

Sindh Land Reforms Movement (SLRM) – a civil society Network

During the period 'Sindh Land Reforms Movement' (SLRM), a network of civil society organizations has been strengthened and reactivated. The purpose of SLRM is to struggle for land reforms and eliminate the debt bondage in Sindh. SLRM helped in closely monitoring and filling of the cases of poor peasants and farmers. Besides livelihood project partners, the network also held meetings with highest police official and provided justice and protection to the victims.

Background of Sindh Land Reforms Movement:

A group of peasant based civil society organizations in Sindh formed a network; ***Sindh Land Reforms Movement***, (announced on July 2, 2012) to carry forward long awaiting demand of land reforms in the province, where majority of the people whose dependence is on agriculture as principal source of livelihood have been living in virtual serfdom. In Sindh at the time of inception, eight per cent of land owners owned 55 per cent of total farm land. Currently among other provinces, Sindh has the highest incidence of absolute landlessness, with 26 per cent or two million households have no land. Whereas, 26 per cent of 700,000 household possess the lowest share in the land. Seventy two per cent house holds of Sindh are food insecure. It is in this condition that peasants are pushed into the quagmire of marginalization where they do not receive fair wages (Rs. 30 per day in some areas), face sexual harassment, lack access to shelter and dearth of crop insurance, have no record keeping, no right to unionization, and are slapped with the debt-bondage.

The two successive catastrophes of floods and heavy monsoon rains in 2010 and 2011 exposed the vulnerabilities of haris (peasants) and the level of the poverty they were living in. Prior the disasters unleashed Sindh, the haris were living under harsh realities, where they were devoid of health, education, safe drinking water, shelter facilities, and also they were slapped with the debt-bondage.

Process of formation of Sindh Land Reforms Movement:

In this back drop civil society organizations working around the issues of labour particularly the agriculture workers (peasants) of Sindh held extensive sessions of meetings in Karachi and Hyderabad. About eight consultative meeting were held of the civil society organizations. Meetings debated extensively on the need of land reforms in the province (Sindh) and were of common view to organize the movement for land reforms from a joint platform. As a result of the continued meetings and consultations the need was felt to form a new network (Sindh Land Reforms Movement) of peasant based organizations to take the demand forward and make it part of the wider movement. It has also been realized by the broader section of peasant based civil society organizations that with out true land reforms plight of the landless would not change.

Demands of Sindh Land Reforms Movement:

1. Distribution of state land to bonafide haris on the lines of Propriety Rights on Occupancy Tenants & Muqarraridars Act 2011, Government of Punjab

- We demand from the Government of Sindh to enact law on the pattern of the Propriety Rights on Occupancy Tenants and Muqarraridars Act 2011 for distribution of state land to the haris of Sindh who have been cultivating agriculture land for many years.

2. Distribute state land among landless haris

- The Sindh government immediately distribute state land among landless haris with priority given to released bonded laborers and flood affected people and women.

3. Right of shelter/ housing right to haris

- Formal land entitlements/official land deeds should be issued to all rural residents, including haris, wage workers and share croppers.

4. Tenancy Act, 1950 reforms

- We deplore the fact that draft amendment to the Tenancy Act 1950 presented by a coalition of peasant organizations to the Sindh Assembly in February 2009 was rejected. The Sindh Tenancy Act 1950 should be reviewed, updated and amended to bring it in line with prevailing conditions and requirements necessary to the interest of haris.
- In the meantime, compulsory registration of all haris be undertaken forthwith. Hari courts should be established. Agricultural land is being converted for commercial purposes resulting in the ejection of haris and intensification of food security.

5. All labour laws, inclusive of Industrial Relations Act, ESSI, EOBI, be extended to haris

- Agriculture workers must have the rights to form association and to collective bargaining, which are fundamental constitutional rights for all workers in Pakistan. Other relevant laws and privileges, registration with EOBI and ESSI, applicable to workers must be extended to agricultural workers in due course of time. Sindh Assembly should immediately re-enact Bonded Labour Abolition Act (1992), and the Sindh government should also adopt National Policy and Plan of Action (2001) to eradicate bonded labour from the province.

6. Land reforms as per 1977 Bill

- We believe serious land reforms are urgently needed. In this context we support the petition filed in Pakistan before the Supreme Court by a group of civil society representatives for the reversal of the judgment of the Federal Shariat Court to allow for a more equitable land distribution across the country.

7. Co-operatives of haris be established on at least 1000 acres

- Sindh Government should take steps to allocate land and provide incentives to the haris to form agriculture co-operative.

Member Organizations:

Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum, Sindh Agriculture Workers Coordinating Organization, Institute of Social Movements, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, Bhandar Hari Sangat, Research and Development Foundation (RDF), Sindh Hari Porhiat Council, Sindh Rural Partners Organization, Sindhi Hari Tahrik, Centre for Peace and Civil Society, Root Works Foundation, Green Rural Development Organization, Sindh Community Foundation, Rural Development Foundation, Association for Better Community Foundation, Laar Rural Development Programme, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Sindh Development Society.

Roles and Responsibilities of the member organizations:

It was in the meetings of Provincial Steering Committee meetings that member organizations would carry out a mapping of their working themes and geographical areas. So far six organizations have shared mapping of their organizations' working themes and geographical areas they are engaged in. they include, Bhandar Sangat, GRDO, Root Work Foundation, Sindh Community Foundation, SAP-PK, and Association for Better Community Development.

Compiling statistics about shelter less rural workers:

The member organizations also agreed in the meetings that they would carry out data compiling exercises in their respective working areas about the peasants living without ownership of their homes or hutments. So far none of the member organization has shared with the Secretariat such kind of statistics.