

PAKISTAN

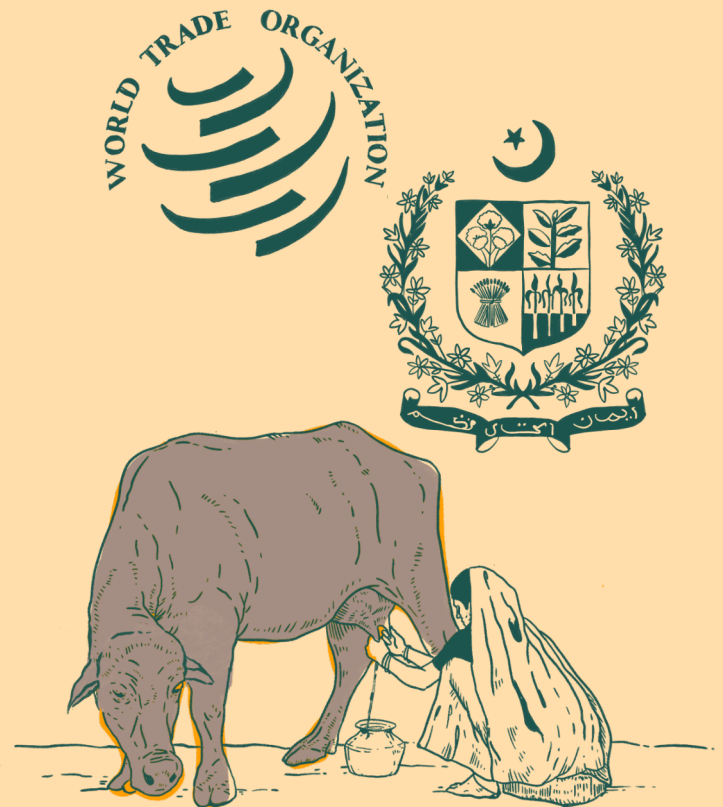
The Impacts of Trade Liberalisation in the Livestock and Dairy Sector in Punjab, Pakistan on Peasant Women



Background

Neoliberal food and agriculture policies in Pakistan are shaped by the World Trade Organization (WTO) through the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the 'Codex Alimentarius' or 'Food Code', as adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Codex standards, a set of internationally approved and adopted rules pertaining to the safety and quality of food products, were conceived in 1963 and have come to be recognised as a credible determinant for ensuring safety and quality standards for food products, particularly those meant for international trade. It includes standards for food at all stages of production (whether raw or processed) and has provisions for additives, contaminants, labeling and methods of analysis and sampling. The export-oriented, globalised food standards outlined under Codex are forming the basis for national production, processing and packaging policies related to the dairy sector in Pakistan. Proponents defend the Codex saying that it is a voluntary reference standard for those wishing to adhere to it. This applies to both members of Codex and of other trade organisations. Realistically speaking, since the WTO upholds the Codex as an international reference standard, it automatically has a bearing on terms of international trade, particularly when it is backed by agreements like SPS that considers Codex standards and guidelines as the benchmark against which national measures and regulations are evaluated.

Adherence to the Codex and WTO rules has led to Pakistan signing several laws that harm small dairy women farmers on the one hand, while consolidating the dairy sector's production and value chain to the benefit of big dairy corporations on the other. In Pakistan, 90 per cent of consumers still buy fresh, unpasteurised milk, which is mostly being supplied by the informal milk sector. This sector is largely in the hands of small and landless farmers (as producers) and a very wide network of milk vendors spread across the country both in rural and urban



“It’s ironic that corporations and government entities that create a ruckus about safety standards in the dairy sector do not bat an eyelid about the heavy use of harmful pesticides in crops or the unavailability of clean water for a significant portion of the population.”

-Azra Sayeed of Roots
for Equity on dairy safety
standards

areas. Punjab province is one of the targets of the corporatising the milk sector as the province has the largest livestock sector in Pakistan, reportedly accounting for 49 per cent of all cattle in Pakistan and notably, 65 per cent of buffaloes in the country. The Punjab Pure Food Authority Act 2011 and the Pakistan Pure Foods Law 2011, Punjab Pure Food Regulations 2018 form the basis of the existing trade-related food quality and safety legislative framework. These laws cover more than 400 items including milk and milk products. As part of the Punjab Pure Food Authority Act 2011, the province of Punjab has created the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) whose basic purpose is to lay out standards for food articles and regulate their manufacturing, storage, distribution, sale and import. Since May 2019, the PFA has been campaigning to ban the sale of fresh milk and intends to pass legislation prohibiting the sale of fresh milk in Lahore, the second largest city in the country in terms of population and also the capital of the province of Punjab. The Minimum Pasteurization Law which will be implemented by July 2022 will criminalise the sale of raw milk. The small and landless farmers who produce most of the fresh milk in Pakistan will lose the market for their produce since they cannot afford pasteurisation plants. Instead, corporations will step in to process and package milk for consumers.

These laws endanger the livelihoods of those in the dairy sector's value chain, including livestock growers and milk sellers. The women in Punjab's dairy sector are particularly vulnerable since their work is seasonal, informal, and most of the time unpaid because it is considered as part of family labour. They are also multi-dimensionally burdened since aside from being the primary caretakers of livestock, they are also tasked with other agricultural labour as well as caregiving, domestic housework and community work.

FPAR Journey

From September 2019 to March 2021, rural women joined Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT) 's Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR). Power mapping and critical pathways exercises, focus groups discussions and key informant interviews were conducted with the women during the FPAR process to document how the corporatisation of the dairy industry will affect their livelihoods. These women raise livestock to help them secure food for their families by keeping a portion of their production for their own consumption. They also sell the milk to other households in their

communities as well as to milk sellers. The milk sellers supply milk to shops in the villages and the city, individual households in the city, tea stalls and hotels, as well as middlemen that in turn, supply dairy companies.

The PKMT's FPAR intends to strengthen the capacity of women agriculture workers involved in the dairy sector of the province of Punjab to challenge the Pure Food Law and the Punjab Pure Food Authority Act, which threaten their income prospects and livelihood opportunities as livestock breeders, keepers and milk sellers.

FPAR Findings

Loss of livelihoods for peasant women and attacks on the right to health

Rearing livestock is critical to household food security and nutrition in rural areas, particularly in remote areas. Caring for cattle enables women to produce fresh milk, as well as other products such as butter, yogurt and ghee. Dry animal manure, which is used as fuel and fertilizer, is also produced as a byproduct of cattle-raising. A portion of these products are saved for family consumption while the rest is sold for cash.

Measures to make dairy production compliant to the Pure Foods Law, Punjab Pure Food Authority Act, and Minimum Pasteurization Law will push out small cattle growers from the dairy sector as these laws introduce high-technology equipment and processes that are unaffordable for small cattle growers. Farm upgrades using biogas units, pasteurisation units, cross-breeding between local and foreign breeds of cattle to improve milk yields, as well as specialised seeds for fodder and factory-produced silage for animal feed are too expensive for small cattle growers and at the same time, attract foreign investments in the sector. Programmes initiated by foreign interests such as the USAID's Dairy and Rural Development Foundation (DRDF) are responsible for initiating dairy projects that introduce these expensive and high-input processes in South Punjab, with one of its sponsors/partners being Nestle.

“Milk sales are very important for [our] survival...women manage household expenses and pay for children's education from the money earned by selling milk.”

-Women FPAR participants

Peasant women who take care of cattle will lose their livelihoods when the ban on selling unpasteurised milk is implemented. Households which previously used unpasteurised milk will have to switch to packaged milk. Not only will they have to spend more on milk itself (since company-processed and packaged milk is more expensive), but they will also have to purchase other dairy products separately e.g. butter and yogurt. For a large segment of the population, this will not be financially feasible, and women farmers foresee a fall in nutritional intake.

Banning fresh milk will cause household financial distress and further limit women's control over economic assets

The sale of fresh milk grants a steady source of income, especially for landless women agriculture workers who have tenuous and/or seasonal access to agricultural work. A ban on the sale of fresh/unpasteurised milk will mean that women who are dependent on the trade will lose a vital source of income. Since this is a regular income and allows them to pay for daily household expenses, the ban will cause financial distress. In some households, milk sales are so critical for daily household expenses that women were unable to buy household essentials such as soap and detergent when the COVID-19 breakout caused a decline in milk sales.

Banning the sale of fresh milk can limit women's control over economic resources and in turn reinforce women's economic dependence on their male relatives. Revenues from milk sales offset some of the



gendered economic disparities that are common in feudal and patriarchal agricultural societies that devalue women's work. Peasant women have limited avenues for alternative jobs and the majority of their work in agriculture and inside the house goes undocumented and is considered as unpaid family labour. Through the income from milk sales, women are able to contribute financially and have some control over decision-making inside the household. Taking away this income can result in further weakening their role in decision-making. Income can still be earned from selling cattle especially during the Eid ul Adha¹ when there is an increase in the need for sacrificial animals. However, mostly, male members of the family keep a significant amount of income generated through the sale of cattle while only a small amount is shared with the women who worked tirelessly to raise the animals, thus reinforcing the gendered labour and economic disparities that women experience.

Reinforcement and worsening of existing inequalities

Access to land is a determinant of the size of the cattle herd that a family can care for and thus, the amount of milk, meat and dung that they can produce. Only households owning land or possessing resources to lease land can engage in the endeavour of multiplying their cattle, primarily due to their ability to grow their own fodder. Landless farmers struggle to maintain a sizeable herd due to the daily costs of procuring fodder for the livestock. For the landless peasants, especially women, livestock is often their only asset. For landless peasants who cannot afford to buy their own cattle and instead rear livestock owned by landlords, proximity to livestock means a reliable source of nutrition for the household in addition to the income from milk and dung sales. Corporatising the milk sector will further reinforce and worsen the inequalities between those with and without access to land as the requirements of large-scale milk production and mandatory pasteurisation can only be met by those with enough land and other resources. Those without access to land and are dependent on milk sales and seasonal agricultural work will be left without the incomes that they used to rely on.

¹ Eid al-Adha is the latter of the two official holidays celebrated within Islam.

Women's Empowerment

Through the FPAR, women have started reflecting on the impacts of the government's relentless crackdown on the sale of raw milk and the provincial government's work towards a province-wide ban on the sale of unpasteurised milk as a result of the introduction of food laws such as the Pure Foods Law, Punjab Pure Food Authority Act and Minimum Pasteurization Law. They actively took part in discussion, gained awareness, and reframed their perceptions about their abilities. A good example was that initially, the landless women farmers used to refer to themselves as ghareeb or poor; the term they used to describe their socioeconomic realities which had connotations of helplessness. During one of their meetings, one woman exclaimed:

“We are not poor, and we shouldn't call ourselves poor. We are farmers and we are workers. We are suffering because companies and the government are snatching away our rights to food sovereignty and fair terms and conditions of work. They are stealing our food and they are stealing our livelihoods and now, we will not stay quiet. We will go anywhere to fight, and we will fight until we get our rights.”

The women expressed their willingness to participate more meaningfully in the socio-political spheres by becoming official members of PKMT. The FPAR also helped address the division and other challenges presented by differences among the women's class, caste, age and educational levels. Through the spaces that the FPAR provided, the women had the chance to interact with each other and slowly increased solidarity between the women.

Recommendations

For the government of Pakistan

- Establish a democratic process by which small and landless dairy farmers are part of the consultative and decision making process for all policy making and laws and regulations being developed for the dairy sector.
- Reject the domestic enforcement of inequitable international food safety standards that are formulated by capitalist first-world countries and their monopolistic corporations whose interests dominate the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- Put an end to all neoliberal agricultural laws and corporate control of the food and agriculture sector, particularly the Pure Foods Law, Punjab Pure Food Authority Act, and Minimum Pasteurization Law, that disadvantage small farmers/small producers while paving the way for mega-corporations to reap super-profits and further consolidate their control over world food systems through mergers and multi-billion dollar deals.

- Implement food and agriculture policies that favour small producers, including locally determined food safety standards that are appropriate and democratic for small and landless farmers.
- Place a strict moratorium on capital-intensive agricultural technologies, including digital technologies, until terms of ownership and use are made equitable and affordable for small and landless farmers.
- Encourage and adopt slow-paced and sustainable agro-ecological/indigenous farming and livestock practices that support local livelihoods, protect and restore local ecologies and have a low carbon footprint.
- Implement tariffs to inhibit dairy-processing corporations from importing cheap powdered milk that they reconstitute as packaged liquid milk at the expense of acquiring locally produced fresh milk from small farmers;
- End local and foreign private investments in farming, dairy and livestock sector that are encouraging the formation of large-scale, mechanised corporate dairy setups requiring high-cost inputs (e.g. industrial milking systems, imports of genetic material for cross-breeding, premium feed).

To the Governments of Pakistan, Switzerland, and the Netherlands

- The Pakistani Government must hold the local and foreign industrial meat and dairy companies in Pakistan, Nestle and Friesland Campenia in particular, accountable for wasteful and unsustainable practices, as well as for accelerating climate change through unchecked greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Swiss and Dutch Governments must uphold their extraterritorial human rights obligations. They must regulate their companies operating in Pakistan to ensure that these comply with human rights standards, including environmental rights.
- The Pakistani, Swiss, and Dutch Governments must ensure that remedies and compensation for damages done by the companies mentioned above are awarded to affected communities and individuals.

For rural communities and farmers' movements

- Intensify the call for just, equitable and genuine land reforms that allow land redistribution to landless farmers, including women agriculture workers.
- Intensify demands for women's right to own and control land, livestock and all productive resources in order to guarantee women's access to decent livelihood, adequate and healthy nutrition and implementation of just, equitable and self-reliant sustainable food production and consumption systems.
- Educate society about the importance of conserving indigenous livestock systems that are resilient to low-input, low-resource rural settings and to climate change (as opposed to imported cattle breeds that require expensive feed and temperature-controlled settings to survive).
- Build up unions, associations and alliances between farmers and milk sellers to strengthen farmers' movements and other peoples' movements against trade liberalisation and corporate hegemony in the dairy and livestock sector.

About Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek

Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek is an alliance of small and landless farmers in Pakistan. Formed in 2008, PKMT is active in 16 districts across three provinces of Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh. PKMT offers a collective voice to small farmers advocating for seed and food sovereignty, and equitable land distribution in Pakistan.



About APWLD

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist organisations and individual activists. For 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice.



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