

Thanks for the support received from ESSF in 2019-2020 - Crofter Foundation and Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee Activity Report

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We would like to thank Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF) and all its campaign contributors for their continued support in 2019/2020 for the activities of the Crofter Foundation (CF) and the Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC) to help the smallholder farmer land rights movement and popularize the ideas of food sovereignty.

The donations we received from ESSF, as well as from other solidarity organizations and social movements, helped fund Crofter/PKRC's activities, which are summarized below:

Peasants' rights, inequality and food sovereignty

During this period, the main focus of these activities was around land rights advocacy, economic services and the popularization ideas of food sovereignty. Different campaigns were promoted among small farmers and poor rural communities.

On 19 January 2020, the Crofter Foundation, together with other organizations, organized a week against inequality in the cities of Lahore, Gujranwala, Multan and Toba Tek Singh. A press conference was organized at the Lahore Press Club on 19 January 2020, which was attended by social activists and peasant leaders. We campaigned through print, electronic and social media, including a one-hour live TV debate on 20 January on private TV channel GTE on the issue of wheat flour hoarding and price hike. It was a debate between parliamentarians and Farooq Tariq, Secretary General of PKRC.

On 29 January 2020, at the World Food Security Council (WFS) in Rome (an official meeting to discuss and negotiate the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition), a PKRC representative attended and represented La Via Campesina at this meeting. It included mainly governments with the participation of UN agencies (FAO, IFAD, WHO, OHCHR and many others), as well as social movements, civil society organizations and other actors.

The PKRC representative said that food systems cannot continue to be reshaped to serve private profits nor can they be reshaped by focusing only on productivity. Food systems must serve the public interest. To ensure this, safeguards against conflicts of interest are needed, as mentioned by previous speakers. The section should clearly state the main role of the government as the implementer of the Guidelines.

Part of ESSF's donations were spent on popularizing the sustainable natural farming system and policies based on agroecology, end of feudalism through effective land reforms. It also called for a total ban on coal-fired power generation and the adoption of renewable energy resources.

A three-day international conference, organized by the Crofter Foundation and PKRC on 6/7/8 February 2020, called for a total ban on genetically modified seeds and an end to feudalism through land reforms in Pakistan. The event was attended by 20 international delegates from 15 Asian and European states and over 40 delegates from different parts of Pakistan representing several farmers' organizations.

The theme of the event was "Towards a Just Transition: Food Sovereignty, Post-extractivism and Climate Justice". It was organised with the help of the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF).

The conference recommended the government to pass legislation on the implementation of the UN Peasants' Charter, which was adopted in 2018 by the UN General Assembly and for which Pakistan voted. "It is time to implement the Peasants' Charter in its true spirit".

On 14 February, a campaign for clean water was launched by PKRC members in villages of Qasur district. On 19 February, PKRC members participated in a conference in Peshawar organized by the provincial agriculture department to discuss the problems faced by small-scale farmers.

On 18 February, the PKRC and the Crofter Foundation joined with other organizations to organise the largest one-day cultural activity for workers called Faiz Ann Mela. Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the PKRC, was the coordinator of the event, which was attended by over 5,000 people who listened to singers, watched street plays and participated in other cultural activities.

On 8 March, International Women's Day, the Crofter Foundation participated in an event in Lahore called the Aurat March, attended by over 5,000 women and activists to mark the day.

On 12 March, a minimum wage campaign was launched with other organizations to address the growing problems of poverty among the rural population. Posters were printed and campaign leaflets distributed in several villages. A telephone number was provided on the campaign materials for complaints about labour law violations.

Covid

An awareness campaign launched by the Crofter Foundation to combat the rising tide of COVID-19 among rural communities. We printed articles, leaflets, produced short videos and an SMS campaign was launched. We had to fight the ideas that 'CORONA is nothing', an imperialist conspiracy, only a small flu, does not affect young people and many other confusing ideas.

We were the first to launch the Labour Relief Campaign (LRC) to help workers on 26 March, together with 5 other organizations, just after the coronavirus appeared. Until 12 July, more than 4,000 families, including the poor peasantry hit hard by COVID-19, received a dry food ration sufficient for a family of six for 20 days. We collected more than Rs 15 million from our supporters and social organizations for the LRC. We have been able to reach 5 districts of Punjab with relief packages taking care of all the protective measures for the volunteers who distribute these packages at the doorstep.

Some of the videos of the General Secretary of PKRC, who himself was a victim of Corona, have been viewed by more than 3 million people, explaining how to fight Corona and what to do during the Corona period. Thousands of people have been educated and many lives have been saved by the messages in these short 3/6 minutes videos.

We facilitated 1500 farmer members to get information about the government's COVID-19 fund and helped them to registered in this program.

150 women farm workers benefited from the government's COVID-19 assistance fund. We launched a media campaign through press releases published in major media on the losses suffered by small farmers and the government's failure to compensate them. Several PKRC statements were printed nationally, giving concrete examples of the losses suffered by the peasantry. Crofter Foundation made short videos with farmers explaining the losses suffered by farmers due to COVID-19. On May 1, International Workers' Day, PKRC and the Crofter Foundation participated in a webinar with trade unions to discuss the plight of workers.

On June 15, June 26 and July 10, PKRC and Crofter Foundation held online meetings with farmer representatives. Two webinars organised by the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), mainly by PKRC and Crofter Foundation, on the theme "Food producers should not go hungry" were held on 26 June and 10 July. More than 100 people attended these webinars and more than 250 registered.

Environment and climate

Farmers were trained and introduced to a different farming system, the Natural Sustainable Crop Production System. Farmers learned how to achieve higher production without using too many inputs. 12 agricultural cooperatives were established, 11 in Punjab and 1 in Sindh, to produce good quality crops and improve market linkages.

Support from ESSF has enabled us to campaign for land rights. Some support was provided to legal aid for imprisoned farmer leaders who were released through our efforts at the end of 2020, after 4.5 years in prison.

The ESSF has always come forward in difficult times, as the history of the last 10 years has shown. As a farmers' network of 29 farmers' organizations, we are very happy to be associated with your association. We also ask comrades and supporters to continue to support ESSF, which in turn has become a vehicle of support in the most difficult times for working class organizations in developing countries.

Once again, we would like to extend our warmest thanks to all of ESSF's donors who have enabled us to carry out these activities.

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