

Pakistan

Pakistan gained independence in 1947 after India was partitioned. There are three regions: the mountainous north where the Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Himalayan ranges meet; the south-west plateau of Balochistan, and the Punjab and Sindh plains of the Indus River and its five main tributaries. Agriculture accounts for about a fifth of the economy and employs more than half the workforce. Social development has remained slow and inequality between social classes, sexes and rural/urban areas has led to widespread poverty.

Most people are Muslim. The national language is Urdu, while the official language is English, and the many regional and ethnic groups have their own languages. Following constant political and economic instability, the army took over power for the fourth time in 1999. Because of the ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan, Pakistan has hosted two to three million refugees over the past 20 years. The latest conflict resulted in a fresh influx of 200,000 refugees, mainly women and children.

ActionAid in Pakistan

ActionAid began operating in Pakistan in 1992, where it now works with 60,000 of the most disadvantaged people, particularly small, landless farmers, women and urban poor people, helping them to gain access to their basic rights. Poverty is made worse by flooding, drought, extremes of temperature and lack of education and health services. We work with a wide range of community and national organisations and lobby the government and other decision makers to influence policies and practices that affect the lives of poor people. We work mainly on food

Factfile

135m people live in Pakistan

63% of the population live in rural areas

31% of the population live on less than 70p a day

Nearly 1 in 12 children die before their first birthday

67% of women and 43% of men are illiterate

Only 42% of rural people have access to adequate sanitation

rights, education and gender issues. We helped to provide the refugees who had fled from the conflict in Afghanistan with food, clothing, water and medicine. We are also training counsellors to tackle the longer-term effects of insecurity and resentment felt by the refugees and border communities and are training local groups to use aid money effectively. Other areas of work are labour rights, youth and peace building.

Key areas of work

Education

We campaign through a network of community organisations to make quality primary education free and accessible to all by addressing the causes hindering this. We work with local people to help them influence the Education for All National Plan of Action.

We tackle the issues of education for all – especially girls' education, child labour as an impediment to education, and poor teaching methods. During the international Global Week of Action in April 2001, we organised activities involving local governments, students, teachers, parents, unions and the clergy in poor and neglected areas. We also encourage the inclusion of human rights in school curricula and in teachers' training programmes.

Our youth programme 'Playing by the rules' has begun in Johi, Khairpur and Kasur. This promotes tolerance and democracy, and steers young people away from violence by offering them interesting alternatives – sports, art and cultural activities. We also distributed 6,000 children's story books teaching tolerance and democracy to children in poor communities in 10 areas.

We set up and support community schools and help to improve government schools that are not functioning properly. We run adult



literacy centres and book banks in several areas, including Kasur, Dera Ismail Khan, Bahawalnagar and Khipro. In Johi we have started home schools.

Reflect, a programme combining adult literacy with helping people to organise themselves, using their own materials, is spreading rapidly in the areas where we work. *Reflect* groups create time, space and resources for local people, especially women, to discuss their problems and find their own solutions to them.

The right to food

As an active member of ActionAid's global food rights campaign we are working at local, national, regional and international level to ensure poor people's right to food. We conduct awareness-raising campaigns on food rights issues with farming communities.

As a result some farmers in Swabi and Khipro conducted field trials of organic farming, reducing the use of agro-chemicals by up to 60 per cent and harvesting good quality crops.

We also help to train rural communities in pest management and natural compost making.

We are active members of the Sustainable Agriculture Action Group, which monitors national policy and addresses issues of sustainable agriculture affecting poor people. It is working on the Plant Breeders Rights Act,

marketing policies, corporate farming and biosafety guidelines. In October 2001, we organised a national seminar with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to agree on issues to be taken to the World Trade Organisation's ministerial meeting in Qatar.

We use our local and national level experience at international lobbying events. In November 2000 a woman basmati grower from one of the areas where we work was actively involved in a series of events in Geneva to protest against basmati rice patenting by the American corporation Rice Tech. In 2001 we helped to design the 'TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) on Trial' event in Geneva where the testimony of a small farmer from Pakistan was read out.

Gender

We campaign for gender equality and women's empowerment in the home and community and also target male dominance at state level. Through our partner organisations we challenge social hierarchies at all levels. Interactive and street theatre are very effective ways of raising public awareness about domestic violence, child abuse, child marriages, rape and girls' education.

Our anti-trafficking campaign is currently pressurising the government to introduce strict penalties for traffickers. In the last decade 200,000 women from Bangladesh were abducted, sold, lured into prostitution, and forced into marriages and bonded labour when trafficked to Pakistan.

We interviewed women in custody (in jails, shelters and mental homes) and conducted a national study as part of a regional project called 'Listening to the poor'. This research will enable us to design programmes to help these women.

We also campaign against sexual harassment in the workplace and unequal pay for women.

Peacebuilding

After the events of 11 September the focus on the conflict in Afghanistan led us to join other national organisations to launch a 'no war, no bombing' campaign which also called for new measures against extremists in

Jan Bahadar's seeds

Jan Bahadar and his five brothers are farmers in Swabi district. "We have a very small piece of land so we wanted to try anything that would increase our yield," he said. "I bought some Monsanto maize seeds which cost more than the normal seeds plus fertilisers. It took more time and manpower to plant the seeds a particular way". But the seeds didn't turn into saplings. They just turned rotten and black. He lost his entire crop and protested in vain to the dealer. "I was very angry," he explained. "The only thing we can do is tell other people about our experience and convince them not to buy the seeds at all." With other farmers, Jan has joined ActionAid's local partner organisation, the Community Development Organisation. "This has provided me with a platform where we can come together to share experiences so that people become aware of the problems."

Pakistan. We also took part in the largest-ever peace rallies in Rawalpindi and Lahore in 2001.

Emergencies

The North West Frontier Province and Balochistan were badly affected after the attack on Afghanistan and the influx of refugees into Pakistan. Severe drought has aggravated the situation by depleting natural resources and devastating the local economy. As well as providing food, bedding and education materials to the Afghan refugees, we also warn the women of the dangers of trafficking and prostitution and teach income-making activities like spinning and weaving.

Funding

ActionAid's work in Pakistan is funded by child and community sponsorship, the UK Government's Department for International Development, companies and trusts.

Gul Pari's wish is fulfilled

Gul Pari is a 30-year-old housewife with five children from Jamal in Turbat. She was illiterate three years ago but now she has completed primary school.

"One day I saw a well-dressed woman who was literate," she said. "I wished that I could also become like her. My wish came true when SPO (ActionAid's partner organisation) provided this opportunity by forming AZTs (female adult education centres) in our village. Today I can read, write, do simple arithmetic and also deliver speeches at different events organised by the AZT, and I feel very proud. I want to continue my education so that I am more aware of what's happening around me."

ActionAid is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world – a world without poverty.

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Fact sheets available

Countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti/Dominican Republic, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, Uganda, Vietnam, Ayuda en Acción (Spanish partner).

Issues: ActionAid the facts, Children, Education, Emergencies, Financial services, Food and farming, Gender, Health, ActionAid's history, HIV/AIDS, Promoting change, Urban, Water.