



Land security in Pakistan (guest article by Waheed Jamali)

Land security is social protection!

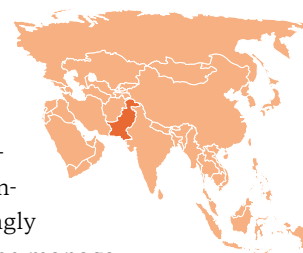


Land is the foundation of our society, but in places like Sindh, Pakistan, unfair land distribution perpetuates poverty. Despite proposed reforms, many farmers remain landless, facing exploitation and vulnerability. Stronger laws and support are needed to ensure equitable access to land and natural resources.

Land is not just soil and vegetation but a foundation of our society, shaping power dynamics, economic opportunities, and social harmony. The urgency of addressing the critical issue of peasants' land rights becomes even more apparent in regions like Sindh province, Pakistan. Here, the lingering effects of historical injustices and unjust institutions continue to dictate land ownership, underscoring the need for immediate action.

In Pakistan, as in many other areas of the world, how land is distributed reflects the consequences of historical events such as colonisation and power battles after colonial control ended. During the British Raj, which lasted over a century, those who backed the British rulers were handed vast parcels of land, often unfairly. In the post-colonial period, these individuals hold property ownership rights, enriching themselves while harming local populations with their power and injustice. Following independence, dishonest government officials and politicians maintained this unequal arrangement, concentrating most of the land in the hands of a tiny minority of individuals. Land, which used to assist rural populations, became a means for a few to maintain power, exacerbating poverty and inequality. Land reforms proposed by the government in the 1970s, which sought to divide land more equally among farmers who did not have it, were never implemented due to politics and selfish interests. As a result, millions of farmers were left landless, trapped in a cycle of poverty and suffering. The absence of land significantly influences Pakistani society, exacerbating poverty, inequality, and social problems. Farmers who cannot obtain their land due to the unjust system miss out on opportunities to earn a living and support their families. This makes it difficult for rural areas to get a proper education, medical treatment, and opportunities to advance in society. Furthermore, when only a few individuals hold the majority of the land, it concentrates authority in the hands of a small number, making democracy challenging to implement effectively.

Farmers without land are locked in a relentless battle against poverty and inequality. Land, a lifeline for economic progress, remains agonizingly out of their reach. The few who manage to secure land leave the rest behind, trapped in a cycle of destitution. Without land, they are more susceptible to the ravages of pollution, climate change, and natural disasters, further exacerbating their plight.



Farmers who do not own land often work on other people's farms, a practice known as sharecropping. Despite its purported fairness, sharecropping usually becomes a tool for landowners to exploit those who toil for them. The existing laws, designed to protect workers, prove inadequate, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. These sharecroppers, the backbone of our food production, face numerous hurdles. They lack secure rights to the land they cultivate, have no say in the disposal of their harvest, and struggle to access necessities such as decent housing, healthcare, education and clean water.

The United Nations has recognised farmers' and rural workers' challenges and stated that farmers should have equal access to land, water, and decent working conditions. Despite this acknowledgement, many Pakistani farmers, particularly in Sindh province, continue to experience land rights issues and are not treated equitably. Addressing these issues requires substantial changes. We need stronger laws and procedures to ensure fair access to land and resources for all. Governments must step up to secure peasants' access to land and support their efforts, creating a level playing field for success. As global citizens, it is our shared duty to champion the rights of peasants and rural workers, ensuring they receive the support and recognition they deserve. We can foster a more just and equitable society by advocating for them, empowering everyone to realise their full potential.

The writer has more than 17 years of experience in sustainable development, land rights, food security, and climate change. He is currently pursuing his PhD at Humboldt University of Berlin and has been awarded the Brot für die Welt Leadership Scholarship.

Assignment

→ Describe the problems in Pakistan and summarise what Waheed is working for.