

Peasant movements in Pakistan resist the green grab with resilience

From Arifwala to Cholistan, Okara to the banks of the Indus, Pakistan's peasant struggle is a fight for life itself. In a dynamic, multi-front movement, it pits two visions of agriculture against each other – one of extraction and control, and one of justice, dignity, and resilience. What's at stake is not only land, but the future of food, communities, and sovereignty.

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As the morning sun rose over Ehsan Pur Seed Farm in Kot Addu, Punjab, on April 10, 2025, peasant farmers were quietly harvesting wheat in their fields – land they and their families have farmed for generations without a formal title. But now, the government is attempting to displace them for corporate investors and agribusiness transnational corporations, and the peasants push back. A court-issued stay order barred authorities from carrying out evictions while the case remained under litigation. Yet that sunny April morning, local officials, accompanied by police, stormed the fields. Without warning or formal charges, two farmers were arrested and their tractors seized – retaliation for resisting displacement.

Word spread quickly. By midday, a wave of resistance swept through the region. Families, elders, and youth flooded the roads in protest, forming a blockade and demanding the immediate release of farmers and the return of their essential harvest equipment. Faced with public outrage and mounting pressure, the authorities were forced to retreat. The farmers were released. The machinery

was returned. It was a rare, if small, victory – but one that symbolised a much larger and intensifying struggle for land, dignity, and survival in the Pakistani countryside.

This moment captures a key part of a growing conflict in rural and urban Pakistan, where control over land, water, seeds, and resources fuels large-scale monoculture. Peasants, women, and rural youth resist with resilience, united by agroecology and seed sovereignty.

Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the national peasant organisation Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC, a member of La Via Campesina), stated: "The government is reinforcing a new feudal system – where land remains concentrated in a few elite hands and peasants are reduced to precarious labour – by promoting military-backed corporate farming. Instead of empowering landless peasants through genuine land reforms and redistribution, this model displaces peasants and cultivators and replaces them with contracted farm workers under exploitative conditions. It entrenches control, while stripping rural communities of autonomy and land-based livelihoods."



Photo: Awami Tahreek Sindh (People's Movement Sindh)

Rural women lead a powerful demonstration in Badin, Sindh, demanding an end to water grabbing and large-scale canal and dam projects. They call for equitable water access for small farmers and peasants to sustain cultivation.

The green grab disguised as development and food security

Across the fertile plains of Punjab and Sindh, a new wave of state-sanctioned land dispossession is underway. Under the banner of the Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI) – a project launched in July 2023 to promote the corporatisation of agriculture – the government and military are facilitating the takeover of millions of hectares of farmland. The land grab centers on the Land Information & Management System (LIMS), which uses GIS, drones, and satellite imagery to classify communal and peasant lands as ‘barren’ or ‘unused.’ This technocratic approach transfers ancestral lands to corporate entities for industrial agriculture, seen as more ‘productive’ and in the ‘national interest.’ Under GPI, 4.8 million acres are designated for corporate farming, but lack of transparency raises concerns about accountability and military expansion over civilian resources. Additionally, the proposed construction of six new canals along the Indus River threatens to divert vital water resources, further exacerbating water scarcity for small farmers in downstream

provinces such as Sindh and southern Punjab. Peasant groups denounce these projects as extractive and anti-people.

Peasants stand in solidarity with defiance in their eyes and resistance in their bodies

Vasand Thari, president of Awami Tahreek Sindh (People’s Movement Sindh), remarked: “This is not just about canals. It’s about saving Sindh’s land, water, and minerals from exploitative entities like the Green Corporate Initiative Pvt. Ltd. – a modern-day East India Company. These canals will serve export-oriented industrial farming. Food will be shipped to the Gulf and Global North countries, while increasing hunger and deprivation at home.”

These takeovers are based on colonial-era laws, such as the Colonization of Lands Act (1912) and the Land Acquisition Act



Photo: Awami Tahreek Sindh (Peoples Movement Sindh)

Peasant women march at the forefront of a mobilisation in Sujawal, Sindh, holding banners and flags to protest canal projects on the Indus River and the expansion of corporate farming.

(1894), which permit governments to displace communities in the name of ‘public interest’. Even after decades of cultivation, peasants are denied land titles.

Today, 51% of rural households are landless. Just five percent of landlords control 64% of farmland, while 65% of farmers own only 15% of land. Corporate farming threatens to accelerate this inequality, rendering even more small farmers landless, adding to the 30 million already without land. Women are doubly marginalised, owning only three percent of land and facing systemic exclusion from land rights, credit, and recognition.

Peasant resistance and grassroots resilience

Peasant resistance in Pakistan is not only growing – it is evolving into a dynamic, multi-front movement that includes legal battles, grassroots organising, direct action, and global solidarity. On April 13, 2025, peasant and small farmers’ movements, along with workers and trade unions, launched a nationwide day of mobilisation across Punjab and Sindh. From village assemblies to town hall meetings, these coordinated actions openly rejected the Green Pakistan Initiative’s corporate farmland leases and canal construction projects. One of the most significant expressions of this resistance occurred at the Bhakkar Convention on May 6, 2025, where hundreds of landless peasants – including women and youth – gathered with peasant movements, agricultural workers, and allied trade unions to denounce corporate land grabs and demand

structural and popular agrarian reform.

Peasants are engaging in bold, direct actions. In Sindh’s Babarloi region, peasant movements, lawyers, and community groups staged a nearly two-week sit-in (April 18 – 29, 2025), blocking major highways to stop canal construction tied to the Green Pakistan Initiative. Their pressure led to the suspension of the project by the Council of Common Interests. Meanwhile, in Arifwala and Hasilpur, thousands of peasants physically resisted police attempts to seize farmlands, chanting “We will not leave,” as they defended land cultivated for generations. These are not isolated acts of defiance – they represent a growing strategy of civil disobedience rooted in land justice.

Muhammad Ikhlaq, a peasant from Arifwala and local organiser of the Punjab Landless Peasants Association, declared: “For over a century, we have cultivated this land with our blood and toil – yet we are denied ownership. The state now wants to hand over our homes and fields to corporations. We resisted their police, and we will continue to resist their oppression. This land is ours, and we will not surrender it. Peasants and small farmers’ movements condemn corporate farming as a ‘scheme of economic genocide against peasants’ and vow to intensify resistance.”

Resilience-building education

Equally important is the resilience-building grassroots educational work unfolding across rural communities. Women and youth are increasingly taking leadership roles through agroecology and political education programmes

coordinated by small-scale food producer organisations and community networks. Together, they are cultivating a new generation of politically aware food producers, deeply grounded in agroecology, climate justice, and peasant feminism.

Women and community networks are leading workshops and village learning circles, promoting agroecological farming techniques – such as natural pest management, soil regeneration, and kitchen gardening – while simultaneously raising awareness about the politics of agriculture: women’s unpaid contributions to farm labour, the health and ecological dangers of chemical pesticides, and the right to safe, chemical-free food.

Agroecology and seed sovereignty are central pillars of resistance and resilience. Peasant and small farmers’ movements promote natural, non-corporate farming methods, rejecting chemical inputs, hybrid GMO seeds, and monoculture. Women-led networks are reviving ancestral seed varieties, preserving agro-biodiversity, and reclaiming food systems from corporate biotech monopolies. These efforts aim not only to protect the land but to redefine the very model of development imposed on rural communities, enhancing community autonomy and resilience.

In rural Pakistan, women play a crucial role in dairy farming. As agribusiness increasingly dominates the sector, small and landless farmers are organising women through local networks. Some women partner with men to run agroecological farms and lead in collecting and regenerating traditional seeds. They maintain community seed banks for wheat, rice, maize, and vegetables, for local use and exchange. While few women own land outright, many work on family farms, vital to seed sovereignty and local food systems.

Legal resistance remains a critical tool. Peasant movements and farmer groups have secured court-ordered stays from the Lahore High Court against illegal land seizures, forced evictions, and machinery confiscations. Even in the face of state efforts to override these rulings, peasants have stood firm. Popular rural assemblies continue to call for the repeal of colonial-era land acquisition laws and for comprehensive agrarian reform that centers the rights of the landless.

Land, life, and liberation

The movement against corporate farming and the canal projects is bolstered by solidarity across sectors. Peasants have forged strong ties with progressive political parties, labour rights groups, journalists, lawyers, and international allies – but these relationships didn’t emerge overnight – they were forged through years of consistent

engagement, mutual support in moments of crisis, and a clear articulation of shared struggles. When peasants faced arrests or violent evictions, they reached out to lawyers’ groups for legal defense and injunctions; in return, these lawyers became embedded allies, shaping legal arguments for land rights. Journalists were invited to on-site visits and people’s tribunals, ensuring that stories of dispossession were documented and made visible in mainstream and alternative media.

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Progressive political parties and labour unions engaged through joint mobilisations, co-signed statements, and common struggles – recognising that land grabs, wage exploitation, and privatisation are all facets of the same system of dispossession. Internationally, groups like Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC) leveraged their involvement in La Via Campesina to link local struggles to the global food sovereignty movement, creating reciprocal solidarity.

These actions are strengthening community resilience in profound ways. Organising for resistance and resilience has unified previously disconnected rural communities, fostering solidarity and social cohesion that are vital for withstanding state repression and negotiating with authorities.

By defending land rights and resisting forced contract changes or evictions while simultaneously building autonomous agroecological production systems, peasants are increasing their resource security, leading to more stable access to livelihoods and food, and reducing their vulnerability to poverty and climate shocks. This ongoing struggle is also raising political awareness among rural populations, allowing for broader and more confident participation in governance, advocacy, and rights-based organising. Peasant actions also promote ecological resilience. Secure tenure and collective ownership encourage small farmers to adopt agroecological land use practices, investing in long-term soil health and biodiversity instead of short-term profits, which is often driven by insecure tenancy.

In resisting externally imposed policies – such as forced crop changes, monocultures, or GMO seed imports – peasants are defending both traditional farming systems and ecological diversity, contributing to healthier ecosystems and a more climate-resilient rural landscape. ■

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