food security in Nepal and these can be overlapping and be over-determined. Perhaps the single most significant factor is the lack of infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure. Much of the infrastructure that did exist had been destroyed during the civil war, along with trust and cohesion within society. The insurgency mounted by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN(M)) received much of its support in the countryside and the response by the army often destructive. There was a positive correlation between places of unrest and places of food insecurity. Complicating this situation is the extensive system of class and caste systems and the great variety of ethnic groups in the country. Some communities but not all occupy locations where subsistence agriculture is practicable but others do not. The long, open border with India to the south means that there is

always an incentive, especially for men, to migrate for labour to earn some cash, perhaps on a seasonal basis. Poor families suffer problems with debt and a particular problem occurs when it is time to marry a daughter, since the provision of a suitable dowry can be a ruinous expense.

These factors can all act in concert as a form of intersectionality. In “Gendered Dimensions of Food Security in Nepal,” Yamuna Ghale elucidates how this takes place in practice: “The nature and form of discrimination intensifies and grows more complex when girls and women search for opportunities beyond the household responsibilities. For an example, a *dalit* girl or a woman suffers from gender-based discrimination with the family. When they come out of household to pursue out-of-home opportunities, they face caste-based discrimination from the community. When women cross certain boundaries ... they have to multiple and intersecting discriminations in the name of gender, caste, class, educational background, and place of origin.” Food security exists within this context: women in food insecure situations are prevented from taking innovative actions to try to improve their circumstances or at least face several forms of discrimination if they try to do so. Ghale concludes that food insecurity has become a more severe problem for women because of the out-migration of men, climate change and market-led agriculture.

In “Improving Markets and Trade Policy for Food Security,” Nirmal Kumar Bishokarma adapts his doctoral research to indicate the extensive list of problems preventing improvements in Nepal’s agricultural sector. These include informal trade with India, limited harnessing of comparatively advantaged sectors, lack of transport agreements, phytosanitary standards, information gaps, import tariffs, bandhs and closures and so forth. There is a long list of such problems but a rather shorter list of ideas as to how to solve

them. In the concluding chapter, “Agricultural Productivity and Food Security: Challenges and Opportunities,” Babar Shahbaz, Ghazamfor Ali Khan and Muhammad Iftikar call for a transformation in the agricultural sector: “A paradigm shift in the overall vision of agricultural development is required to move beyond increasing crop yields to a more holistic food security and livelihood-centric approach.” Few people would, it is hoped, disagree with this but, at the household level, what does this mean other than better extension services and inputs provided by local government officials unable to do much more than they already do?

Overall, this is a useful and informative book based on problems which are, quite possibly, too difficult to solve in the foreseeable future. What poor people need, of course, is more money as a necessary but insufficient response to this situation. Whether such money can be provided under the present, perhaps interim political settlement remains to be seen.

References

Bishokarma, N.K. (2016). Improving markets and trade policy for food security. In Upreti, B.R., Sharma, S.R. and Paudel, S.B. eds. *Food security in post-conflict Nepal: challenges and opportunities* (New Delhi: Adroit Books), 129-48.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (1996). *Rome declaration on world food security*, available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>.

Ghale, Y. (2016). Gendered dimensions of food security in Nepal. In Upreti, B.R., Sharma, S.R. and Paudel, S.B. eds. *Food security in post-conflict Nepal: challenges and opportunities* (New Delhi: Adroit Books), 105-28.

Pinstrup-Anderson, P. (2009). Food security: definition and management, *Food Security*, 1(1), 5-7.

Shahbaz, B., Khan, G.A. and Iftikhar, M. (2016). Agricultural productivity and food security: challenges and opportunities. In Upreti, B.R., Sharma, S.R. and Paudel, S.B. eds. *Food security in post-conflict Nepal: challenges and opportunities* (New Delhi: Adroit Books), 149-68.

Upreti, B.R. and Butler, C. (2016), Food security in the conflict and post-conflict context of Nepal. In Upreti, B.R., Sharma, S.R. and Paudel, S.B. eds. *Food security in post-conflict Nepal: challenges and opportunities* (New Delhi: Adroit Books), 15-32.

John Walsh, Shinawatra University