

Goal 15

LIFE ON LAND

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Country Context

Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the fifth largest population on the planet with 213.6 million people,¹ is a sovereign state situated in a geo-strategic location at the junction of middle East and central Asia. Bereft of Quaid's dream for a welfare state, social development has been off the mark with 22.4 million Out of School Children,² 56.3% Out of Pocket Expenditure in health,³ and 29.5% population living below poverty line.⁴ Exclusionist policy patterns marginalizing governance has led to country ranking at 147th out of 188 in Human Development Index⁵ and 143rd out of 144th in Global Gender Gap Index.⁶ Moreover, marginalization of key strategic sectors has led to funding diversions away from social development, barely allocating 3% of the GDP each for Education, Health and Social protection.⁷

With a GDP of \$279 billion (2017 est.),⁸ Pakistan is categorized as a lower middle-income country. Economic stability has been a constant uphill battle with public debts and liabilities escalating up to 74% of GDP.⁹ The country is ranked at 171 out of 188 countries in terms of GDP per capita (PPP) of \$5,400 (2017 est.)¹⁰ while unemployment stands at 6% without factoring in statistics from informal economy which employs almost 70% of the country's workforce.¹¹ Gini index estimates 30.7% inequality with disparities as wide as the income share held by the lowest 10% at 4% against that of the top 10% at 26% (2013 est.)¹² in Pakistan.

In hindsight, political institutions in their formative years - mainly adapted from the colonial rump - were barely able to withstand extraconstitutional maneuvers¹³ in the absence of a strong nation-building consciousness. This resulted in successive instability of civilian governments followed by political proxies and status-quo representatives, beguiling under democratic pretexts. Weak democratic structures led to the absentia of populace from democratic processes and crippled country prospects in socio-economic and political spheres with implications long into its future. This is evident of the country rankings at 110th in Democracy Index¹⁴ and 20th among Failed States rankings in 2018.¹⁵ Fret over it not though, for Quaid's optimism guides our course:

The story of Pakistan, its struggle and its achievement, is the very story of great human ideals, struggling to survive in the face of great odds and difficulties.ⁱ

Amid international isolationism, national calamities and social fragmentation, democratization of state and social institutions is the moral and political imperative. It is essential that we promote critical education and discourse to bring forth analysis that helps adequately influence policy mandates for a just, peaceful and prosperous Pakistan.

ⁱ M.A. Jinnah, Address to the people in Chittagong, March 23, 1948

Life on Land

The colonial pattern of land distribution is evident in patronized distribution of state-owned land. The government 2009 onwards, awarded almost 7 million acres of land under a 50 or 99-year lease 2009 onwards without taking into consideration caps on land holdings. Inequitable distribution of land continues to be the single most dominant factor for widening inequality traps and increasing food insecurity (currently 48.6% with striking disparities among provinces)¹⁶ in Pakistan. Small farmers, sharecroppers and agricultural workers mostly bear the brunt of land grabbing, with women and socio-economically disadvantaged disproportionately affected by it. Market-led agricultural land acquisition, the new phenomenon of 'land grabbing', has further intensified landlessness in rural areas. Small farmers are being forced through government land acquisition to sell their land at very cheap prices - way lower than market price. The situation reverberates colonial echoes; a 'lawful' deprivation of ancestral land from the natives to push them off the peripheries. There have been several where communities have protested corporate capture of the land in Gwadar, Tharparkar and Karachi to no good effect.

Agricultural Census 2010 revealed that 11% big landlords own 45% of the land while the 89% small farmers own 55% of the land. A small portion of these farmers owns less than 12.5 acres while a big majority owns less than 5 acres of the land.¹⁷ Despite producing almost 60% of the food, less than 3% women have ownership of land in their name.¹⁸ Although the figures are testimony to a massive hegemony, they still do not capture the entirety of landlessness in the country. Of the entire workforce, 47% from the rural areas - mostly involved in agro-economy - are landless tenants (sharecroppers) and agricultural workers (seasonal workers or daily wagers) some of whom are forced into bonded labor and held hostage for generations. Land reforms, in retrospect, have brought about different changes but none of substantive impact in restructuring inequitable land distribution and the associated power patterns. A future peace therefore holds high risk of land-grab unless a truly democratic, pro-people and pro-poor governance arrangement is enacted for socially just redistributive policy outcomes.¹⁹

- 1. Pro-poor policies protecting the rights of the most marginalized need to be enacted to stop structural marginalization of the poorest.**
- 2. Affirmative policy action should be mobilized in favor of small land owners and farmers to restructure land distribution as a socially just redistributive measure.**
- 3. Various land disputes, pertaining to enforced evacuation and accusation of land by powerful entities, must be resolved through fairness and justice in favor of the rightful poor landowners and communities.**
- 4. Hegemonic patterns in agricultural subsidies must be reversed to ensure the access of excluded farmers over those with political patronage.**

5. National priority for food security should be placed ahead of exports; the country's fertile land should ensure in-house food security first and then focus on serving as a food basket for the region and beyond.
6. Dislodged accountability processes must be backed by political will and efficient governance to ensure the protection of citizens' rights.
7. The government must obligate itself to protect the rights of citizens ahead of multi-nationals and corporate lobbies.
8. The government needs to adopt coherent policies for protection of biodiversity in Pakistan

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