

Forum: Citizen forum on inequalities

Theme: How to reduce inequalities at different scales?

Name of citizen: Ramesh Lal Bheel

Marital status:	Level of education
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Married/in a relationship○ Single○ With children, if so, how many: 47	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Primary○ Secondary○ University

Personal information

My name is Ramesh Lal Bheel, and I'm a 37-year-old Hindu man who resides in Sindh, Pakistan, working as a tenant farmer for my landlord Haji Chandio. I work the fields 10 hours per day, and most of my crop yield goes to pay advances. The cost of seed, fertilizer, and loans is all deducted by my landlord, who keeps me tied in a cycle of debt.

How does the theme of inequalities concern you?

Due to the high heat and droughts, my area suffers from water scarcity, and good water becomes strictly accessible to the wealthy. During March and April (Rabi season), rainfall was dramatically low, with the region reporting a 50% water deficit in supply, and some canal systems suffering from an incredibly high number of shortages, such as 80%. The situation has recently improved, due to the federal government's intervention, but supplying my family with healthy water is still a struggle. The only water I have access to is canal water, which isn't filtered and often carries pesticides and animal waste. I struggle to supply my family with food, and I often starve myself to feed and educate my children. I don't have the funds to send my eldest son, Imrane, to secondary school, and unfortunately, he's following my path and working in the fields with me.

I have given a Muslim name to all my children to put them in a condition to have an easier life, since we Hindus face severe discrimination and hardships in our daily life. Hindus in the Sindh are approximately 4.9 million, constituting 8.8% of the area's population: most Hindus in Pakistan reside in Sindh, working as farmers for Muslim landowners. Other than the economic challenges, the extreme droughts, and harsh working conditions, we face severe discrimination and exclusion. I'm lucky to have a job, since I have no bargaining power, and my complaining about my working conditions

or about my pay would result in me getting fired and having debt penalties. I have little to no say in community decisions, and muslim citizens are prioritized over me. All of us Hindus are under pressure to assimilate into Islam, with young females being under threat of forced conversion. Living conditions are very harsh, and little to nothing has improved these recent years. Almost a year ago, a childhood friend of mine, Chaman Kolhi, committed suicide along with his family, since he was desperate and couldn't handle hunger and unemployment anymore. Hindu suicides in Sindh have been rapidly increasing. Despite Sindh being the first Pakistani province to call for legal action against the forced conversion of minority girls in 2016, tragedies involving rape and abduction constantly happen.

What solutions would you find most helpful?

One of the possible solutions to get me and all my community out of this situation could be a land reform or tenancy rights, to make Hindu farmers profit from their work and not be indebted to their landowner for their whole life. By redistributing the land, inequality between farmers would be diminished: everyone would make a profit off of their own land, and the only losers are the rich landowners, because to encourage their workforce to work on their land and not on their own, they must improve their salaries. Another solution is the government paying the farming material for the farmers and not the landowner, to prevent the landowners from indebting and exploiting the workforce.

The climate cannot be changed, but there are possible solutions to face the issue. Safe and shared water resources built by local NGOs or government programs that ensure that the whole population has access to healthy water, and force the landowners to guarantee fair access to water for their workers.

The only potential solutions for social inequality are education and restriction of the laws: schools and governmental infrastructures should spread awareness and educate the youth into embracing cultural diversity within their society, and the government should severely punish acts of violence and segregation towards minorities. If Pakistan's government eventually keeps ignoring the issue, then worldwide associations such as the UN should proceed with sanctions.