

## Squandering the potential for true development



The country's development strategy is almost entirely centred on economic growth with little attention to environmental and social issues. Pakistan has the potential to provide energy for its population, but lacks planning to ensure that those most affected by mega projects are also taken into account. Its water shortage needs to be urgently addressed as eventually the river Indus will dry up. Reliable data on the number of bonded labourers there are in the country is urgently needed so that Government officials can no longer deny the rights of these highly exploited workers while the economy reaps the benefits of their work.

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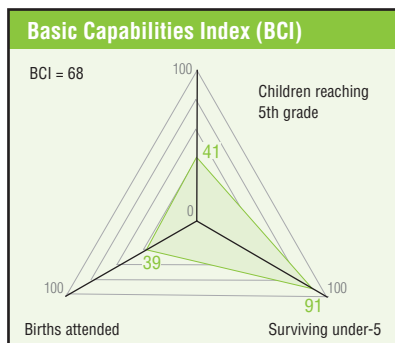
Massive flooding in Pakistan in 2010 devastated an area of around 160,000 km<sup>2</sup> and affected about 20 million people, most of whom lived and worked in the agricultural sector. They not only lost their homes, but also their livelihoods. It is estimated that more than 2 million hectares of crops were lost during the floods, resulting in fruit and vegetables now having to travel for hours to reach areas that used to have a plentiful amount of fresh goods available. Together with rising petrol prices, this has caused a significant price increase for fresh produce, which has had a devastating effect on the already poor communities of Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

The coping mechanisms developed by riverside communities over decades have also been undermined by high population growth and persistent poverty as well as a number of land management factors, including deforestation, water encroachment on land in the river belt, physical infrastructure development and maintenance of river and canal embankments.

Due to inadequate infrastructure plans and policies, the monsoon season in 2011 also caused devastation throughout the country, leaving much of the Sindh region under water.

### Emergency response: success and failures

About 2 million flood-affected families have received Government provided 'Watan cards,' each guaranteeing access to PKR.100,000 (approx. USD 1,170). A major flaw in the programme was the decision to allocate cards to male family heads via the system of Computerized National Identity Cards (CNIC), thereby automatically excluding orphans and female-headed families, along with hundreds of thousands of men and women who had migrated to affected areas before the floods and were ineligible because their CNICs were from other districts. Levels of fraud were high; those registered in more than one flood camp claimed more than one Watan card. No training on how to use an ATM machine was provided and the number of ATMs available remained low; cases of flood victims selling their Watan cards for cash (never their full value) were common. Free fertilisers



and seeds were distributed to farmers; however the project brought complaints of poor seed quality and lack of access.

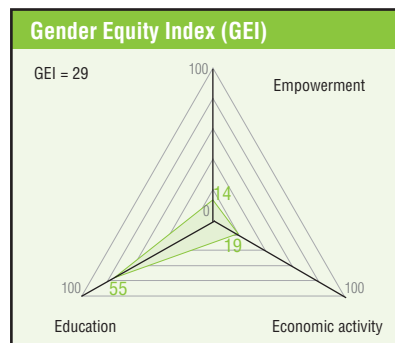
The distribution of aid to people affected by the floods was flawed and corrupt, leaving millions without access to basic rights such as healthcare, education, shelter, food and dignity. The situation is aggravated by the existence of bonded labourers; those working in the agricultural sector found themselves not only homeless, but with the land they lived and worked on now under water, their ability to repay their already endless debt became increasingly unlikely.

Civil society organizations issued a Citizen's Charter stating that the country's "social, economic, commerce, foreign, and national security policies all are extremely exclusionary in nature and need to be redeveloped incorporating a pro-people agenda of development and progress."<sup>2</sup>

### Indus delta issues

Tibetan glaciers are retreating at an alarmingly high rate; in the short term, this will cause lakes to expand and bring floods and mudflows; in the long run, once the glaciers vanish, water supplies in Pakistan will be in peril.<sup>3</sup>

In 1984, the World Bank initiated the Left Bank Outfall Drain (LBOD) programme, which included the creation of a 300km outfall drain from eastern Sindh into the sea. Initially, agriculture improved along the north of the drain and many farmers who had previously left to seek employment in urban areas returned.



However in 1999, a monsoon cyclone caused the drain to burst, destroying thousands of acres of land used for farming. Four years later mass flooding caused even more damage, killing at least 50 local villagers and displacing around 50,000 people. Due to a high level of salinity in ground water caused by the floods, drinking water became scarce and damage to a significant amount of farmland caused major economic losses.<sup>4</sup>

A man-made system of irrigation and drains have led to the unchecked disposal of effluents and chemical waste from factories into Manchar Lake, which then flows into the sea. Large canals in the north, such as Chashma and Tausa, are also widely blamed for a shortage of freshwater; designed to be used in times of floods, due to mismanagement and corruption they are now used at all times. This has not only reduced water in the rivers south of the canals, but has left the downstream Kotri Delta conservation area without sufficient water to sustain its wetlands, which are home to a large number of shrimp and fish as well as being crucial in times of natural disasters. The Kotri Delta is also a globally recognized stopping ground for migratory birds from Siberia; however due to a lack of water, only a few gulls remain today.

As these rivers end before they reach the Arabian Sea, the lack of silt from the rivers has caused the sea to seriously intrude on the land. Over 2 million acres of land has already been claimed by the sea, forcing coastal communities to migrate inland and destroying the fishing industry. There is an urgent need to fix river banks and water flow

1 See: <www.bbc.co.uk/news/south-world-asia-11875204>.

2 See: <www.humanrights.asia/news/forwarded-news/AHRC-FST-098-2010>.

3 See: <www.afp.com>.

4 See: <www.devex.com/en/articles/world-bank-water-project-imperils-pakistan-fisherfolk>.

direction, implement a system for the de-silting of rivers, and stop the misuse of canals which is ruining wetland areas.

Families who have lived and worked on the banks of the Indus for generations now struggle to catch enough fish to survive. It is estimated that fishing has declined by 70-80% in some villages and many farmers have switched production from rice to sunflowers, which require less water and yield about the same profit, but means there is less food available.<sup>5</sup> Lack of water in the rivers is also posing a serious threat to the Indus dolphins, who are now in danger of extinction.

### Coal: potential threats and opportunities

The district of Tharparkar in the Sindh province is rich in natural resources including vast coal mines (among the world's 5 largest coal reserve) and is home to about 1.5 million people. A proposed project for Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) in the district has the potential to generate 5,000 mw of electricity for at least 800 years.

The majority of Tharparkar's residents are members of indigenous minority groups. These groups are doubly disadvantaged in society as they are not only Hindus but also *Dalits*, also called *Outcastes*. They are asset-less people who rely on rain-fed agriculture and livestock rearing who simply wish for their livelihoods and traditions to be respected. Part of their concern comes from a dramatic rise in Thar's population, leading to an increase in poverty levels and scarcity of resources, while there are plans to outsource labour for the UCG project instead of hiring local residents.

The Government has so far created no solid proposals for the resettlement of Thar's residents or taken their wellbeing into account. Because of this, in 2010 the World Bank pulled out of the project, representing a major blow to the country's sustainable development.

### Bonded labour

Despite numerous legal provisions designed to reduce bonded labour, this practice continues, particularly in areas where there are brick kilns, carpet industries, fishing, mining, stone/brick crushing, shoe-making, power looms, refuse sorting and agri-

## EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan, like most developing countries, actually contributes very little to overall greenhouse gas emissions; however their effects are substantial. For example:

- Glacier melt in the Himalayas will increase flooding before affecting water resources in Pakistan within the next 2-3 decades;
- Freshwater availability is projected to decrease, leading to biodiversity loss as well as shortage of drinking water;
- Coastal areas bordering the Arabian Sea will be at great risk of rising sea levels;
- Crop yields are expected to decrease causing high risk of hunger and food insecurity.
- Endemic morbidity and mortality due to diseases associated with floods and draughts will rise, while changes in coastal water temperatures will increase incidence of cholera.
- Existing social inequalities regarding resource use will be aggravated, leading to instability, conflicts, displacement of people and changes in migration patterns.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: <[www.lead.org.pk/cc/basicguide\\_climate\\_change.html](http://www.lead.org.pk/cc/basicguide_climate_change.html)>.

culture. They are thus found in all provinces, but are highly prevalent in Sindh and Punjab. There is a serious lack of reliable data concerning their numbers, causing the problem to remain unaddressed.<sup>5</sup> The ILO reported 20 million bonded labourers in Pakistan in 1993, and only 1.7 million by 2009. However NGOs claimed there are around 1.3 million engaged in bonded labour in Sindh province alone.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the lack of economic opportunities and high levels of illiteracy, bonded labour is often voluntary.<sup>7</sup> Bonded labourers are left with no escape; the majority of them do not own a national identity card, thus having no right to vote and no access to social services. Feudal landlords, who often take pride in having bonded labourers, especially if they are children, resist initiatives for change as they benefit significantly from the bonded labour system.<sup>8</sup>

### Long term solutions

The Government needs to make a comprehensive plan for the protection of the local fishing and farming communities, as well as the conservation of important environmental areas such as the wetlands. The plan should include the revival of agriculture and

provision of improved fishing equipment to those affected by river mismanagement, the promotion of livestock and dairy development, income generation activities, the provision of safe drinking water, and a long term plan for the revival of education and health facilities in the area.<sup>9</sup>

All contaminated water released into the Arabian Sea should be treated and routinely checked to preserve marine life. A plan is needed to ensure that sea water does not enter the wetlands and a comprehensive water recycling / rain harvesting system should be in operation to deal with the water shortage problem. A number of smaller dams on the Indus may prove to be more effective than the large canals in operation at present.

As Pakistan is frequently affected by natural disasters, it is crucial that an effective system of Disaster Risk Reduction and Risk Mapping is in place, involving and educating those who are most likely to be affected by major crises, to ensure that the extent of devastation and destruction is as little as possible. Disaster Management Authorities in each province should step up their efforts and engage local universities in conducting research on climate change. ■

<sup>5</sup> G. M. Kundi and B. Shah, *Bonded Labour and Constrained Role of Pakistan Government in its Eradication*, Department of Public Administration, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, (2006).

<sup>6</sup> See: <[www.tbl.com.pk/the-menace-of-bonded-labour-in-pakistan-agricultural-sector](http://www.tbl.com.pk/the-menace-of-bonded-labour-in-pakistan-agricultural-sector)>.

<sup>7</sup> District Umerkot Sindh, Rural Support Programmes Network, *Bonded Labour*, (2009).

<sup>8</sup> See: <[www.sparcpk.org](http://www.sparcpk.org)>.

<sup>9</sup> See: <[www.ifwatchnet.org/?q=en/node/6](http://www.ifwatchnet.org/?q=en/node/6)>.