

# IN A NUTSHELL

Issue 16  
Apr - Jun 2025

## *Monthly Overview on Political Economy of Agriculture*

### People's Power against Neoliberalism!

After months of agitation in Sindh against the Cholistan Canal Project (often referred to as the Six Canal Project), it has been overturned by the Council of Common Interests, a body that resolves disputes of power sharing between the federation and the provinces. It is clear that when people stand up for their rights and show their mass strength, authorities have to work with the will of the people.

However, the victory of the people on a single issue needs to be examined in context to the neoliberal framework, which is being entirely accepted by the Pakistani State, and has been pursuing agriculture reform policies in the agriculture sector. Not only the federal government but provincial governments have their focus on modernizing the food and agriculture sector, whether it be in context to crops, livestock, or fisheries.

Prime Minister-Shehbaz Sharif has demanded a National Agri-Innovation Plan based on modern technology, emphasizing reforms to the existing seed certification system to promote the use of high-quality seeds, as well as a regulatory framework for the agriculture sector to facilitate technological integration and environmental sustainability. The government has also allocated PKR 3 billion for training of 1,000 young agricultural graduates on modern scientific and technological advancements made by China in agriculture sector. In Sindh, the Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has also stressed for farmers education on latest technology, and modern farming practices, including use of lasers for land levelling. Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has proposed the KP Mountain Agriculture Policy, which emphasizes the unique characteristics of mountain agriculture, focusing on value chain development, and access to markets.

While modern technology is being considered a beacon to increasing economic productivity, such policies clearly disadvantage local farmers, especially the small and landless farmers who in the first place are unable to afford these technologies, and in the second place are largely landless working as sharecroppers or/and as contract farmers. However, they are the majority in terms of number of farmers even-though they have very little land ownership.

For a comprehensive victory for farmers' rights, and people's rights, people power will ultimately have to fight against the entire framework promoting neoliberalism, an agenda which is favored by imperialist powers to gain control over our national resources, and sovereignty.



*It is clear that when people stand up for their rights and show their mass strength, authorities have to work with the will of the people.*

*In a Nutshell is based on our monthly publication Haal Ahwal that can be found on our website [https://rootsforequity.org/?%20page\\_id=593](https://rootsforequity.org/?%20page_id=593)*



## At the Will of the Master!

There are clear indications that for imperialist institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the main agenda is to liberalize agriculture for the benefit of monopoly capital. IMF's long demanded tax reform policy is finally showing its full impact. High cost of production in both the industrial and agriculture sector has already hit both sectors economic output.

Years of increased price of fertilizers in the past years has impacted crop yields, which has decreased by 6.8 percent; overall agriculture sector growth has decreased by 0.56 percent. According to figures reported by a particular farmers' group, farmers have collectively sustained a staggering compound loss of approximately PKR 2,200 billion in wheat alone between May 2024 and May 2025. Apart from wheat, cotton production has also suffered a loss, being 50 percent below target, while showing 34 percent lower production than last year. Similarly, maize production has declined by 15.4 percent and sugarcane production has decreased to 84.24 million tons from 87.64 million tons.

The government seeks to raise economic growth rate to 4.2 percent for the next year, and it believes that this target can be met through pushing for mechanization, modern irrigation methods, providing cheap credit, and increasing investments in the development of new seed varieties to boost yields. It is nothing new that the focus on modernization remains the most sought-after factor for economic growth. However, it is a puzzle how does the government compute its economic growth? The cost of purchasing modern technology will certainly increase the debt burden while at the same time taking away initiatives for self-sufficiency. With decreased production in cotton, a critical raw material for our textile sector, the cost of cotton imports is shooting up. It is being predicted that cotton production decline could inflate the cotton import bill to an alarming \$1.9 billion, which would be massive increase from \$448

million last year.

The federal government, as part of the IMF negotiations, has brought an end to commodity market interventions and stopped providing minimum support prices. After throwing wheat, a staple food of the people to the market, there are now indications that the same is intended for sugar. The government's excuse this time seems to 'to avoid controversies and unjustified price hikes of the commodity in the country.' State failure to protect the interest of the farmers and bowing to the will of the IMF has already produced disastrous result for the agriculture sector, as stated above. The Planning Commission has acknowledged that policy decisions and government measures at both the federal and provincial levels have caused a substantial contraction of 13.5 per cent in major crops this fiscal year. But even then, there seems to be no consideration of changing track towards self-sufficiency and fostering an economic environment which would allow farmers to work towards higher productivity that would not only increase revenues for the nation-state but also provide a higher income growth for the farmers and rural communities.

The government is so bound by the IMF, that it is incapable of waiving an 18 percent sales tax imposed on the local sale of cotton, yarn and grey cloth; it is still awaiting approval from the IMF on such a decision. And at the same time, the federal government has closed down Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (PASSCO), the state-run grain procurement organization. A consultant has been hired to sell off PASSCO's assets, while there is now heavy involvement of private sector parties such as HarvestPlus for investing in the wheat sector.

The result of trade liberalization is evident. The local cotton import bill has gone up to 114 percent in the first 10 months of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, as compared to last year. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, it was a 58.4

percent increase in this period, compared to the same period last year. External markets, climate crisis (a result of climate imperialist policies of advanced industrial countries such as the US and other G7, and other European countries) make production as well as exports unpredictable. Even after facing the debacle in the cotton sector, policy makers are now eying introduction of genetically modified maize crops in Pakistan.

At the same time, rich industrial countries use their might to ignore international trade regulations. An example is of the Trump administration which is set to impose a 29 percent tariff on Pakistani exports. In order to stave off this catastrophe, as the US is its highest export market, Pakistan will be importing US products such as cotton and soybean to reduce its trade surplus of \$3 billion.

Agro-chemical corporations are free to promote their products advocating farmers to 'choose reputable companies.' The context of using seeds from foreign corporations is based on the WTO's agreement on intellectual property rights (the TRIPs agreement). This agreement has taken away the right from farmers to save and grow their own seeds, while mega agro-chemical corporations have pirated the millennia old genetic resources that are the collective property of farmers.

In the end, it is the corporate sector of the imperialist countries who gain, not only by selling high value machinery but also be the ones to provide grains, seeds and raw materials to meet local need. In short, increased taxation on our industry and agriculture along with market liberalization is to ensure that our local production is destroyed allowing the mega-corporations to take over the production, distribution and retail sectors.

### Cash Cow!

Based on data, livestock is considered the most dynamic and resilient sub-sector of Pakistan's agriculture. More than eight million rural households are

# INDUS WATER TREATY - 1960



able to gain 30-40 percent of their income by being engaged in this sector. Herd size, through the hard labor of rural families have been growing, across major species, with cattle and buffalo populations reaching approximately 59.7 million and 47.7 million, respectively.

A gain from this sector is a gross milk production of 72.34 million tons, which is about a 3.2 percent annual increase, driven by higher yields and increased livestock population. Not only dairy but also meat, leather and natural fertilizer, cooking fuel are obtained by this precious asset, being a critical component of rural household food security.

However, as is usual for profit-seeking corporate sector, they are now eying this 'lucrative market,' which is only present due to hard, harsh labour of primarily landless farmers. Multinational corporations such as Royal FrieslandCampina and Nestle have long been trying to take control of this market. According to them they are willing to invest to 'develop the dairy sector.' In other words wrest control away from small and landless farmers of their livelihood and food security pushing them into further hunger and immiseration.

## Political Quagmire—Water Policy

Acute water scarcity faced by Pakistan is a 'gift' from the World Bank, which was the main 'broker' of the Indus Water Treaty in 1960; the treaty allowed the eastern rivers including Ravi, Beas and Sutlej to India. This was the time that Pakistan also started implementing the Green Revolution policy that introduced hybrid seeds that are highly dependent on high volumes of water. This must have been the reason for the World Bank to initiate the Indus Basin Project based on which two huge dams, Tarbela and Mangla dams were constructed. The projects allowed the US and other European corporations to mint massive profits. The acute shortage of water today, the suffering of the people of Pakistan in general and the peasantry in particular is certainly based on the imperialist impositions of the past. And then many decades later,

there is a breakdown of relations with India, and Modi government announcing suspension of the Indus Water Treaty. At the same time, Sindh continues to suffer from waters shortage as the political strife between Punjab remains unresolved. At the same time, farmers in Haripur suffer from extreme shortage of water as the Khanewal Dam is being stolen for Islamabad.

There are initiatives being planned for water reservoirs for corporate farming, which according to opponents are for the benefit of large landowners and corporate entities. According to Economic Survey 2024-25, Pakistan is one of the most water-stressed countries in the world, with an average per capita annual water availability of less than 1,000 cubic meters. The country is approaching a water-scarce status driven by various factors including industrial expansion, inefficient irrigation, unsustainable groundwater use among others.

Today, we see new interventions from the World Bank. All blame is being conveniently passed on to climate emergency (which of course is a result of the centuries of intense use of fossil fuel for building up the industrial empires of the colonial North), and the World Bank is back with new proposals, namely the 'Irrigation operators for future (IOFs).' According to a World Bank consultant, IOF is a toolkit for addressing issues related to water management and making it timely, equitable and reliable. One gets goose bumps to know that the World Bank is working with Pakistan government and its institutions to improve irrigation system and increase agricultural production. The result of previous interventions is witness to the failure of these policies and programs.

At the same time, new actors are also making their presence known in the water sector, The Green Climate Fund (GCF) intends to provide technologies for building the country's capacity in practicing precision agriculture, including a centralised knowledge management system at the University of Agriculture in Faisalabad. The claim is that precision agriculture helps avoid un-

wanted practices in crop production by reducing labour, water, fertilization, and pesticides, thereby ensuring quality produce. It recommends site-specific management interventions, automated irrigation, and drones to maximize yield and reduce input costs, utilizing GPS-guided digital support systems. Pakistan lacks a standardized framework or coherent strategy for promoting and implementing precision agriculture as a climate resilience measure. The question remains, who will benefit? In a country with millions of small and landless farmers, with very small tracts of land, are these technologies for their benefit or for the rich powerful feudal and corporate class? And then, in a country with high unemployment, should the state really consider a policy initiative for reducing the need for labour?

## The Digital Mantra

The latest saviour for the agriculture sector in Pakistan is now digital technology. From digital tracking for crop production to plans for an Electronic Warehouse Reset System (EWR), and provision of a wheat support price as well as loans for purchasing agricultural inputs through a Kisan Card. It is indeed ironic, that instead of helping the most productive class the small and landless farmers who are responsible for the production of not only wheat but the entire food and agriculture production, The Bank of Punjab will provide financial services to the private sector for the renovation and construction of warehouses for wheat storage. The Punjab government will pay a markup of PKR 5 billion to provide storage facilities to the wheat farmers.

Digital technology is controlled by mega-corporations. The data accumulated by using digital technology provides corporations further advantages of forcing farmers to follow production models pushed by corporations, rather than independent, indigenous knowledge practices. The machinery, tools, education and knowledge needed for use of digital technology invariably benefits professional and corporate businesses rather than small farmers.



## Pakistan's poverty rate to stand at 42.4%: World Bank

### Human Rights?



Democracy is a key pillar of Capitalism, and so is human rights. With the Gaza genocide, it does seem that these two pillars have collapsed. The situation of the urban poor and peasantry in Pakistan also reflects the shakiness of these 'moral values' of Capitalism. Though it seems that inflation has been brought under control, it does not translate correlate to decreasing poverty in the country. According to The World Bank's Poverty and Equity Brief, poverty rate in Pakistan is estimated to stand at 42.4 percent. Approximately 1.9 additional people are facing poverty.

With no wheat support price, wheat prices in the market are low which though maybe beneficial to urban poor, is devastating for small and landless farmers who still have to pay off their loans incurred for buying expensive agriculture inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and harvesting costs. The government at the moment had a huge leftover stock due to unwise imports, and both Sindh and Punjab governments ended up not purchasing wheat stocks from farmers; however pressure from farmers did result in the federal government's increased procurement target from 1.4 million tons to 1.8 million tons.

On one side, the government is emphasizing latest technologies while fishermen are unable to keep their catches safe as ice factories are unable to function due to low voltage electricity which is also available only for a few hours. Addressing a press conference at Gwadar Press Club, the representatives of the fishing sector protested that they paid extremely high electricity bills to the Quetta Electric Supply Company but were left with poor and negligible service. In addition, they also have to spend up to 600,000 every month to purchase water.

Where are farmers' rights, workers' rights, fishers' rights in this fiasco? The hard labor of peasants, their non-stop labor through

intensely high temperatures, working under the blazing sun is worth nothing to the elite of this country. Policies are made to benefit the international corporate sector, and the rich feudal landlords who are free to reap super profits off the labor of the working people.

As privatization policy marches on, there are widespread protests from various sectors of society. From high electricity bills, to lack of water, to outsourcing of hospitals and other health facilities and educational institutions is being pursued across the country. However, they are the majority in terms of number of farmers even-though they have very little land ownership. Young doctors protesting these measures were met with police force and suppression, including threats of hiring doctors on daily wages.

Other abysmal policies include imposition of 18% sales tax on essential medical devices and diagnostic equipment that is exacerbating cost of medical care for patients.

Climate crisis has left thousands of people suffering. Just a glimpse is that a poultry farm worker and two children died as their abode could not stand up to the force of winds and storm; at the same time many others also suffered injuries as strong winds and heavy rain lashed areas in Hyderabad and Jamshoro districts. Their meagre abodes could not withstand the storm and roofs and walls collapsed. In addition, 32 people were killed and 150 injured as a heatwave was followed by stormy rain and winds.

There is no end to the atrocities faced by the people at the hands of the private-public partnership mantra. In the past few years there has been constant fight back from the people across sectors. In the end, people power is the only way to reach an equitable society.

*According to The World Bank's Poverty and Equity Brief, poverty rate in Pakistan is estimated to stand at 42.4 percent. Approximately 1.9 additional people are facing poverty.*

#### Contact Us

Roots for Equity  
A1 First Floor Block-2 Gulshan-e-Iqbal  
Karachi

Phone +92 21 34813320

Email: [roots@rootsforequity.org](mailto:roots@rootsforequity.org)

Visit us at our website  
[www.rootsforequity.org](http://www.rootsforequity.org)