



Will India and China have enough to eat?

India and the People's Republic of China must act quickly if they are to have enough to eat over the coming decades.

For the PRC, the biggest challenges come before 2030, when its population is expected to peak, then decline.

India, which will take over the mantle of the world's most populous country around that time, will see its food needs continue to grow for decades after that, especially if it manages to ease the poverty that now afflicts one in five of its people.

The outcome of the efforts in the PRC and India will have consequences for the food supply of Asia and the rest of the world. Their success in meeting their food needs will be especially important to other countries having difficulty feeding their own populations.

Food consumption in the PRC and India will rise by at least 50 percent by 2030, with the consumption of higher-value foods such as meat, dairy, and processed foods rising even faster.

Growth in domestic food supplies in both countries will fail to match the rise in consumption, and the cost of producing food will increase due to scarcer natural resources.

Both India and the PRC have limited farmland, with industry, business, and houses demanding more space. Land values are rising. Areas dedicated to growing food will shrink unless priority is given to agriculture.

The cost of producing food domestically will rise, but global food prices will fall, making imports less expensive. That will result in rising imports in both countries.

If gross domestic product rises fast enough and the PRC and India invest in agriculture while controlling population growth, the two countries will be able to handle the challenges.

The best-case scenario is that the PRC and India will improve global food security, an especially welcome result for those countries where food supplies are at risk.

But a failure to invest in agriculture and improve GDP will mean that domestic food supplies in the PRC and India will decline between 2030 and 2050. Both domestic and import prices will rise and global food supplies will fall.

If the PRC's population begins to decline as expected in the 2030s, that should alleviate some of the pressure, so long as the country makes investing in agriculture a priority alongside raising consumer incomes.

India's challenges will last longer, as its population is expected to continue growing into the 2030s and 2040s. Unlike the PRC, which has made considerable strides in reducing poverty, India still has a large proportion of its citizens who are undernourished.

Raising them from poverty will put more pressure on domestic and imported food supplies; failing to do so will only be worse.

This is part two of an episode based on research done for ADBI by various authors, compiled in Food Insecurity in Asia: Why Institutions Matter. The book was edited by Zhang-Yue Zhou, a professor at the College of Business, Law and Governance, James Cook University, Australia, and Guanghua Wan, an economist at the Asian Development Bank, Manila.