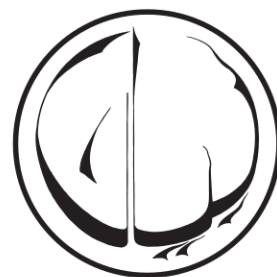


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THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK
VOLUME VII DECEMBER 2021
BI-ANNUAL SOCIO-LEGAL JOURNAL



Simorgh Women's Resource and Publication Centre is a non-government, not for profit feminist activist organisation. Simorgh's main focus is research and dissemination of information that will enable women and men to challenge the dominance of ideas that support social and economic divisions on the basis of gender, class, caste, religion, race and nationality.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those held by Simorgh.

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NEOLIBERALISM IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE – RAMIFICATIONS AND STRUGGLES



AZRA TALAT SAYEED

ABSTRACT

Framed by the global context of capitalist agricultural practices and neo-imperial strategies of dominance and control from the start of the Green Revolution from the 1960s to the present day, Dr. Azra Talat Sayeed discusses the food production and hunger crisis generally and in the global South, specifically in Pakistan including its fallout under the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing attention to the semi-colonial, semi-feudal relations between the former colonial states and the 'developing and developed' countries, the essay discusses the exploitation and control of Third World economies by rich industrialised nations and the ways in which technological advancement in tandem with neoliberal agendas have resulted in the pauperisation of rural communities and burgeoning urban slums in the global South. As possible ways forward, the essay highlights the importance of people's resistance movements and policy changes that are responsive to Pakistan's current and long-term climate change and food security needs.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Azra Talat Sayeed is a social and political activist and academic who has been advocating for social justice, gender equality, and workers' rights for several decades. Associated with Roots for Equity, an organisation that works with small and landless farmers, women and religious minorities in the rural and urban sector, she is also the founder and chairperson of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), a non-government organisation for labour rights, and vice-chairperson of the International League of People's Struggles (ILPS), a global alliance of progressive organisations and movements for social, economic and political justice.

Dr. Sayeed has authored several books and articles on labour rights, women's rights, and social justice issues in Pakistan, and is the recipient of several awards, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Decent Work Champion Award and the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, one of Pakistan's highest civilian awards.

It is not surprising that according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition 2021, there is global failure in progressing towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on ensuring access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all people throughout the year and eradicating all forms of malnutrition. The Report also states that "between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 – as many as 161 million more than in 2019. Nearly 2.37 billion people did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – showing an increase of 320 million people in just one year".¹

These devastating figures cannot be put at the raging pandemic's door alone, as trends since 2014 have shown that hunger is on the rise. As such, an analysis of the political economy of hunger could yield some critical insights into how an advanced global society has drifted so far away from meeting one of the most critical and basic human needs.

Food and agriculture production constitutes the foundation of any society's survival, self-reliance and dignity, and history shows that societies have always striven for food security. Until the middle of the last century, dependency on food security was based on the knowledge and hard labour of farmers and the realm of small producers. Much of this scenario changed with the growing reliance on science and technology at the expense of traditional methods of food production. However, just within half a century this dependence on these bulwarks of progress proved to be fallacious as it laid bare the inherent risks and limitations of technological development framed by the capitalist mode of production, whether based on bioengineering, green economy or the much touted Green Revolution technologies.

On the one hand, we have affluent, well-fed people who have never grown any form of food, and on the other, the millions who work all year round to produce food for the world but themselves go hungry day after day. Furthermore, while surplus food is being produced, those who consume it face different forms of malnourishment due to its poor quality. And finally, there is the immense plunder of Nature in tandem with Nature's unwillingness to passively accept its chemical and genetic intoxication, which is now apparent in the severe weather calamities that are part and parcel of climate change.

Agriculture has been the basis of society's development since pre-historic times. In this regard, the Indus Valley Civilisation has the merit of owning an ancient and fairly sophisticated agricultural system, with seasonally

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) et al., "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for All" (Rome, Italy: FAO, 2021). Available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4474en>

grown cereals, fruits and vegetables.² The historical move from traditional agricultural practices to capitalist agriculture and the onslaught of a set of technological advancements, generally referred to as the Green Revolution in the 1960s, had a vast and deeply felt structural impact on agriculture globally and locally.

By the 1980s, genetic engineering, a harbinger of further technological progress in the field of agriculture, was on the horizon. With Biotechnology as the new science providing technical application in a wide range of sectors from health, energy, food and agriculture, the result was a push for a new era of capitalism, often euphemistically called globalisation. Others have called it imperialism. Globalisation shifted the Keynesian bent of policies towards an entirely new set of policy options, namely neoliberal policies. From the 1990s to the present day, the technological advances in food and agriculture have thrust peasant politics to the forefront once again. This political battlefield encompasses 'stakeholders' that on the one hand comprise small and landless farmers, fisher folk, the urban poor and other basic producers who can be considered as collective owners of the wealth of a people's traditional knowledge and experience, and on the other, the super-rich mega corporations that own vast tracts of land and state of the art technologies; with one suffering the misery and humiliation of poverty and hunger, and the other with their corporate profiles, mega profits, scientific simulations and projections of 'Zero Hunger'.

This paper will draw out the semi-colonial and semi-feudal relations that exist between the former colonial states and their erstwhile colonial masters, now respectively called the developing and developed countries. In this relationship the rich industrialised countries are able to 'govern' the countries of the Third World by pushing neo-liberalism across the board, including food and agriculture policies, and can be held directly accountable for the massive pauperisation of rural communities and burgeoning urban poor slums across the global South. The impact of these policies and the resistance movements by peasants, women and other sectors they led to, will be analysed with possible ways forward that are responsive to the various crises now besetting the world.

FROM TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE TO CAPITALIST AGRICULTURE

The adaptation of Green Revolution policies can be seen as the initiation of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture systems; as such it is an important point of reference for understanding the context of food and agriculture policies today.

The Green Revolution was introduced at a time when a large number of countries were emerging from their colonial bondage and were paving the way to independent charters for the realisation of their development visions. This was a time when ideological struggles, based on the juxtaposed philosophies of capitalism and socialism were vying for dominance, and political blocs were emerging with very different methods of operation for policies addressing agriculture and food production and consumption. The concept of sustainable food production and consumption was still to become an issue for critical focus.

The Chinese Revolution (1940s) had clearly opted for land distribution and the formation of land collectives to address household and community livelihood and food security needs, especially of the poorest peasants. The Green Revolution technologies, on the other hand, pushed for higher productivity, and promised, instead of a Red Revolution, a green one. Green Revolution technologies were based on high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of seeds for maize, rice and wheat supported by chemical fertilisers, pesticides and mechanisation of agricultural production. This technology had been developed in the US and had many reasons for being propagated. The mantra emphasised not a political solution i.e. equitable land distribution, but a technical intervention for increased food production to provide for growing Third World populations.

It cannot be denied that countries that adopted the Green Revolution policy approach obtained very high degrees of productivity based on HYVs seeds for targeted food crops. It was only after a number of years that the impact of chemical inputs in food and agriculture began to show the intense destruction of biodiversity as well

² Steven Weber, "Seeds of Urbanism: Palaeoethnobotany and the Indus Civilization," *Antiquity*, Vol. 73, Iss. 282 (December 1999): p. 813–26. Available at: <http://www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~tcrndfu/articles/original%20Weber%20antiquity.pdf>

as severe impacts on human health and environment. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in the 1970s laid bare the atrocities of chemical industrial food and agriculture production and its impact on nature.

It is pertinent to draw attention to the political impact of the Green Revolution as it allowed feudal land holders and big landlords to amass great wealth, particularly as in the case of Pakistan, where they retained the vast tracts of inherited land acquired as part of their services to colonial regimes. The hacienda systems in Latin America and the Philippines also bear witness to this colonial heritage across continents. Before the arrival of HYVs, third world agriculture was reliant on internal inputs, such as indigenous seeds, farm manure, compost and non-mechanised methods of production. In short, it was totally self-reliant in production.

The new set of policies pertaining to the Green Revolution allowed the United States to acquire numerous political and economic benefits in countries where it was introduced. Politically these ensured the maintenance of a powerful elite in the so called newly independent countries. These Countries were willing to tilt the development agenda towards economic policies that created structural dependencies on industrial inputs from the first world, especially the US. In addition, several other factors led to uneven societies with the powerful colluding with advanced capitalist countries and favouring policy paradigms that allow wealth to flow from the third to first world countries. While terms such as 'liberalism', 'free speech' and 'free society' were touted as the Holy Grail, this rhetoric overshadowed the real context of capitalism: its greed for controlling raw materials, markets and labour.

Tragically, peoples' movements have remained in a confused mire aspiring towards rights while demanding development models that imbibe capitalist forms of democracy that fully allow the protection of private property and enable the private sector to thrive. As a result, the so called 'free society' remains the prerogative of the rich and those with close ties to the establishment, who aspire to democratic societies in the rich industrialised world, while maintaining close ties with the establishment.

In this context, the food and agriculture production system was and remains of critical interest to the capitalist world. Not only because this sector yields rich profits, but because of its deep political interest as a means to controlling the people and the economy of nation-states.

GLOBALISATION'S TOUCHSTONE – NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism, may be considered as globalisation's policy-face that includes deregulation, privatisation and trade liberalisation. Though these policies had already been introduced by the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP), the more unified universal policy package – hence recognised and coined through the term 'Globalisation' – was introduced in 1995 through the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

With the dying away of the Soviet Union, the practice of state capitalism under Keynesian economics, which was the hall mark of the Cold War period, was put aside and neoliberalism pushed forward as the path for development and prosperity. Introduced in the 1980s, the Washington Consensus represented the first wave in the introduction of austerity policies following the oil and burgeoning debt crisis of the 1970s. Third world governments were forced to reshape their economic systems to accept the pivotal role of the open market in both production and international trade through the conditionalities imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The policies emanating from the Washington Consensus were generally packaged under the SAPs well into the 21st century and are still part of policy directives from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for indebted countries.

SAP had a huge impact on agriculture production as Green Revolution technologies were essentially based on external inputs subsidised by governments throughout the Keynesian era. The removal of subsidies resulted in skyrocketing prices for fuel, seeds, fertilisers and transport. Today, these are the basis of skyrocketing poverty in our countries including Pakistan.

The role of the Green Revolution provides the key to our understanding of agriculture and food production in Pakistan. These complex interlinkages will be discussed in the following sections.

THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION – THE UNIVERSALITY OF NEO-LIBERALISM

Launched in 1986, the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade set the road map for the formation of the WTO. It was here that the US, for the very first time, introduced a number of new issues, including agriculture that so far had not been governed by GATT rules.³ An added area was intellectual property rights. These two areas, in terms of agriculture and food, were and are tied together intrinsically. Agriculture, till it was brought under the umbrella of the WTO, had largely stayed out of the international market regime. This was in line with the way the US, European and third world countries were protecting their agricultural sector as national food security was a critical political factor.⁴ However, under the WTO, the US forced inclusion of a whole new set of laws defining agriculture and food trade under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA).

Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) are an entirely different issue. Though the fight over IPRs has a long historical context, the introduction of such a legal clause can be considered nothing but a political positioning of the United States to guard new technological innovations, especially for pharmaceuticals and agriculture as well as a fight for maintaining its market domination.⁵

In the 1980s biotechnology had advanced considerably, and a particular area of critical interests was the introduction of genetically engineered seeds. The Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), introduced in the WTO had a deeply significant impact not only on agricultural trade but also on domestic level production, as it impacted ownership of the indigenous knowledge of farming communities and indigenous peoples, especially in the context of seeds. Up until the Green Revolution, even though HYV seeds were being patented by big agro-chemical corporations, there were no international universal laws that 'protected' their claims of intellectual property. The TRIPS Agreement was pushed for and demanded by the US corporate lobby in the WTO. This highlights the importance of establishing and understanding the linkages of US long-term capitalist design to capture genetic resources:

Global collection of plant germplasm was initiated by the U.S. Patent Office as early as 1839 ... The creation of the Green Revolution research centers (e.g., the International Rice Research Institute, the International Center for the Improvement of Maize and Wheat) was the product not only of an effort to introduce capitalism into the countryside but also the need to collect systematically the exotic germplasm required by the breeding programs of developed nations. Western science ... staffed an institutional network that has served as a conduit for the extraction of plant germplasm for the Third World.⁶

It can be seen that the inclusion of AoA, TRIPS, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) in the WTO regime is the most diabolical attack on agriculture, food security and livelihoods of the poorest, the most vulnerable and marginalised communities across the globe, especially in third world countries.

UNDERSTANDING NEOLIBERALISM IN AGRICULTURE – AOA AND TRIPS

The Agreement on Agriculture, which is composed of three basic clauses: domestic subsidy, access to markets and export subsidy, drastically changed the rules of the game for agriculture. It not only set a very stringent system for international trade in food and agricultural products, it also forced third

³ Chakravarthi Raghavan, *Recolonization: GATT, the Uruguay Round & the Third World* (Third World Network, 1990). Available at: https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/Recolonization.html?id=X3mRjwEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

⁴ FAO, "The State of Food and Agriculture 2000: Lessons from the Past 50 Years" (Rome, Italy: FAO, 2000). Available at: <https://www.fao.org/agrifood-economics/publications/detail/en/c/122046/>

⁵ Azra T. Sayeed, "Impact of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on Pharmaceutical Development in the Third World" (Ph.D. Thesis, 1995).

⁶ Jack R. Kloppenburg Jr., *First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology*, Uwpres.wisc.edu, Second ed. (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/First-Seed-Political-Biotechnology-Technology/dp/029919244X>

world governments to change domestic systems of support to the agriculture sector. Through these clauses, the agreement stipulated that national governments must bring down domestic production and export support they provide to farmers, while simultaneously opening their markets to accept imports from other countries. A baseline year was set for first and third world countries to reduce domestic subsidies based on a complex system of determining country-specific reductions.⁷

How have these stipulations impacted the small and landless farmers of the third world? What has been the impact on food security, especially household food security of rural households, the urban poor and other small producers?

In order to understand the impact of the AoA, some basic differences between first and third world agriculture producers must be taken into account. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the definition of a 'small farmer' in the US from the 1980s to 2012, was someone who had at least 250 acres of land:

In 2015, 90 percent of U.S. farms were small family operations with under \$350,000 in annual gross cash farm income (GCFI) – measure of revenue that includes sales of crops and livestock, Government payments, and other farm-related income. These small farms, however, only accounted for 24 percent of the value of production. By comparison, large-scale family farms with at least \$ 1 million GCFI made up on 2.9 percent of U.S. farms but contributed 42 percent of total production.⁸

A similar comparison was made between Indian and US farmers in 2020, as follows:

Indian farmers, having an average landholding on one hectare ... with US farmers whose average landholding is 176 hectares. There are 2.1 million farms across the US employing less than 2% of the population, with an average annual on-farm income per farm household of \$18,637. Whereas more than half of India's 1.3 billion that depend on agriculture so for their livelihoods, with an average annual income of per farm household (from all sources) at less than US\$ 1000.⁹

The Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) describes agriculture as:

... practiced by families (including one or more households) using only or mostly family labour and deriving from that work a large but variable share of their income, in kind or in cash. Agriculture includes crop-raising, animal husbandry, forestry and artisanal fisheries. The holdings are run by family groups, a large proportion of which are headed by women, and women play important roles in production, processing and marketing activities.¹⁰

It has been reported that, of the 1.4 billion extremely poor people in the world (living on less than USD 1.25/day), 70 per cent are estimated to live in rural areas and most of them depend partly (or completely) on agriculture.¹¹ Further, according to data from 81 countries, which cover two-thirds of the world's population and 38 per cent of agricultural land area, 73 per cent of the total number of holdings dispose of less than 1 hectare (2.47 acres) of land and 85 per cent dispose of less than 2 hectares of land.¹²

In a country like Pakistan, small farmers are considered to be those in possession of 12.5 acres or less land, and in essence they have zero income as they are constantly in debt. A circular system of buying inputs based on loans to be paid off at the time of harvest is what keeps the production system rolling. It should be noted that the highest percentage (99%) of small farmers, often referred to as family farmers, are to be found in Asia.

The high level of risks and the modest means available imply that unpredictable expenditures can trigger an impoverishment spiral. Second, when products are sold, there is pressure to first feed the family and repay loans or

⁷ "WTO Agreement on Agriculture" (European Parliament, 2020). Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/111/wto-agreement-on-agriculture>

⁸ James M. MacDonald and Robert A. Hoppe, "Large Family Farms Continue to Dominate U.S. Agricultural Production" (Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, March 6, 2017). Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2017/march/large-family-farms-continue-to-dominate-us-agricultural-production/>

⁹ "Perils of the US-India Free Trade Agreement for Indian Farmers" (GRAIN, May 26, 2020). Available at: <https://grain.org/e/6472>.

¹⁰ High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), "Investing in Smallholder Agriculture for Food Security" (Rome, Italy: FAO, June 2013). Available at: <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/6559f2f5-10d4-5ff6-941d-498626eb219a/>

¹¹ Ibid, p.10.

¹² Benjamin E. Graeb et al., "The State of Family Farms in the World," World Development, Vol. 87 (November 2016): p. 1-15. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15001217>

debts. Thus the marketable surplus is reduced, cash incomes remain low and, consequently, investments through cash expenditures become difficult. This is linked to a third organizational feature of small holder production: small holders often make investments through family labour. This implies that the quality of life in terms of health and access to basic services is of primary importance for productivity, as well as education and training to improve family members' skills, both agricultural and non-farm.¹³

The debt burden referred to above correctly depicts the tragic burden millions of small farmers across Africa, Latin America and Asia. The majority of the third world countries are dependent on first world countries for agricultural technology and agricultural inputs such as seed, fertilisers and pesticides among others. At the same time, the internal national political landscape portrays that the majority of agricultural production is carried out by small and landless farmers who have no political clout or voice in the agricultural policy arena. This voice and clout lies with the powerful feudal elites and rich farmers who have control and ownership over large tracts of land. This is in absolute contrast to the immense political power and sway of farmers' association in the advanced capitalist world. In the US for instance, they are mostly represented by myriad farmer's associations with offices in Washington DC and lobbies based on their particular group of commodities or other produce.¹⁴

This was the scenario during the Uruguay Round negotiations and much later after the formation of the WTO. Major US farm associations have always lobbied the US government with respect to international trade deals such as during the North American Free Trade Agreement,¹⁵ and the Uruguay Round negotiations on agriculture vying for laws and stipulations that protect their interests in the international market.¹⁶ Apart from farm lobbies, mega-agrochemical corporations, their associations are also well known to influence governments to open up markets for their products, particularly for genetically modified seeds and crops. Agrochemical giants like Monsanto and other trade unions such as FoodDrinkEurope have made considerable efforts to impact policymakers and organisations such as the European Commission.¹⁷ The partnership between governments and corporations is an ongoing revolving door phenomenon: Arthur Dunkel, the former Director General of GATT during the Uruguay Round, later became the chair of the International Chamber of Commerce Commission on International Trade and Investment; he was also serving on Nestlé's Board as well as a registered dispute settlement panelist for the WTO.¹⁸

Another important factor is regarding the domestic support provided to farmers by the rich industrialised countries. The US Farm Bill, a tool for agricultural policy, is particularly problematic as it provides enormous subsidies to 'farmers', a top per cent of whom had an annual income as high as USD 750,000. As already stated, even small farmers had an average annual income of USD 450,000 in the past decade.¹⁹

In the late 1990s, changes in US agricultural legislation allowed farmers to receive direct payment –this payment was regardless of crop output, with the US government providing payment on yields and acreage, based on the harvest history of the previous years.²⁰ In 1996, just one year after the formation of the WTO, the US passed the Freedom to Farm Act. From 1999-2001 the US government paid record subsidies to American farmers that came to over USD 30B annually.²¹ In 2002, the US adopted a Farm Bill that was estimated to increase agricultural subsidies over the next ten years by 80 per cent to a total of USD 82 billion dollars.²² The trend of supporting US farmers has never waned – the 2018 Farm Bill has provided USD 867 billion dollars in subsidies to

¹³ William P. Browne, "Farm Organizations and Agribusiness," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 34, Iss. 3 (1982): p. 198–211. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1173740>

¹⁴ David Orden, "Agricultural Interest Groups and the North American Free Trade Agreement," in *The Political Economy of American Trade Policy*, ed. Anne O. Krueger (University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 335–84. Available at: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c8709>

¹⁵ Robert L. Thompson, "The US Farm Bill and the Doha Negotiations: On Parallel Tracks or a Collision Course?" (Washington D.C., United States: International Food and Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC), 2005). Available at: https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/posp52_ifatpc_e.pdf

¹⁶ Darren Hoad, "The World Trade Organisation, Corporate Interests and Global Opposition: Seattle and After," *Geography*, Vol. 87, Iss. 2 (2002): 148–54. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40573670>

¹⁷ See f.n. 8 (Large Family Farms Continue To Dominate U.S. Agricultural Production).

¹⁸ See f.n. 15 (The US Farm Bill and the Doha Negotiations).

¹⁹ Kathleen Masterson, "The Farm Bill: From Charitable Start to Prime Budget Target," NPR, September 26, 2011. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2011/09/26/140802243/the-farm-bill-from-charitable-start-to-prime-budget-target>

²⁰ Claire Godfrey, "Stop the Dumping! How EU Agricultural Subsidies Are Damaging Livelihoods in the Developing World" (Oxfam Briefing Paper, October 2002). Available at: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/114605/bp31-stop-dumping-011002-en.pdf?sequence=8>

²¹ Jeff Stein, "Congress Just Passed an \$867 Billion Farm Bill. Here's What's in It," *The Washington Post*, December 12, 2018. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/12/11/congress-billion-farm-bill-is-out-heres-whats-it/>

²² See f.n. 8 (Large Family Farms Continue To Dominate U.S. Agricultural Production).

American farmers.²³ The direct payment stipulation in the AoA provides leeway for rich governments to keep on subsidising their farmers; a practice that is not possible for third world governments, especially because of their bondage to structural adjustment programmes that are the key agreements portraying the semi-colonial relationship between rich capitalist and post-colonial countries.

In 2002, seven years after the formation of the WTO, though the EU had decreased its export subsidies, it had increased overall support that was hurting small farmers across Asia. Oxfam's special briefing paper that details the subsidies provided by the European Union's agricultural policy known as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), puts forward specific demands to the European Union to stop dumping its produce in third world countries. The World Bank also acknowledged the impact of the Political Action Committee (PACs) on tilting agricultural policy as per their demands.²⁴

Clearly, the rules of the game for agriculture for first and third world farmers are based on old colonial rules. However, this is only half the story. The TRIPS Agreement needs to be factored in to understand the changes carried in the agriculture international trade arena. Agreements such as TBT and SPS have also impacted food security and agricultural production as they have control over domestic production of food from plants to animals based on health and hygiene standards. Added to this, the TRIPS Agreement which is by and large the most critical in terms of national self-reliance, is applicable to the entire realm of technologies whether related to food, agriculture, health, education, energy and others.

In general, intellectual property has been contested since its inception, in a constant tussle between individual economic interests versus the individual and collective rights of the people and society. However, the TRIPS Agreement has gone beyond the normally contested lines as it has claimed IPRs over living organisms and genetic resources. In short, it gives agrochemical and biotechnology firms the right to patent germplasm; all of which means that agrochemical corporations have successfully created a legal recourse to patent seeds. If seeds are now a commodity controlled by capitalism, it means it has been successful in finally controlled human life.

More than sixty years ago, a well-known US Senator, Hubert Humphrey, stated in front of a Senate Committee,

I have heard ... that people may become dependent on us for food. I know that was not supposed to be good news. To me, that was good news. To me, that was good news, because before people can do anything they have got to eat. And if you are looking for a way to get people to lean on you and be dependent on you, in terms of their cooperation with you, it seems that food dependence would be terrific.²⁵

The above statement may be seen to indicate the use of Green Revolution technologies and HYVs that were introduced in the 1950s, but it can certainly be seen as applicable in the context of the patenting of genetic resources in the 1990s. In 1995, thirty five years after the widespread implementation of the Green Revolution, farmers worldwide had already lost the major part of their indigenous seed bank, because seeds to be kept alive have to be sown year after year. Programmes implemented by the World Bank and the US AID had long cajoled big landlords to convert to HYVs; as for the majority of small and landless farmers, they had little recourse but to use the HYVs. Thus overtime the local indigenous seeds were lost and an irreversible biodiversity loss incurred.

The dependence of third world agriculture on corporate controlled hybrid and genetically engineered (GE) seeds is now the norm. The US to date has rigorously pursued the implementation of its trade policies paying close attention to the TRIPs Agreements. In its recent report on US Trade Policy, it has categorically stated that,

One of the top trade priorities for the Trump Administration is to use all possible sources of leverage to encourage other countries to open their markets to U.S. exports of goods and services and to provide adequate and effective protection and enforcement of U.S. intellectual property (IP) rights.²⁶

²³ Kishore Gawande and Bernard M. Hoekman, "Lobbying and Agricultural Trade Policy in the United States," World Bank (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2006). Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/397751468314681835/lobbying-and-agricultural-trade-policy-in-the-united-states>

²⁴ Leften S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift*, First ed. (William Morrow & Co, 1981), p. 443. Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/271171>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Robert E. Lighthizer, "2020 Trade Policy Agenda and 2019 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program" (Office of

HYPER CAPITALISM – A NEW ERA OF IMPERIALISMS

The previous sections were a walk-through of contemporary historical agriculture development, from capitalism's initial encroachment to a full blown takeover of the sector. Once SAPs and WTO had laid the foundations of liberalising agriculture across third world countries, other methods were employed, ranging from a labyrinth of bilateral to regional free trade agreements to coercion through development assistance, not to mention the power of corporate investments that form the core of market reforms. Unlike the UN system, the WTO has a legal dispute mechanism system for enforcing its agreements in its member countries, thus bringing about changes in the domestic legal frameworks that support full implementation of its agreements including in the agriculture sector. A particular area that agrochemical corporations have pushed for, and largely succeeded in doing so, are plant breeding and seed laws.

A crucial change dictated through global policymaking was the creation of a new space for the corporate sector and forcing its acceptance at governmental and intergovernmental levels as a critical player in national development. As a result, the fundamental resistance and pushback against the corporate sector received a grave setback. Transnational corporations that were held accountable for being the most critical agents in creating poverty and hunger, and were considered as the hallmark of exploitation and oppression are now termed 'development actors'.

A series of high level policy forums redesigning the international government aid agenda, including the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness 2008, and the fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLP4) 2011 in Busan, categorically created policy frameworks that put civil society, resistance movements and corporations (now euphemistically called the private sector) on equal footing. The outcome document of the HLP4 put forth language on enabling "participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of development policies and strategies to foster sustainable growth and poverty reduction".²⁷ From 1992 at the Earth Summit onwards, the private sector has been provided with an equal voice in shaping policy that favours corporate sector policy making.

Over time, the space occupied by the corporate sector has widened and deepened. For instance, the preparatory processes for the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been especially critiqued for being hijacked by the corporate sector.²⁸ The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) that engages with a wide array of movements and organisations that include farmers, women and indigenous peoples among others through its Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), also has an allocated space for corporations through the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM). This change is a clear victory of imperialist policies. It has led to a significantly more diluted and reformist mode of fight-back against the corporate sector – a policy measure that countries like the US have actively sought through bilateral aid mechanisms such as the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In this regard, the international agricultural research institutions have also played a critical role as in this new era, they have chosen to partner with the private sectors. For instance the Consultative Group on International Research (CGIAR) Consortium has set up the CGIAR Fund (in response to the Aid Harmonisation processes), and only members who contribute more than USD 500,000 can have a seat on the Fund Council.²⁹ From 2011 to 2020, the highest benefactors have been the USA (23.82 per cent), followed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (16 per cent) with the contribution of USD 1,230.8 million and USD 759 million respectively.³⁰ Both are committed to enhancing the role of the private sector in agriculture. There can be little doubt as to the kind

the United States Trade Representative, 2020). Available at: [https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2020 Trade Policy Agenda and 2019 Annual Report.pdf](https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Trade%20Policy%20Agenda%20and%202019%20Annual%20Report.pdf)

²⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation," (Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011). Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf>

²⁸ Lou Pinget, "Lou Pinget Corporate Influence in the Post-2015 Process" (Aachen, Germany: Bischöfliches Hilfswerk MISEREOR e.V., January 2014). Available at: https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Sonstiges/Corporate_influence_in_the_post_2015_process.pdf

²⁹ Shalini Bhutani, "Re-Searching Agriculture in South Asia: The Law and Policy Context for Agricultural Research and Development and Its Impact on Smallholder Farmers" (London: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), July 2013). Available at: <https://www.iied.org/g03628>

³⁰ "CGIAR Trust Fund Contributions," CGIAR (France, n.d.). Available at: <https://www.cgiar.org/funders/trust-fund/trust-fund-contributions-dashboard/>

of research policy recommendations that would be coming from these organisations.

It is essential to point out that first world countries have a wide range of agencies and services for promoting exports including agricultural exports, and that most of these efforts are on behalf of the corporate sector. For instance, the US embassies promote agricultural trade through the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the Commercial section embedded in these embassies across the world. This trend is also true for European nations. According to a study by the European Economic and Social committee, and advisory body of employers and workers to the EU, details effective strategies needed for increasing exports to foreign markets.

The net results of imperialist advances in agriculture have turned into an assembly line for raw material provision to the value added production chain, as well as a market for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) plants and animals, external inputs and high-tech machinery including digital technology. Third world governments, including Pakistan, have made sweeping changes in their agricultural sector, allowing for the increasing role of corporations to dictate not only production but also marketing. For example, Pakistan reduced its maximum tariff rate from 22.5 per cent in 1986 to 35 per cent in 1999.³¹

From the 1990s to the 21st century, third world countries have been gradually forced to comply with the rules and regulations enforced by the WTO. For instance, the government of Pakistan has made profound changes in its agricultural sector. These include the Pakistan Pure Food Laws 2007 (revised from 1963), the Pakistan Seed (Amendment) Act 2015, Plant Breeders' Rights Act 2016, the Punjab Forest (Amendment) Act 2015 and the Punjab Agriculture Marketing Regulatory Authority Act (PAMRA) 2018. PAMRA has provided a legal framework for digital marketing, uniformity and harmonisation in product standards. These interventions push out small farmers, leaving rich farmers and corporations to monopolise the markets.

The impact on the agriculture sector in the third world can be seen clearly. As stated in the beginning, world hunger is rising, and has steadily increased in the past years. The State of Food Security and Nutrition Report (FAO, 2019) has stated,

After decades of steady decline, the trend in world hunger – as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment – reverted in 2015, remaining virtually unchanged in the past three years at a level slightly below 11 percent. Meanwhile, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased. As a result, more than 820 million people in the world were still hungry in 2018, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030.

The report further elaborates that the most affected areas include Asia (with 500 million), especially South Asia and Africa, but hunger is also an issue in Europe and North America. In every region, a higher number of women is more affected than men.

The reasons for this galloping hunger have been discussed in detail in the above sections. With neoliberal policies in place, subsidies provided to the poorest of poor farmers have been removed. Apart from draconian free trade agreements within the WTO framework, a plethora of bilateral and regional free trade agreements were negotiated between highly industrialised countries and poor nations such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early '90s, and were renegotiated under the Trump administration through the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that has been negotiated between 15 countries including the ASEAN countries, China, New Zealand, Australia, South Korea and Japan in 2020. India pulled out of this agreement in November 2019 and at the moment is negotiating a free trade agreement with the USA.

The agreements between rich and poor nations keep true to the neoliberal policies described above, as they guard the interests of the corporations and trade associations in these countries, as the elite segments of society blatantly ignore the impacts on small and landless farmers. It is not difficult to understand the havoc wreaked on farmers' earnings by the escalating price of production on the one hand, and the removal of subsidies on the other. In Pakistan alone, the escalating price of agricultural inputs bear testimony to the dictates of IMF and

³¹ M. Ramzan. Akhtar, Effects of Trade Liberalization on Agriculture in Pakistan: Commodity Aspects (CGPRT Centre, 1999). Available at: <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/32697?ln=en>

the World Bank. Pakistan's debt rose by 60 per cent from 1990 (USD 20.66 billion) to 2000 (USD 30.9 billion). By 2020, its debt was 100.81 billion. The loans provided by the IMF have come with stringent austerity measures that have impacted farmers' productive capacity immensely. In 1997, the cost of one bag of chemical fertiliser, DAP, was PKR 500; in 2020 it fluctuated between PKR 6,000-8,500; in terms of a percentage increase from 1997 to 2001, the price has gone up by 1500 per cent. However, after the formation of the WTO, wage earnings of landless farmers and agriculture workers have decreased consistently over the years. At the same time, real wages for those at the lower rung of employment have consistently declined. In Pakistan, the overtime changes in the inter-occupational wage differentials have shown that elementary occupation experienced a decline from 41 per cent in 1990/91 to 21 per cent in 2006/07. In stark terms, those at the lowest rung of the hierarchy faced real poverty – a condition which has been considered a direct result of trade liberalisation.

Across the world, especially in third world countries, there are numerous accounts of farmers caught in a vicious debt cycle, with India being highlighted for the huge number of farmers' suicides. In fact, the debt cycle among farmers reflects the colonial relationship that has been maintained post-independence between the colonisers and the colonies through a colonial mode of operations, with third-world elites ensuring a system of governance that allows surplus extraction from our lands as well as labour. Market dominance, which was an element of the colonial state, has now been reinforced through institutions such as the WTO, IMF and the World Bank, not to mention the many governmental agencies of the rich industrial nations.

Trade liberalisation has allowed heightened impunity not only to local industrialists but also to transnational corporations. In Pakistan, the case of sugarcane production showcases the collusion of the advanced industrial countries and the political elite in the Third World. Conversely, agricultural land remains in the hand of feudal lords and wealthy farmers, and on the other, the sugarcane factories are controlled by not only the feudal elites but also industrialists. According to the Sugar Inquiry Commission 2020,

Six groups control about 51% of the production of sugar in Pakistan ... These groups have the capacity to manipulate the market by joining hands for cartelization and subsequent manipulation. The control of so few, mostly with political background, of the sugar industry shows the strong influence they can exercise on Policy and Administration.³²

Of the six groups mentioned in the report, three are the OMNI group (10 mills), Sharif family Mills (9 mills) and JDW group (6 mills). In other words, all three represent the country's key mainstream political parties: Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), respectively. As can be seen, on the one hand, there is extreme concentration of land within feudal families, and on the other, these very families have diversified into the industrial sector. According to the government of Pakistan:

The agriculture land distribution in Pakistan is highly skewed as only five percent of the agricultural Households own 64 percent of farmland. On the other side, over 80 percent farmers own less than five Acres of land and women's share of ownership of land is less than two percent.³³

The feudal and industrialist elite control what is produced on the land and what is imported. Over the past few years, sugarcane production has been increasing steadily. In 2017-18, there was a record production of 81.10 million tonnes, with an increase of 7.4 per cent over the previous year's production of 75.48 million tonnes (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017-18). In the same period, the area in production has increased from 1.218 thousand hectares to 1,313 thousand hectares with an increase of 7.8 per cent.

Sugarcane is no longer only a source of sugar; apart from syrup and jaggery, it is also used for the production of numerous other profitable products including ethanol, molasses, bagasse and press mud. Of these ethanol, a longstanding export item for many countries including European Union members,³⁴ has brought massive

³² Wajid Zia, Ahmad Kamal, and M. Goher Nafees, "Report of the Inquiry Committee Constituted by the Prime Minister of Pakistan Regarding Increase in Sugar Prices" (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 2020). Available at: <https://www.app.com.pk/pdf/Commission-Reports/Sugar/Sugar-Inquiry-Committee-Main-Report-dated-24.03.2020.pdf>

³³ "Poverty Alleviation: Human Resource Development and Achieving MDGs," in 11th Five Year Plans Information Management (Islamabad: Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, Government of Pakistan, n.d.), p. 67-82. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/plans/Ch8-Poverty-alleviation1.pdf>

³⁴ Parvaiz I. Rana, "Ethanol Export Fetches \$425m," DAWN News, January 20, 2019. Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1458658>

profits³⁵ However, these profits have not been transferred to small landless farmers and agriculture workers.³⁶ In Pakistan, fresh milk is another critical area of liberalisation that will further erode the livelihood of millions of farmers.³⁷

It must be emphasised that even during a global emergency caused by Covid 19, there has been no change in the neoliberal imperatives of either the first world or third world ruling classes. In September 2021, the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF) held the UN World Food Summit (WFS), which was a hotbed of intrigue and planning for the wealthiest nations and corporations of the world. All through the pandemic and through the WFS, policy directions were set for the benefit of giant agrochemical and seed corporations. The emphasis remains on increasing global trade and deregulation, with no mention of land distribution, land reforms or human rights.³⁸

FIGHTING BACK

The years before the formation of the WTO had seen the birth of various movements calling for food sovereignty. The demand for food sovereignty may be seen as an expression of the farmers' rejection of the WTO and its agreements in the context of food and agriculture. The basic principle of food sovereignty includes the right to safe and nutritious food for all, farmers' access and control over all productive resources with an emphasis on equal rights for women farmers and decent livelihood. The term encapsulates two other key issues: no place for imperialist policies in national food and agriculture, the right to resist anti farmer policies and support for farmers' rights.

The demand for farmers' rights has led to a wide range of movements across the globe. In the Asia Pacific region it has taken root through indigenous movements as well as regional and global unity movements.

In Pakistan, the formation of the Pakistan Kisan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT), an alliance of small and landless farmers has led to demands for food sovereignty and given life to several other struggles.³⁹ These include resistance against land eviction in Peshawar, farmers' struggle against trade liberalisation in the livestock and dairy sector, especially by PKMT women farmers, as well as saving indigenous and local seeds.⁴⁰

The intense farmer's strikes in India against liberalisation are also a testimony to the widespread resistance to imperialist impositions in the food and agriculture sector. Other forms of resistance include a move towards the production and consumption of safe and nutritious food that is not corporate controlled. A particular aspect of this struggle is the seed-saving initiatives across the world.

Finally, there is now a global unity against neoliberal policies. Across the globe, many movements have come forward as a united force and have held many months long resistance movement even in the face of the pandemic. The Global People's Summit on Food Systems involved thousands of people from all regions and countries and gave an alternative vision with pledges of further resistance and implementation of food sovereignty.⁴¹ There is no doubt that for the world to survive, the demand by people's movements, women's and farmers' movements, a just, healthy and equitable food system is the only answer.

³⁵ Lauren Moffitt, "Pakistan's 4Q Ethanol Exports Rise, but Outlook Weak | Argus Media," Argus, March 3, 2021. Available at: <https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2192256-pakistans-4q-ethanol-exports-rise-but-outlook-weak>

³⁶ "Pak Farmers Protest against Non-Payment of Sugarcane Dues during Last Three Months," ANI News, April 7, 2021. Available at: <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/pak-farmers-protest-against-non-payment-of-sugarcane-dues-during-last-three-months20210407230515/>; Azra T. Sayeed, "Globalization's Grotesque Face: The Economic Oppression of Women Agriculture Workers in Pakistan," Pakistan Perspective, Vol. 23, Iss. 1 (2018).

³⁷ Dr. Azra T. Sayeed, "The Fight for Food Sovereignty in Pakistan and the Role of Women," Brennpunkt Drött Welt, July 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.brennpunkt.lu/en/the-fight-for-food-sovereignty-in-pakistan-and-the-role-of-women/>

³⁸ Sylvia Mallari, "Transformation for Whom? On the Corporate Capture of the UN Food Systems Summit" (The Future of Seeds in the UN Food Systems Summit, Global Coalition of Open Source Seeds Initiatives (GOSSI) and farmer-scientist network MASIPAG, 2021). Available at: <https://foodsoy.org/transformation-for-whom-on-the-corporate-capture-of-the-un-food-systems-summit/>

³⁹ "Only Land Redistribution Can Address Peasants' Problems," DAWN News, March 31, 2021. Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1615549/only-land-redistribution-can-address-peasants-problems>

⁴⁰ Wali Haider and Naveed Ahmed, "Food Sovereignty: A Political Vision for Conserving Genetic Resources and Self-Reliance in Pakistan" (UN Environment, July 11, 2019). Available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/perspective-series/issue-no36-food-sovereignty-political-vision-conserving-genetic>

⁴¹ "GPS Declaration (Abridged Version) – End Corporate Monopoly Control!," Global People's Summit, August 30, 2022. Available at: <https://foodsoy.org/gps-declaration-abridged-version/>

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