

PREPARATORY MEASURES

FOOD INSECURITY: STRATEGIES AND POLICY RESPONSES



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Policies should focus on bigger investments in food availability, accessibility and stability

FOOD insecurity is a serious issue facing households in developing economies.

Although Malaysia is generally food secure at the national level (it was ranked 40th out of 113 countries by the Global Security index in 2018), food insecurity exists at the household level.

The United States Agency for International Development has developed the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale to categorise the prevalence of food insecurity in households. It is as follows.

Food-secure — a household is labelled 'food-secure' when members 'rarely', in the past four weeks, worried about not having enough food;

Mildly food-insecure — the members of the household worry about not having enough food sometimes or often, and/or are unable to eat preferred food.

Moderately food-insecure — the household members sacrifice quality more frequently by having a monotonous diet.

Severely food-insecure — the individuals in the household have to often cut back on meal-size or number of meals.

Studies have documented that households employ a range of coping strategies during times of food insecurity.

These strategies, in the context of food security, can be divided between "income soothing" and "consumption soothing".

Income-soothing strategies mean receiving food from other sources, while consumption soothing points to reducing food intake.

In Malaysia, food insecure households which have more schoolgoing children tend to reduce expenditure on their education.



Food stability also refers to the constant supply of food at the household level in the long term. PIC BY FAIZ ANUAR

Households suffering from severe food insecurity are more likely to adopt both "income soothing" and "consumption soothing" coping strategies.

In order to reduce the incidence of household food insecurity, there are some policy responses that can be considered.

Food availability refers to its physical existence.

At the national level, food availability is a combination of domestic food production and food imports and exports.

The food production sector must become commercially vibrant. This can be achieved by emulating the industrial crop production model where large plantations which are private sector-led co-exist with smallholders.

To stimulate investments, incentives for the private sector must be formulated in a way that the returns in food production are on a par with industrial crops such as oil palm.

The sector can also develop agro-entrepreneurship incubation programmes.

At Universiti Putra Malaysia, participants in such programmes are selected from degree holders in agriculture who are predisposed to entrepreneurship.

They are incubated and successful participants would have

their own farms.

The food sector can also implement a land-use policy to enhance food security.

Rapid urbanisation is also causing food insecurity in cities and urban dwellers are net food buyers. Promoting urban farming and community gardens can reduce urban household food expenditure.

It used to be that agriculture was the provider of food and jobs. The paradigm no longer holds due to climate change, resource depletion and food insecurity worldwide.

The new theme for agriculture is to enhance resource conservation, the environment and to alleviate poverty.

Efforts must be intensified in research in food production, crop and genetic diversity, improved food processing, preservation and marketing.

Research should also be done on household handling of food.

Food supplies should be stabilised through adequate stockholding in the form of strategic security reserves as a first line of defence in emergencies.

Data from SWCorp Malaysia indicated that Malaysians produce 38,000 tonnes of waste per day, and from the pile, about 15,000 tonnes is food waste. About 8,000 tonnes, or 60 per cent, is avoid-

able food waste.

This can be rectified by improving food distribution to the poor by locating centres in areas where they live.

Food utilisation requires a clean physical environment for preparation and storage processes. Food safety can be improved at all levels of the supply chain.

Food stability also refers to the constant supply at the household level in the long-term.

It is also important to minimise external risks such as natural disasters and price volatility.

Compared to the industrial sector, the agriculture sector is exposed to many risks and uncertainties. Thus market risk management should be developed, such as price monitoring and forecasting.

Emergency preparedness should be planned through early warning systems as well as measures to prevent natural disasters such as irrigation schemes and flood-mitigation projects.

In conclusion, in order to cushion the impact of food insecurity on the nation and households, the food policy should focus on bigger investments in food availability, accessibility and stability.

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