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Agricultural production and food and nutrition security: A South Asian perspective

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Food and nutrition insecurity is the largest single risk factor faced by South Asia despite recent developments as it holds more than 40 percent of hunger in the world. It has become a huge burden for the health of the population in the region. The study examines the role of agricultural production, particularly rice production in improving the region's food and nutrition security. The study was carried out using secondary data gathered from FAOSTAT and World Bank databases. A fixed effects panel regression was carried out using SPSS version 16.0. Results reveal that there is a beneficial role in production of rice on upgrading the nutrition condition of the region. A 1% increase in rice production contributes to 4.77% decrease in prevalence of undernourishment. Other associative factors of nutrition security in the region are GDP per capita and population growth rate. Food availability dimension of food security is examined by using average dietary energy supply adequacy. It was revealed that average dietary energy supply adequacy is significantly influenced by production of rice, GDP per capita, population growth rate, and inflation and government expenditure on agriculture sector. These factors also showed a significant impact on food accessibility examined using the food price index. The results suggest increased agricultural production in the region may contribute to overall economic growth by improving the availability and accessibility of food, which is the foremost step in achieving food and nutrition security. This calls for tailored, systematic and cross sectorial actions across the region to increase production and support vulnerable households to improve the level of national food and nutrition security.

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