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# Land Rights and the Indus Flood, 2010-2011: Rapid Assessment and Policy Review

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June 2011



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## Executive Summary

The Indus floods of 2010-2011 were the direct cause of over 1,700 deaths and the displacement of an estimated 18 million people across Pakistan. Official estimates of the economic costs of the damage caused by the floods range from \$8.74bn to \$10.85bn, which include the estimated costs, early recovery for the provision of relief, rebuilding destroyed infrastructure, and other economic losses to individuals, communities, firms, and the government.

Access to land, for homesteads as well as agricultural use, is a key correlate of economic opportunity and social position in rural Pakistan. A majority of the households in the flood-affected regions of the country, however, do not own agricultural land, and by extension, enjoy diminished rights of possession over homestead land.

This study addresses the following questions: How have the floods affected the security of access to agricultural, homestead, and common lands for people belonging to poor and socially-marginalized communities across the country? How have the entitlements to land rights of different classes, social groups, and genders been affected? In what way might rehabilitation policies or programmes become more sensitive to the position of people who had low, weak, and precarious land entitlements before the floods? Are there opportunities for the reversal of the long-standing structures of inequality and hierarchy in respect to access to land, as a result of new flood-related interventions?

The floods impacted on different regions of the country in different ways. The initial impact of extraordinarily high rainfall was first felt in the mountainous districts, where major flash-floods and landslides led to the destruction of houses and villages, farms, orchards, and infrastructure. Second in line were the plains regions immediately downstream from the mountainous districts, where flood waters arrived quickly, and caused the highest number of deaths and injuries as people were left stranded with little advance warning. The third areas to be affected were regions in the floodplains all the way down to the Indus delta, where floods submerged riverine zones and breached embankments and other protective structures. Large parts of these regions remained water-logged several months after the floods.

Those who were displaced by the floods and lost their assets and means of livelihood consisted disproportionately of landless tenants and labourers. Regions badly affected by the floods, particularly those suffering from the second and third round of effects mentioned above, are areas where the distribution of land ownership is known to be highly unequal. The proportion of rural households who own land is low, and large holdings account for a high proportion of the total area.

The regions covered in this rapid assessment include: the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KPK), southern Punjab, eastern Balochistan, and upper and lower Sindh. There were wide variations across the regions covered in economic conditions, agrarian structures, and flood impact. In eastern Balochistan and upper Sindh regions, land ownership is dominated by powerful tribal leaders. In the plains of KPK and southern Punjab, there are strong class-caste dimensions to the agrarian hierarchy. Here, historically marginalized communities such as traditional labour castes and semi-nomadic populations face particular disadvantage. In lower Sindh, caste and tribal structures are less conspicuous, even though land ownership remains concentrated in the hands of a few families.

## Three categories of land security

Among those belonging to poor and marginalized communities interviewed for the rapid assessment, there were three categories of land security:

- 1 **Smallholders.** The most secure among people living in poverty were those who happened to own some agricultural land, even if it was a small plot. In all regions, even those dominated by powerful tribal landlords, there were numerous individuals and groups from among former landless tenants and labourers who had succeeded in purchasing land. There were also smallholders who had inherited land from their parents and succeeded in retaining it.
- 2 **Landless tenants and labourers with secured possession of their homesteads.** Less secure than smallholders were landless tenants and labourers who, through a variety of processes, had acquired some level of secure possession, at least of their homesteads. In nearly all regions and fieldwork sites covered in this report, such individuals, families and, groups were found to be vulnerable to the economic and political demands of dominant landowners. There were instances when they were able to resist these demands and times when they acquiesced. Demands included support during elections and the provision of customary unpaid service at particular times.
- 3 **Landless tenants and labourers with no residential security.** Finally, there were individuals, families, and even entire communities, who neither owned land, nor enjoyed secure rights of possession over their homesteads. Within this latter group there were some tenants or labourers who lived on privately-owned land belonging to their landlords or employers. There was a clear understanding that their rights of residence extended only insofar as they remained in an economic relationship with their landlords or employers. There were others in this category who were socially marginalized due to their group identities or individual circumstances. These included people belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, and historically oppressed caste groups.

Title, while important, is not always a guarantee of the right of ownership if, as in a number of cases, politically-powerful individuals are able to wield influence over land administration officials through bribes and patronage, or harass the owners to the point where they cede their rights. Social networks and political capital are important factors in ensuring security of ownership and possession. A family that is unsupported in the community – either because they are considered to be social outsiders, or due to conflict – may face difficulties in asserting their legal claims. The same holds true for individuals who are not able to count on the support of their immediate and extended families.

There were landless tenants and labourers in all regions who were confident that their prior entitlements to land would remain secure following the floods and displacement. For some, entitlements depended on their landlord and/or employers, but these were secure because the economic relationship was expected to continue. In many cases such economic ties are highly exploitative. There were others whose entitlements were held autonomously and are not dependent on landlords or employers.

The ownership of even a small plot of agricultural land signals that an individual or family enjoys some measure of political enfranchisement or social support. Smallholders interviewed were confident that their property rights would remain secure following the flood.

The conditions of smallholders cultivating land in the riverbed areas of Sindh represent the most vivid cases where factors other than formal title are seen to be determinants of the security of ownership claims. Since the land was never officially surveyed, claims of ownership are premised on mutual recognition within and between communities, rather than formally-enforceable legal title. In the settled areas (outside the riverine area) where

official land ownership records do exist, there is nevertheless a sense that title is buttressed by other social and political factors in maintaining ownership and control.

## Evaluating the assessments

A key lesson learned from analysis of previous disasters is that humanitarian, as well as development responses, must be anchored in a rights-based framework, with explicit consideration for those who face inequality and were marginalized before the disaster. Such vulnerable groups need to be protected against the risk of dispossession as well as a return to unequal power relations. But despite these lessons, the policy direction of government and international development partners in regard to the post-floods response has so far paid little attention to land rights and vulnerability as a dimension of recovery.

In the aftermath of the floods, a preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) was published jointly by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank (WB), and the federal government, with estimates of the financial costs of flood-related damage and loss of income, as well as the expected public costs of recovery (ADB *et al.* 2010). Other important assessments of damage and policy direction relevant to land issues have been made by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (OCHA 2010) and jointly by UN-Habitat and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) (UN-Habitat and NDMA 2010).

The DNA and other documents failed to acknowledge that a majority of rural residents in most of the flood-affected districts of the country do not own land. For landless tenants, it is assumed that the most preferable outcome would be to return to take up tenancy leases from their existing landowners. This may be incorrect for tenants who were living and working in conditions of extreme exploitation, and for whom other labour market opportunities would be preferable to a return to this exploitation.

The proposed housing recovery and reconstruction strategy makes no mention of land ownership issues. The key proposed policy principles state that rebuilding should be encouraged at the original site of the damaged property, except in high-risk areas. The main recommendations deal with the quality and design of reconstruction and its probable costs and disbursement mechanisms. It is proposed that houses in zones which are designated as 'five-year flood areas' must be relocated. The detailed calculations for various scenarios for reconstruction costs, however, do not include any provision for the costs of land acquisition either by the government or by private individuals themselves. The discussion of the financial sector notes the importance of expanding land ownership and improving the quality of title, but does not incorporate this observation into the recovery strategy.

The assessment of damage and reconstruction in the housing sector undertaken by the UN-Habitat Pakistan country office fails to take into consideration the lessons competently compiled elsewhere by its international counterpart. There is little appreciation of the range and complexity of land issues faced by those who do not own land and who are socially marginalized.

Positive ideas on land and rural housing might be sought from past government interventions for providing residential security. The Sindh provincial government's Sindh Goth Abad Housing Scheme (SGAHS) attempted to provide residential security to rural landless tenants and labourers through the regularization of existing settlements. In Punjab, the Marla schemes of the 1970s were based on the government providing individual leases to landless labourer households in specially established colonies set up on government-owned or acquired land. This scheme was aborted after a few years, but left behind an important and unacknowledged positive legacy in many districts.

The policy priorities in the DNA for other sectors, such as agriculture where land is critical, suffer from a bias in favour of landowners, as compensation is to be directed to those who already own land. This means that those who are relatively better off will be the primary beneficiaries of compensation, even though a majority of rural households in many affected districts are made up of either landless tenants or labourers. The same is true in respect to the proposed subsidies to the financial sector to help it tide over non-performing loans. Since borrowers from the formal sector are exclusively from among the bigger farmers, the primary beneficiaries of this subsidy too will be people who are relatively better off, even among landowners.

Government at the federal and sub-national levels, international financial institutions (IFIs), and the UN must incorporate land issues and land inequality explicitly into the policy and strategic response to the floods. A start can be made through the initiation of a comprehensive review of access-to-land issues in the flood-affected districts.

Housing sector priorities must reflect the fact that a large and as yet uncounted number of rural households have weak entitlements over their homestead land. The government must be prepared to provide land to the landless for homesteads in economically-viable locations, and to acquire land for this purpose if necessary. The provision of state or acquired land for homesteads in the form of outright ownership of individual plots must be used to advance women's right to land, through nominating the female head of the household as the owner or joint owner. It is important to acknowledge and learn lessons from past government interventions in this regard.

There is an urgent need on the part of IFIs to correct the bias of recovery and reconstruction priorities against those who do not own land or whose ownership of, and/or access to, land is insecure. Investments in agriculture and finance are almost entirely directed towards the relatively wealthy, by virtue of the fact that they are likely to accrue to landowners. These investments might be partly utilized to create greater access to land for those who currently do not own land.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Tenancy Act – the Act governing the tenant–landlord relationship. A tenant is a person who holds land under another person and is liable to pay rent for the land. The tenant of a landlord operates under one lease or one set of conditions. The aim of this law is to accommodate landless people and to provide cover and support them against landowners and landlords.

Residential security – secure ownership or tenant rights to land being used for the purpose of housing/shelter; also known as housing rights.

Land security/tenure security – secure ownership or tenant rights to land being used for the purpose of housing/shelter or agricultural purposes.

Collective entitlements – collective historical rights to land that a community has been residing on for several years (usually decades or centuries).

Sharecropping – is a system of agriculture whereby a landowner allows a tenant farmer to use the land in return for a share of the crop produced on the land.

*Katcho* areas – riverine areas where property rights are poorly defined.

*Pukka* areas – non-riverine area; settled area outside the flood ‘bund’ (embankment or dyke where people usually have permanent houses).

# 1. Introduction

The Indus floods of 2010-2011 were the direct cause of over 1,700 deaths and the displacement of an estimated 18 million people across Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. Official estimates of the economic damage range from \$8.74bn to \$10.85bn, which include the estimated costs, early recovery for the provision of relief, rebuilding destroyed infrastructure, and other economic losses to individuals, communities, firms, and the government (ADB *et al.*, 2010).

It is widely recognized that full recovery from the floods may take many years. In the meantime, as the government, international development partners, national organizations, communities, and private individuals set about dealing with the impacts, they will do so in a context which is already marked by severe inequality in access to land.

Access to land for homesteads as well as agricultural use is a key correlate of economic opportunity and social position in rural Pakistan. A majority of the households in the flood-affected regions of the country, however, do not own agricultural land, and by extension, enjoy diminished rights of possession over homestead land. In addition to causing displacement and economic vulnerability, the floods have also disrupted existing arrangements for agricultural livelihoods, and access to agricultural and homestead land. Land rights are therefore critical to understanding the impact of the floods, and in instituting sustainable and equitable policies and strategies for recovery.

This report addresses the issue of land rights and security of tenure in the flood-affected regions, and the impact of the floods and post-flood rehabilitation in magnifying or reducing the vulnerability of the land rights of people who are poor and socially marginalized. The absence of uniform title or enforcement of land claims and rights across different regions, types of land use, as well as the class, social identity, migrant status, and gender of individuals means that floods, displacement and rehabilitation are likely to have had diverse impacts across and within the affected districts. The security of rights and claims to land cannot be taken for granted in any analysis of the impact of the floods, or in the design of rehabilitation and recovery policies.

The main question addressed by this study is:

- How have the floods affected the access to agricultural, homestead, and common lands of those belonging to poor and socially marginalized communities across the country?

Subsidiary questions include the following:

- How have the entitlements to land rights of different classes, social groups and genders been affected?
- In what way might rehabilitation policies or programmes become more sensitive to the position of people who had low, weak and precarious land entitlements before the floods?
- Are there opportunities for the reversal of long-standing structures of inequality and hierarchy in respect to access to land, as a result of new flood-related interventions?

The regions covered in this report are the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KPK), southern Punjab, eastern Balochistan, and upper and lower Sindh.

The results of a rapid assessment carried out in all four provinces are summarized in Section 2. Section 3 reviews existing policy priorities in the light of international experience. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Section 4.

## 2. Flood and vulnerability of land rights: empirical findings

### 2.1 The floods

According to official accounts, the floods affected a majority of districts in all provinces and sub-national regions of the country. The initial impact of extraordinarily high rainfall was felt in the mountainous districts of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan. In a number of these districts there were major flash foods and landslides leading to the destruction of houses and villages, farms, orchards, and infrastructure. The second in line were plains regions immediately downstream from the mountainous districts, where flood waters arrived quickly, and caused the highest number of deaths and injuries as people were left stranded with little advance warning. The third areas to be affected were regions in the floodplains all the way down to the Indus delta, where the floods led to the submergence of riverine zones, and the breaching of embankments and other protective structures.

Some districts in the second category also experienced flash flooding, and river protection was breached. This was the case in particular in the plains districts of central KPK, including Charsaddah and Nowshera, where water flowing down from the mountainous areas led to major rivers breaching their embankments. Some of the districts of Balochistan and southern Punjab, downstream from hill torrents to their immediate west, experienced flash floods in the immediate aftermath of the rains in August; plain areas in these districts later flooded when the Indus itself flooded in September.

#### *'Slow-moving Tsunami'*

The floodplains of Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan saw major flooding, or what came to be called a 'slow-moving tsunami', as the main stem of the Indus overflowed its banks, triggering large-scale breaches of embankments, irrigation canals and drains, and spreading a wall of water across the countryside. In southern Punjab, mostly in the districts of Muzaffargarh and Dera Ghazi Khan, the traditional riverine areas as well as some more protected areas were affected due to breaches at the Taunsa barrage. All through the length of Sindh, the river was expected to inundate all of its *katcho* area – the historical riverbed protected on both sides by embankments. Two breaches in Indus embankments, the first on its right bank at Tori (Sindh Province) in the north and the second on the left bank much further to the south at Kot Alamo (Sindh Province) were sources of major devastation in the protected or *pukka* region.<sup>2</sup> The inundation resulting from the Tori breach, in particular, was responsible for the submergence of much of the right bank of the Indus in upper Sindh and Balochistan, laying waste to large parts of Shikarpur, Jacobabad, Shahdadkot, and Dadu districts in Sindh, and Jaffarabad district in Balochistan.

#### *Impact*

The experience of people living in the flood-affected areas varied between regions. In most of the regions other than those affected by the Tori breach in northern Sindh, the flood waters receded within a few weeks, if not sooner. In upper Sindh and eastern Balochistan, large tracts remained waterlogged two months after the main flood had passed, and were expected to remain in this condition for several months longer. At the time of the rapid assessment, there appeared little prospect in many of these areas for the resumption of normal economic activity, even if some of the main settlements were once again inhabitable. In other areas where the waters had receded, some economic activity had revived, even if it was hampered by the loss of private assets and public infrastructure.

## 2.2 Land rights in Pakistan before the flood

Most of the regions badly affected by the floods also happen to be areas where distribution of land ownership is known to be highly unequal. The proportion of rural households who own land is low, and large holdings account for a high proportion of the total area. This is the case in nearly all of the plains areas where the Indus flood caused devastation and displacement. Those who were displaced by the floods and lost their assets and means of livelihood, therefore, consisted disproportionately of landless tenants and labourers. While land and agrarian systems vary between regions, that land ownership is concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful elite is a fact of life in nearly all the affected districts. Access to land, therefore, is closely correlated with social status and political power.

In some of the affected areas, such as the *katcho* areas in Sindh, as well as some riverine regions in southern Punjab, records of land ownership are incomplete, as cultivation is often carried out on land that has not been properly surveyed by the revenue department, which is responsible for maintaining records of land rights. In other communities settled in the *pukka* areas where ownership rights to agricultural land are maintained on a regular basis, there are nevertheless other claims to land which are not adequately documented. Access to residential land or commonly-owned waste land, for example, is often simply an extension of the ownership of agricultural land in the same revenue village. Those who do not own agricultural land, therefore, enjoy various degrees of rights to possession of their homestead, from extremely secure to highly insecure, depending upon their precise conditions. There are also wide local variations in the functioning of these land arrangements.

The rapid assessment undertaken for this study attempted to ascertain the concerns of displaced women, men and communities from different classes, social groups and regions with respect to their entitlements to land. The survey also observed the living conditions of people who had returned to their homes, as well as the living conditions of those who had not returned or did not wish to return. The rapid assessment relied on qualitative research methods to collect data. A check-list of questions (Appendix 1) was developed following preliminary fieldwork in internally-displaced persons' (IDP) camps in Karachi. This check-list was used for individual interviews with women and men, and for group discussions.

Besides Karachi, fieldwork was also carried out in the following districts: Newshehra in the plains region of KPK, Muzaffargarh in southern Punjab, Jaffarabad in eastern Balochistan, Larkana and Dadu in upper Sindh (including *katcho* as well as settled areas), and Thatta in lower Sindh.<sup>3</sup> Conditions in the selected districts are typical for their respective regions. The main regions that were left out of the rapid assessment are those in the mountainous areas affected by flash floods. Some of the prior conditions in the selected districts with respect to land ownership and agriculture are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Land ownership and agriculture in selected districts**

District	Landowners as proportion of rural households - %	Agriculture (not including labourers) as proportion of all occupations - % of adult males	Labourers (including agricultural labourers) as proportion of all occupations - % of adult males	Landless tenants as proportion of all farmers - %	Area operated by tenants as proportion of all area - %
Dadu (S)	28.1	48.2	25.4	16.5	15.9
Larkana (S)	31.7	61.8	22.9	22.5	15.3
Thatta (S)	24.2	62.3	22.2	3.9	4.7
Muzaffargarh (P)	54.3	39.2	38.4	6.3	16.5
Nowshehra (KPK)	39.3	19.5	33.9	3.3	13.5
Jafferabad (B)	28.8	67.7	19.1	58.6	47.7
Year	2000	1998	1998	2000	2000
Source	Agricultural Census 2000	Population Census 1998	Population Census 1998	Agricultural Census 2000	Agricultural Census 2000

## 2.3 Findings

### *Regional overview*

There are wide variations across the regions covered by the rapid assessment in regard to economic conditions, agrarian structures, and flood impact.

There are some similarities between upper Sindh right bank, upper Sindh *katcho*, and eastern Balochistan in terms of cropping patterns, land ownership and tenure, and social organization. In these three regions, landlords with large holdings running into thousands of acres dominate the rural economy and society. Social organization along tribal lines dominates, and large landowners are also powerful tribal leaders. Many smaller farmers are under their influence due to tribal affinity, and their tenants and labourers include people affiliated with their tribes, as well as outsiders. In these areas, regardless of the formal arrangements for recording property rights, political capital based upon tribal organization plays an important part in any individual's ability to assert rights of ownership and possession. In the *katcho* area, criminality has been identified as an integral feature of the relationships between large landlords and their landless dependents. The community perception (in *katcho* and settled areas) is that some landlords offer protection to those escaping the law or retribution elsewhere, and then expect and even encourage their dependent populations to take part in acts of criminal violence aimed at maintaining their control.

Although powerful landlords are also present in the other regions, they do not match the scale of land ownership or political power enjoyed by those in upper Sindh and eastern Balochistan. For instance, in Thatta in lower Sindh, large landowners are also present.

They are mostly from the Syed caste and combine landed power with religious authority, but do not command tribal allegiance. Tribal identity is important in Nowshera in the plains region of KPK, but class dynamics are driven more by formal land ownership than tribal identity. Established landed families and clans assert their control over resources through formal means such as influence over local land administration, rather than through a constant state of tribal mobilization, as in upper Sindh and eastern Balochistan.

In the parts of southern Punjab covered by the survey, there are some similarities with upper Sindh and eastern Balochistan. In some of these areas the dominant landlords are politically powerful. In other areas the landowning groups dominate the local community, but are themselves relatively marginalized within the wider political context. The division of a relatively well-defined village community into a hierarchy of castes and kinship groups characterizes the rural structure in this region. Dominant groups who belong to traditional landowning castes attempt to maintain control over formerly subservient labour castes through steady pressure and harassment, often premised on the use of homestead and common land, but not through overt use of violence.

The above summary of the broader context of rural economic relations and social organization is based on specific responses given by individual and group respondents from these areas, who were interviewed for the rapid assessment. While this picture broadly conforms to the prior understanding of rural economic and social arrangements and inequalities in these regions, it needs to be noted that the survey cannot be regarded as providing a regionally representative account of land and social inequality for any region.

The fact that the respondents from upper Sindh and eastern Balochistan experienced conditions of domination by large landlords who were also tribal leaders cannot be taken to represent the situation in *all* villages in these districts. There will be other villages, communities and sub-regions within upper Sindh and eastern Balochistan where conditions are different. But these findings mean that our interview data can be used to understand the situation of individuals and communities who *are* living under such conditions. Likewise, just because the respondents in southern Punjab, the plains region of KPK and lower Sindh did not live in areas where powerful tribal leaders dominated land, society, and politics, does not mean that such forms of domination do not exist in these regions. Nevertheless, our interviews and group discussions in the latter three regions are helpful in understanding the interaction of other forms of social hierarchy and power in the context of the devastation caused by the floods.

The situation in regard to the ongoing impacts of the floods varied between different regions and fieldwork sites. In the fieldwork sites in Nowshera (in the plains region of KPK) and Muzaffargarh (southern Punjab), flood waters had receded, and it was feasible for displaced people to return to their homes. There were still clusters of people living in camps in Muzaffargarh who did not wish to return to their former places of residence for various reasons that are discussed in greater detail below. In the Larkana site (upper Sindh *katcho*), flood waters had receded as well, and many residents had returned. In the fieldwork sites in Qambar-Shahdadkot and Dadu (upper Sindh right bank) and Jaffarabad (eastern Balochistan), at the time of the survey flood waters had not fully receded from most residential areas, let alone agricultural lands. In Thatta (lower Sindh left bank) the main areas of human settlement, which were on raised ground, were inhabitable, though there was still standing water in some of the agricultural lands of the affected communities.

### ***Land security among those living in poverty***

Although the precise conditions of the agrarian economy, social organization, and the reach of formal systems of title vary greatly across the fieldwork sites, there are also sufficient commonalities in the hierarchy of claims and entitlements. In all regions and fieldwork sites, there are some individuals and groups, who either by the virtue of long-

standing title, or due to political power and social networks, enjoy highly secure rights of ownership or possession. In many of the regions, these individuals and groups at the top of the rural hierarchy are, in fact, sources of insecurity for others.

### Three categories of land security

Among people belonging to poor and marginalized groups interviewed for the survey, there were three categories of land security:

1. **Smallholders.** The most secure among people living in poverty were those who happened to own some agricultural land, even if it was a small plot. In all regions, even those dominated by powerful tribal landlords, there were numerous individuals and groups from among former landless tenants and labourers who had succeeded in purchasing land. There were also smallholders who had inherited land from their parents and succeeded in retaining it.
2. **Landless tenants and labourers with secured possession of their homesteads.** Less secure than smallholders were landless tenants and labourers who, through a variety of processes, had acquired some level of secure possession, at least of their homesteads. In nearly all regions and fieldwork sites such individuals, families and groups were often vulnerable to economic and political demands on the part of dominant landowners. There were instances when they were able to resist these demands and times when they acquiesced. Demands included support during elections, and the provision of customary unpaid service at particular times.
3. **Landless tenants and labourers with no residential security.** Finally, there were individuals, families and even entire communities, who neither owned land, nor enjoyed secure rights of possession over their homesteads. Within this latter group there were some tenants or labourers who lived on privately-owned land belonging to their landlords or employers. There was a clear understanding that their rights of residence extended only insofar as they remained in an economic relationship with their landlords or employers. There were others in this category who were socially marginalized due to their group identities or individual circumstances. These included people belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, historically oppressed caste groups such as non-cultivators (known pejoratively as *kammis*) and menial castes such as the Muslim Shaikh. There were also groups such as *Bagris* in Sindh, *Gujjars* in KPK, and *Odh* in Punjab who are regarded by local landowners as homeless migrants without fixed abode, even if they have remained in the same place for many years.

Considering these three degrees of land security among the poor proved to be a useful tool for interpreting broad patterns in the flood-affected areas. They do not represent discrete groups into which individuals and families could be placed neatly. There is considerable overlap between them, particularly between the second and third categories. A wide range of factors appeared to contribute to level of security of ownership and possession enjoyed by an individual, family, or group.

Possession of formal title is, of course, an important determinant of security. Yet even in the *katcho* area of Sindh, where much of the land remains unsurveyed, we were informed about the buying and selling of land. Title, moreover, is not always a guarantee of right if, as in a number of cases, politically powerful individuals were able to wield influence over land administration officials through bribes and patronage, or harassed the owners to the point that they ceded their rights. Social networks and political capital are important factors in ensuring security of ownership and possession. A family that is unsupported in the community – either because they are considered to be social outsiders, or due to conflict – could face difficulties in asserting their legal claims. The same holds true for individuals who are not able to count on the support of their immediate and extended families.

### ***Landless tenants and labourers without secure residential entitlements***

Home ownership data in Pakistan do not, typically, differentiate between those who claim to enjoy rights of possession of their home at a particular moment in time, and those who have secure property rights in the land on which their homesteads stand. This distinction is important even under normal conditions, but can become a critical one at times of involuntary displacement. It was not possible to use secondary sources to estimate the relative proportions of landless tenants and labourers in the flood-affected areas who enjoyed entitlements to homestead land compared with those who only enjoyed contingent rights of possession of built structures. In all regions, however, there are distinct classes and groups who fall in the latter category.

The conversation about the security of rights over land in general and homesteads in particular was generally held in the context of plans and aspirations about returning to the original place of residence. In Nowshera (KPK) families who had already returned to their villages included those who were entirely dependent on landlords for homes as well as homesteads. The tenancy system in this area includes the provision not just of homestead land, but built houses to tenants. This also means that the tenants have to vacate their homes at the will of the landlord. The families who had returned told us that they would have to move if the landlord asked them to leave and that there was no question of having an independent claim to homesteads or homestead land from their employment or tenancy of agricultural land. The landlord's outright ownership of the house where the tenants live gives him greater control over tenanted agricultural land.

#### **Box 1**

During the rapid assessment, interviewers came across a case in a village in Nowshera of a poor widow's family being forced from of its pre-flood residence and having to move in with relatives elsewhere. The landlord utilized flood-induced displacement as a pretext to make a change in their tenure. In the same district, Noora Bibi's family, who had worked as sharecroppers for as long as she could remember, were evicted when the land they worked changed hands. The family had to leave their native district in search of a new landlord, and remained in debt.

In other regions it was more common for landless tenants and labourers to live in homes that they had themselves constructed, rather than those provided by landlords or employers. There were commonly observed restrictions, however, in the construction material which could be used by landless tenants who did not enjoy homestead entitlements. In the *katcho* areas, brick and mortar houses were rare. This might be due partly to the geographic conditions, since it is assumed that even a moderate flood would lead to the inundation of much of the *katcho*, and thus destruction of built structures. There was also an institutional element here, as ownership rights over agricultural and non-agricultural land were weakly defined and not always protected through any formal legal system of ownership. The arrangements governing access to land and homesteads in the *katcho* are unregulated. For example, even those who own land in the area, and have no other place of residence other than the *katcho*, have identity cards that give the addresses of relatives living in the settled area. While the *katcho* residents, land-owners as well as landless labourers and tenants, might mutually recognize different levels of informal entitlements to land, the official record does not recognize them as legal residents of the area. In fact, according to some official sources, there are not meant to be any permanent residents in the *katcho*; this is a stance that clearly ignores the reality.

Flood patterns are not entirely unpredictable in this area, and there are sizeable settlements including small market places in the *katcho*. The full extent of the protected riverbed – that is, protected by embankments on either side – can be as wide as 100km in places, and the total area of the *katcho* (riverine belt) runs to over a million acres. Within the *katcho*, however, the river itself covers a relatively small proportion of the entire area, and while flows change as a result of major floods, according to our respondents this is

likely to happen only once every few decades. The emergence and consolidation of relatively large settlements within the *katcho*, therefore, are not entirely surprising.

The position of *katcho* residents and any observations about their security or insecurity of land entitlements is further complicated by the fact that many have absconded from the law.

### Box 2

A family who had worked as labourers for a landlord with large holdings in the Larkana *katcho* had received refuge here some three years previously. The respondent himself had murdered a *kamdar* or manager who was employed by an influential landlord. A newly emerging landlord who had criminal connections gave him refuge.

The fieldwork in the area had to be negotiated delicately through local contacts who were able to guarantee the security of the research team. Some male respondents admitted to being either absconders from the law, or of fleeing from retribution in the settled areas. Many of them openly carried firearms, despite otherwise being poor. Entitlements to land and homestead appear to be well respected within the *katcho*, and communities use geographical markers such as sand dunes to mark their respective areas. For individuals, however, the security of entitlements is highly dependent on political protection afforded by the major landlords or powerful kinship groups.

In eastern Balochistan and upper Sindh right-bank fieldwork sites, there was a clear distinction between those landless tenants and labourers who lived on landlords' privately owned land, and those who lived in officially recognized villages. The same is true in Thatta, in lower Sindh. The distinction was enforced particularly severely in Jaffarabad (eastern Balochistan), where those living on *jagirdari* (landlord's privately owned) land as opposed to those in *chak* land were not allowed by the landowners to build *pukka* (brick and mortar) structures.

### Box 3

During a group discussion with landless tenants belonging to the same clan in Jaffarabad, it was discovered that many had moved homes and landlords several times over the course of their working lives. They always depended on the goodwill of a landlord and their residence inside landlords' lands was strongly related to continuity of work and other conditions. One respondent told us that five out of 13 households among his relatives had still not been allowed to reoccupy their damaged houses or plots, even though the water had receded weeks ago. The landlord had levelled their homestead plot for the next wheat crop. Another nine households belonging to the respondent's relatives who were heavily indebted but in the landlord's favour were allowed to resettle on a canal embankment.

Another group of five households had been evicted by many landlords and had never made a *pukka* (permanent) house anywhere. Their homesteads were still inundated but they were unsure if their landlord would call them back since he had only 200 acres of land and only a small portion of his land would be ready for cultivation by the next crop season. This group was sure that their landlord would reclaim his debt by force if they received any cash assistance from the government.

Since many parts of eastern Balochistan and the upper Sindh right bank were still waterlogged at the time of the survey, it was not always clear if the constraint in returning to the village was inundation or loss of residential rights.

In Thatta, most of the landless tenants and labourers who live on government land or '*pad*' - elevated land near canal banks - enjoy a range of proprietary claims. Even in this region, as elsewhere in Sindh, neighbouring landlords are able to assert some claims on state-owned land using legal instruments of pre-emption. Since control over the '*pad*' is premised on some level of collective action on the part of landless labourers and tenants, usually on the basis of clan or kinship group, some individuals are marginalized due to conflicts within kinship groups.

#### Box 4

In Thatta, the researchers came across the case of a landless tenant family who had not been allowed to return to the *pad* by their own kinsfolk because of a family dispute. They had taken up residence in an adjacent low-lying plot of land, also presumably state-owned, which remained partly water logged, because they were no longer welcome in the main settlement.

In Dadu, district a landless Chandio family had moved several times due to disputes with landowners. This family had spent the last ten years as sharecropper tenants, living on low-lying land in the village. The landlord had not allowed them to connect their home to the electricity network, because he needed more for his home. This family was at risk of eviction at any time.

Another family from the fisherfolk Mallah caste in the Thatta district of Sindh had been evicted several times by previous landlords. This family had purchased some land on the fringes of a township some years ago. At the time of the transaction, it was assumed that the parcel of land was *pad* property. Later, an influential Syed (caste) family had claimed that they had converted the official status of that land from *pad* land. This family was forcibly evicted from the residential land that they had purchased. Some months before the floods, this family had become tenants of a landlord, living on his land. The floods had wiped out their shelter. They found upland near the national highway and fixed tents there. This family was not sure regarding ownership of that land but the women cried and asserted that they were thrown out from many places and now they had occupied government land. The male respondent told us that the land he had occupied belonged to his landlord, who was at liberty to displace him and his family from that place to another.

There were respondents in each region who had frequently changed their place of residence, as they followed livelihood opportunities. These semi-nomadic families were different from people who were settled in a village but had family members who had migrated to other places for work, and were among the most marginalized, particularly in Muzaffargarh. Where economic ties with the landlords had become weak due to labour diversification, there was little incentive for these families to return to villages where they did not have sustainable livelihoods or long-standing social ties. Some of these families carried their residential insecurity with them when they were displaced. Once the flood had subsided they faced pressure to move on from government departments and private landowners alike. Despite the flood waters having receded, there were many marginalized groups and individuals still in makeshift displaced persons clusters in Muzaffargarh, as they waited to see if they could access better opportunities.

#### Box 6

A poor family had given up their land as compensation in a family dispute. Since then, this family had had no fixed abode. They had become tenants under different landlords, but each time had been evicted for various reasons. Four years previously, they had become tenants of a new landlord and got one *kanal* (1/8 acres) and for their residence. But during the floods, this landlord leased their land to non-local 'Punjabis', thereby breaching the informal tenancy arrangements with this family. The ex-landlord warned this family that it was up to the new landlord to allow them to continue living there or not. The new landlord did not prohibit this family from reoccupying that land, but the male and female members of this family had to undertake unpaid work and agricultural labour for below market wages. The family members stayed in the landlord's *dera* (farmhouse) for a couple of months during the flooding, but returned as soon as possible to their homestead as they were worried about the security of the unmarried girls in their household. This family also faced difficulty regarding marriage proposals for their children, as families were reluctant to offer proposals to a family without a fixed abode.

In another case, a widow had spent ten years working as a domestic worker in the house of a landlord. She had moved from her employer's land after flood warnings and joined her older daughter, who was also working as a domestic worker in Muzaffargarh. Her older

daughter had provided her with a small sub-plot in her own homestead. This widow was reluctant to go back to her original employer and wanted to construct a house on her new plot, since her older son had easy excess to casual labour in the city.

Aamana Bibi's family had been working as brick makers and as casual labourers for many years. They had their own home, which they had sold some years ago. They spent all their money to purchase some land to live on from a maternal uncle, but after some time the uncle moved them to another plot. After some years, due to family disputes, they were evicted from there. For the last ten years, this family had been living as tenants of a landlord. In an informal transaction, they were given one *kanal* of land for which they paid Rs. 20,000 in small instalments. After the flood waters receded, they returned to their home, but were afraid that their landlord might evict them.

### ***Landless tenants and labourers with residential entitlements***

In all the regions surveyed, some of the landless tenants and labourers interviewed were confident that their prior entitlements to land remained secure following the floods and displacement. In this category we do not include those who said that their entitlements depended on their landlord and/or employers, but that these were secure because they expected the economic relationship to continue. In fact, there were a number of cases of families who had come under pressure from their landlords/employers to return to the land and to resume work in order to repay past debts. For these individuals and families, the security of tenancy or homestead rights was compounded with their vulnerability to exploitative labour relations. Rather, within the category of landless tenants and labourers with residential entitlements, we include people who were clearly secure about their entitlements, and who explained that these entitlements were not dependent on landlords and/or employers.

In all the fieldwork sites, there were individuals, families, and entire communities who neither owned agricultural land, nor presumed the continuation of an economic relationship with landlords and/or employers, in order to assert their entitlements to homestead land. In most cases, those among the landless who claimed to enjoy autonomous security of homestead rights were those who lived in settlements with some degree of official sanction. There were local variations, of course, in the precise arrangements through which settlements enjoy official protection. In Thatta, such settlements are on raised canal embankments owned by the irrigation department (as elsewhere, known locally as *pad*). In upper Sindh and Balochistan, respondents made clear distinctions between official villages (*chaks*) and landlord-owned or dominated settlements.

In Jaffarabad district, the tenants in a *Jagridari* village controlled by a landlord with over 10,000 acres of land claimed to enjoy more secure residential rights compared to those working for 'smaller' landlords who owned 50 to 100 acres. The reason given was that the large landlords needed them for political support, whereas the smaller landlords had purely economic relations which could be terminated abruptly. In Muzzaffargarh too, land officially demarcated as residential allowed some level of autonomy to landless tenants and labourers.

#### **Box 8**

Karim Bukash was working as a barber in a village, and owned a house but no agricultural land. His house, which was on over eight *marla* (0.05 acres) of land, was completely destroyed, but he was not worried about displacement in the future.

Sharif Mirasi was a traditional *dhol* player at weddings and elections, and some times he used his art for begging. This occupation had been passed down from generation to generation in his family. He had continued his work even after the floods in relief camps. He purchased a plot from another Mirasi family member who had to sell his plot because he injured his leg in an accident. Sharif was confident that he would be able to reoccupy his plot.

Amanat Ali Mir Jat, another respondent in a camp of Qambar district told us that his village was under flood water. He had no agricultural land, but lived in registered *chak* village. He owed Rs.50,000 to the landlord in debt. The landlord was pressuring people who had received Watan Cards (see section 3) to repay their debts. Our respondent told us that his village was on state-owned land therefore the landlord had no authority to evict them from the village.

It was also the case, however, that the continuing *de jure* entitlements of agricultural landowners over uncultivated state-owned land adjacent to their holdings was a source of threat to landless tenants. In a riverine Muzzaffargarh village, where fieldwork for the present study built upon baseline census and ethnographic data going back ten years, dominant landlords were involved in perpetual low-level conflicts with their landless neighbours about rights to homestead land. In this village, the dominant clan landlords no longer controlled their tenants through tenancy relations, as these had given way to casual labour arrangements.

In the *katcho* area of upper Sindh, the situation in respect to land claims is quite distinct. There are long-standing communities engaged in fishing and agricultural tenancy and labour who do not claim to own any land. Access to land or security of tenure in residential land, however, does not appear to be a major constraint for them. In fact, the *katcho* area is known to provide refuge to individuals fleeing from the law or private retribution in the settled areas. The powerful landlords and tribal chiefs maintain houses but do not reside here. For other people living in the *katcho*, landowners and landless alike, the question of residential security is linked to personal security (from the police or known enemies), and both forms of security depend on good relations with powerful patrons.

### ***Smallholders***

Agricultural land ownership is correlated with household income and well-being in rural Pakistan for various reasons. Not only is cultivated land a critical productive asset, but the nature of title in agricultural land approximates more closely to private title across regions. This is in contrast to homestead land, where transactions are generally over rights of possession, or land not suitable for cultivation, which is often held as common property. In fact, the rights of an individual or family to land held as homestead or common property is measured with reference to their ownership of agricultural land.

Large landowners with holdings over 100 acres were present in all fieldwork areas, and in some places the dominant landlords owned considerably more than 100 acres. But there were also numerous smallholders in each region. Many of the smallholders owned very small plots of land indeed. In fact, for many of them, their holdings were sufficient only to establish independent homesteads and tend farm animals. They often relied on tenancy or labour for economic sustenance.

The ownership of even a small plot of agricultural land signals that an individual or family enjoys some measure of political enfranchisement or social support. There are entire villages from where populations were displaced which consisted of smallholders belonging to the same caste or kinship group. Respondents across regions also reported disputes and competition over land ownership, both within families, as well as with others. In general, most smallholders interviewed were confident that their property rights remained secure following the floods. It was, nevertheless, widely observed that smallholders' experience of displacement invariably included retaining some level of physical presence at or in the vicinity of their lands. This often took the form of leaving behind some male members to keep an eye on the lands, even if this had to be done from a distance, in places which had suffered heavy inundation.

The relative confidence of most smallholders in their ability to assert control over their property was not always due to faith in the land administration machinery. Often, the

factors mentioned as being relevant for security of property rights were identical to the ones that had enabled these individuals, families and communities to come to own or retain ownership of their land in the first instance. These included the presence of large numbers of kinsfolk, long-standing periods of residence and ownership in a particular place, and linkages with powerful political patrons. They did not feel that the flooding and displacement had changed the balance of power against them. A number of respondents mentioned that they believed that the large landlords in their area who might have been potential sources of threat were themselves too preoccupied with saving their own assets.

The smallholders of the *katcho* arguably represent the most vivid cases where factors other than formal title are seen to be determinants of the security of ownership claims. Since much of the land in the *katcho* is not officially surveyed, virtually all claims of ownership are premised on mutual recognition within and between communities, rather than formally enforceable legal title. Other mainstream regions share characteristics with the *katcho*, in the sense that title is buttressed by other social and political factors in maintaining ownership and control.

#### Box 9

In Muzaffargarh district, Moomal Kanera's family owned five acres of agricultural land in Basti Tibba Burura. Her family had been residents of Tibba Basti for generations and had always lived in the same place. This family cultivated their own plots, with women members of the family carrying out the bulk of the labour. These women also worked as paid agricultural labourers for other landlords. The members of this household returned soon after the flood waters had receded from their village.

Rahamat Mai Sarki's deceased husband used to work as a tenant for a landlord, but after his death 15 years ago, her family worked as casual labourers. All the members of the family routinely worked as unpaid labourers for the landlord. One of her sons moved to Karachi and worked there. Around five years ago, this family purchased five *kanals* of land by selling their domestic animals. After the floods, they left their damaged homes on the landlord's land and joined some relatives. Mai decided not to go back and work for the landlord under the same terms and conditions.

### *Women, floods, and land rights*

Gender is the starkest line of segmentation in access to land in rural Pakistan. Women account for a small proportion of landowners and where they do own title, social and legal convention generally means that the land is actually controlled by a husband, father, son or brother. In addition, women are landowners in the first place only in those rare cases where the family has no adult male. In Sindh, a recent government programme to address women's land rights has led to the allotment of over 24,000 acres of state land to around 5000 landless women tenants. This is the first intervention of its type in Pakistan, and is still ongoing. It has been estimated that around 41 per cent of land allotted to women is in districts that are severely flood affected, while another 47 per cent is in moderately affected districts (Post-flood Monitoring Report, Participatory Development Initiatives, December 2010. For detailed table see Appendix 3).

Although it was not possible to get specific information on the perceptions of land security of women included in this scheme whose land was flooded, it is possible to make some speculative comments on the basis of our findings from the rapid assessment. The fact that the women beneficiaries received title deeds, and that their ownership of their land plots was widely recognized in their communities and by the government machinery, implies that they will enjoy a relatively high level of security. In cases where a land allotment was disputed by an illegal occupant of state land, it is possible that attempts would be made to force the women from their land plots. The direct and formal involvement of the state machinery, however, makes it unlikely that such challenges would succeed. We extrapolate these observations from our finding that those who

owned formal title would have felt relatively secure in retaining their holdings, even following long periods of displacement.

Given the norm of male land ownership it is not surprising that women and men respondents from various classes and kinship groups had broadly similar perceptions about the impact of the floods and displacement on security of ownership, tenure or residence. Their perceptions of security and insecurity are heavily influenced by the family's overall political and social position, and the strength of land title. The gender of the respondent did not influence their perceptions of threat to their land ownership, with respect to their prior entitlements.

With reference to displacement, women respondents did prioritize some issues that were different from those of their male counterparts. For example, women respondents expressed greater attachment to their villages compared to their male counterparts. This was possibly due to the greater reliance of women on their immediate and long-standing networks of neighbours and relatives for social contact. There were also reports by our respondent families of instances when a family's ability to take advantage of post-displacement economic opportunities was constrained by concerns for the security of young women family members in regard to sexual harassment. Male heads of families with many unmarried young women members felt that they could not stay in certain places, and could not venture out to work leaving their families 'unguarded'. Such forms of vulnerability had been heightened by displacement.

Although there was no clear gender difference in perceptions about the security of land entitlements, there are two distinct and possibly opposite ways in which flood-induced displacement is likely to play itself out with regard to patriarchy. First, the flood contributed to large numbers of women from formerly segregated households being exposed to a range of relief and public services, bringing them into contact with people from outside their immediate families and communities. Second, the factors which were seen as important ones for maintaining claims to land were related to extended patriarchal social organization. Invariably, kinship-group based bonds mediated by male heads of families were the forms of solidarity that individuals and families relied upon in order to sustain their entitlements to land.

### 3. Policy responses in the context of international experience

#### Analysis of the impacts of the floods

The government of Pakistan (GOP) and provincial and sub-regional governments have already indicated a number of priority areas for post-flood recovery and rehabilitation. A preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) was published jointly by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank (WB) and the federal government, with estimates of the financial costs of flood-related damage and loss of income, as well as the expected public costs of recovery (ADB *et al.* 2010). The DNA is the most comprehensive analysis yet of the impact of the floods. It is also the most detailed statement, thus far, of the proposed strategic priorities, policy direction, and implementation arrangements for post-flood recovery and rehabilitation. Other important assessments of damage and policy direction relevant to land issues have been made by the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2010), and jointly by UN-Habitat and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) (UN-Habitat and NDMA 2010).

According to sector-wide estimates provided in the DNA, the total economic losses incurred due to the floods amounted to Rs.854bn (\$10bn). Of these, direct damage to assets, stocks, and inventories including housing, agriculture, livestock, and public infrastructure was Rs.552bn, out of which housing (Rs.91bn) and agriculture (Rs.315bn) accounted for the largest share. The crop sub-sector within agriculture was estimated to have suffered direct losses of Rs.287bn. These findings are significant from the viewpoint of the present study. Most of the direct losses incurred by private individuals and public entities were linked to investments made on land.

According to estimates in the DNA, indirect losses due to economic disruption accounted for Rs.302bn. Besides housing (Rs.43bn) and agriculture (Rs.113bn), communications and transport (Rs.50bn), and finance (Rs.57bn) appear to have suffered major losses. In the financial sector, losses were almost entirely due to the increased estimate in the number of non-performing loans (NPLs) held by banks, 69 per cent which were thought to be in agriculture. In the financial sector too, therefore, around Rs.38bn could be counted as a loss to agriculture. The indirect income losses related to land and agriculture, therefore, came around Rs.195bn, or nearly two-thirds of the total.

#### Land issues and proposed policy framework

The DNA proposes a number of guiding principles for the needs assessment and recovery strategy based on 'recent experience of managing large-scale post-disaster reconstruction programmes' (ADB *et al.* 2010: 34). Some of these principles relate directly to issues relevant to land rights and poverty. It is proposed, for example, that there must be a 'focus on poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods' (*ibid.*). The DNA argues that the following must be ensured:

[T]he rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts [must be] socially equitable with support targeted mainly to those in greatest need. Special measures should be put in place to ensure that vulnerable groups living in the flood-affected areas, such as landless farmers, tenants, and those in riverine areas where property rights are poorly defined, fully benefit from the support measures to be provided, through integrated outreach and monitoring.

(ADB *et al.* 2010: 34).

Moreover, the 'Social aspects' chapter of the DNA specifically notes that in the flood-affected areas, securing the land rights of those living in poverty, ethnic and religious minorities, and women is a challenge. The riverine *katcho* areas are mentioned specifically as regions where residents might be excluded from reconstruction activities. The assessment urges the government to '[adopt] a rights-based development approach to reconstruction' (ADB *et al.* 2010: 41). The government is cautioned against hasty efforts to clear areas of settlement in the flood path or in the *katcho*. Importantly, the DNA argues that:

[O]pportunities exist to provide.....titles to land when reconstructing houses for the landless, distribute land among the landless including women when restoring livelihoods, regularize informal settlements and provide basic infrastructure, when reconstructing records including land records, establish computerized and transparent recording systems.

(ADB *et al.* 2010: 42).

## International experience and guidelines

These recommendations suggest a high level of awareness in government and among Pakistan's international development partners of issues relating to land rights and poverty. They are in line with the recommendations made by various international organizations on policy approaches to land issues following natural disasters. Key contributions in this regard have come from the UN-HABITAT (2009) 'Addressing Land Issues after Natural Disasters. Scoping Report' and particularly UN-HABITAT. These documents draw upon recent experiences of natural disasters and post-disaster response in respect to land issues in a number of countries. The Pakistan earthquake of 2005 figures prominently among the cases which have been used to propose recommendations and guidelines on land issues in post-disaster management.

While these UN-Habitat documents provide a comprehensive treatment of land issues, two of their themes are of particular relevance here. First, there is the concern that a crisis triggered by disasters (both natural and conflict) might be exacerbated for many due to the threat of dispossession, if land records are uneven or of poor quality, or where power relations might place some displaced persons at a disadvantage. Second, where pre-disaster conditions were themselves marked by inequality and insecurity, post-disaster responses need to create more secure tenure and rights for poor people, and marginalized groups in general and women in particular.

It is noted that following the earthquake in Pakistan there were as many as 5,000 landless families (around 8 per cent of the total cases of landless people with land dispute cases) who remained without adequate housing two years after the disaster (UN-Habitat 2009). Families who had been able to leave behind able-bodied men to physically guard claims of possession rights were better able to secure their rights, compared with families who had lost all able-bodied men. The backdrop to contested rights of possession and ownership lay in existing legal disputes, which had remained in court without resolution for long periods of time. There is resonance between these observations and our findings reported in Section 2 above.

The government responded by initiating a Rural Landless Policy, which included cash grants to purchase land plots. But this policy appears to have been obstructed by problems associated with the verification of claims of land compensation (UN-Habitat 2009). The government left transactions to private individuals, and did not itself use its statutory powers to intervene to acquire land.

Other disasters where the land rights of those living in poverty were threatened were Hurricane Ivan in Grenada in 2004, and floods in Mozambique in 2000 (UN-Habitat 2009).

In both these cases, there were a range of informal arrangements in place governing access to land, and actual continuous possession was seen as an important source of security. The effectiveness of responses to tenure insecurity in Grenada was questionable, whereas in Mozambique the outcome was more successful, partly because the government partnered with UN organizations to implement programmes for tenure security in the flood-affected areas. The response to the earthquake in Gujarat, India, in 2001, paid specific attention to the housing needs of people who had weak or insecure housing rights prior to the disaster. It was reported that the government as well NGOs were involved in acquiring land for the resettlement of displaced persons who had lost land, and for those who did not have secure land rights to begin with.

A key lesson learnt from these and other disasters is that humanitarian as well as development responses must be anchored in a rights-based framework, with explicit consideration for those who faced inequality and were marginalized before the disaster. It was also found that there was a need for land programming within a few weeks of the disaster, and that there needed to be early assessment of institutions that provide access and protect rights to land. Vulnerable groups, including those who were vulnerable before the disaster, needed to be protected against the risk of dispossession, as well a return to unequal power relations regarding access to land (UN-Habitat and FAO 2010)

The guidelines developed jointly by UN-Habitat and the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (UN-Habitat and FAO 2010) recommend that a land needs assessment be carried out within the first six weeks of the disaster, as well as an active programme for tenure security responses against arbitrary land-grabbing, and an analysis of obstacles to return and to the restoration of land rights of vulnerable groups. In a time frame of six months following the disaster, these guidelines recommend support for rapid tenure security measures for returnees, protection and restoration of land rights of vulnerable groups, and secure rights and access to agricultural land for vulnerable, groups including tenants and women.

## **Social protection**

Following the floods, the main government responses beyond the relief stage have focussed on social protection through the disbursement of cash compensation via the Watan Card Scheme. There has also been some immediate support for crop agriculture in the form of provision of subsidized seeds and other inputs for winter sowing. The Watan Card, which is linked to the system of computerized national identity cards (CNIC), has been used to disburse Rs.20,000 to eligible beneficiaries through ATMs. This form of disbursement builds upon the experience gained by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) in the post-earthquake response, as well as the implementation of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), which is a federal government cash transfer aimed at poor women.

Cash-based assistance has a valuable role to play in many disaster responses, potentially transferring much-needed aid safely and efficiently, while enabling people to make their own decisions about what they need. To ensure this is truly successful and fulfils its potential, the government has to be much more rigorous than it has been in the past in ensuring that the system does not succumb to corruption, and that the most vulnerable really do have access. With such potential, the importance of strengthening this scheme, and prioritizing the role of non-governmental oversight within it, cannot be overstated. With increased staff levels, resources, and vigorous transparency in the process, the Watan scheme could become a mechanism to deliver assistance to those most in need, both during emergencies and beyond (Oxfam 2011). Table 2 details the coverage of Watan Cards in selected districts, according to official data.

**Table 2: Watan Card coverage in selected districts**

	Number of Watan cards activated	Proportion of rural households covered - per cent
Dadu (S)	39,159	11.1
Larkana (S)	47,117	13.4
Thatta (S)	56,500	19.9
Muzzaffargarh (P)	254,815	57.2
Nowshehra (KPK)	30,239	13.1
Jaffarabad (B)	49,232	66.5

Source: Authors' calculations based on NADRA website (<http://www.nadra.gov.pk/>) Last accessed 14 December 2010)

What is relevant about the Watan Card from the viewpoint of the present study is that it is available, in principle, to any resident of an affected area who possesses a CNIC. Those who do not have cards or have lost their cards have benefited from fast-track verification of personal identity and address, enabling them to secure new identity documents. In addition, land ownership and/or secure title are not pre-conditions for eligibility. There are obstacles, however, for those whose entire families have never possessed identity cards, and who must rely on local government officials for the verification of their identity. It was reported in some of our fieldwork sites that landless tenants and labourers are sometimes dependent on landowners in this regard. It was also reported by respondents in the *katcho* area that their cards had to list the addresses of their relatives who resided in the settled part of the district (ADB *et al.* 2010: 157).<sup>4</sup> Insecurity of land rights therefore, is linked to exclusion from basic entitlements in some cases.

## Post-flood sectoral priorities

While government sectoral priorities at the federal and sub-national levels will come to be known in due course, the DNA document provides a useful starting point. The analysis presented there and the recommendations which follow that analysis already represent to some extent the views of the federal government by virtue of its partnership with the ADB and WB in the preparation of the assessment.

As noted above, the guiding principles included in the DNA have much in common with the recommendations and guidelines regarding land issues proposed internationally (UN-Habitat 2009, UN-Habitat and FAO 2010). The challenge, however, is to translate those principles into concrete policy, programme, and project proposals in particular sectors.

The proposed housing recovery and reconstruction strategy makes no mention of land ownership issues. The key proposed policy principles advocate that rebuilding should be encouraged at the original site of the damaged property, except for high-risk areas. The main recommendations deal with the quality and design of reconstruction and its probable costs and disbursement mechanisms. It is proposed that houses in zones which are designated as 'five-year flood areas' must be relocated. The detailed calculations for various scenarios for reconstruction costs, however, do not include any provision for the costs of land acquisition either by the government or by private individuals themselves. In fact, as we have shown in Section 2 above, the insecurity of rights of possession is likely to be an important problem for large numbers of landless tenants and labourers, particularly if they no longer wish to resume exploitative labour relations with former employers and/or landlords.

The policy priorities in the DNA for other sectors where land may be important – notably agriculture – suffer from a bias in favour of landowners. The fact that a majority of the rural households in many affected districts are either landless tenants or labourers, and increasingly labourers, implies that those who are relatively better off will primarily benefit from compensation. The same is true in respect to the proposed subsidies to the financial sector to help tide it over non-performing loans. Since borrowers from the formal sector are exclusively from among the bigger farmers, the primary beneficiaries of this subsidy too will be people who are relatively better off, even among landowners.

It is interesting to note that the issue of insecure property rights is mentioned as a sectoral priority in the DNA in its discussion of finance, where it is noted that lack of formal legal land titles hinders the expansion of financial services:

Another area of focus for the financial sector should be in housing reconstruction. This would be the ideal time to tackle an issue which has long beset the country. The mismanagement of land records and title deeds has resulted in numerous problems for the housing sector. The housing finance market as a result has been limited, and its potential for contributing to economic growth underutilized. Compiling comprehensive electronic land records and clean titles should be a priority in the reconstruction phase.

(ADB *et al.* 2010: 171).

While the above analysis is broadly correct, it is also a fact that people living in poverty and marginalization routinely face a range of insecurities due to the fact welfare entitlements are often contingent upon having a recognised and legal fixed abode. Securing formal legal documentation of land ownership, moreover, will be linked with complex changes in social organization at the village level. The lessons from the 2005 earthquake, as well as the positive reported outcome of government intervention in the Gujarat earthquake in India, suggests that a simpler and more effective route will be government provision of secure homestead title to the landless poor, on land specifically acquired by the state for this purpose.

None of the sectoral policies and priorities set out in the DNA or in documents prepared by the UN organizations make explicit reference to access to land issues in any significant way. Even UN-Habitat Pakistan's own initial priorities as set out in the report 'Monsoon Flood 2010 Pakistan: Rapid Technical Assessment of Damage and Needs for Reconstruction in Housing Sector (UN-Habitat and NDMA 2010) fail to take into consideration the lessons compiled by its international counterpart. While it acknowledges that many displaced persons do not own their homestead lands, and that there might be conflicts and disputes over post-flood demarcation of homesteads, there is little appreciation of the range and complexity of land issues faced by those who are landless and socially marginalized. The Monsoon Flood 2010 report does not follow the recommendations of UN-Habitat to carry out a land needs assessment, or to pay specific attention to the position of groups who were vulnerable even before the disaster.

The discussion of housing policy does not analyse the existing systems for access to homestead land and the autonomy, vulnerability, and dependence associated with different classes of rural residents. There is, of course, a knowledge gap regarding the incidence of various forms of homestead tenure, both on paper and in terms of actual experience of autonomy or dependence. Nonetheless, we know enough about the arrangements for homestead entitlements to be aware that there is a two-way relationship between insecurity of residential rights, and social inequality.

Previous government interventions to provide residential security to those who are socially marginalized in rural areas can provide some insights into the way forward in post-flood rehabilitation. There are at least two types of models that are available. The Sindh provincial government's Sindh Goth Abad Housing Scheme (SGAHS) attempted to

provide residential security to rural landless tenants and labourers through the regularization of existing settlements (Gazdar and Mallah 2010). While this intervention provided residential security to many, it also contributed to the fragmentation of rural settlements. In Punjab, the Marla schemes of the 1970s were based on the government providing individual leases to landless labourer households in specially established colonies, set up on government owned or acquired land. This scheme was aborted after a few years, but left behind an important and unacknowledged positive legacy in many districts (Gazdar and Mallah 2011).

Agricultural land ownership, which approximates to clean title in most regions, is also not given much attention in the policy proposals relating to agriculture and finance. In fact, the DNA and other documents fail to acknowledge that landless tenants and labourers constitute a majority of rural residents in most of the flood-affected districts of the country. The question of tenancy too is dealt with in the policy proposals set out in these documents. It is assumed that the most preferable outcome for those who were landless tenants before the floods would be to return to take up tenancy leases from the existing owners. This is not likely to be the case for tenants who faced conditions of extreme exploitation, and for whom other labour market opportunities would be preferable to a return to this exploitation.

## 4. Conclusions

Access to land for homesteads as well as agricultural use is a key correlate of economic opportunity and social position in rural Pakistan. A majority of the households in flood-affected regions of the country, however, do not own agricultural land, and by extension, enjoy diminished rights of possession over homestead land.

There are different forms of agrarian structure and social organization across the country and the flood-affected areas. In some regions, land ownership is dominated by powerful landlords who preside over entire communities of landless tenants. In other regions, smaller landlords and farmers hire the services of farm labourers. Land administration works more effectively in some areas, while collective action on the part of local groups is a more reliable guarantor of property rights in others. Tribal affiliation and conflict act as regulators of class divisions in some regions, while traditional caste hierarchies operate in others.

A common feature across the board is the virtual exclusion of women from effective land or homestead ownership, despite the recent introduction of government programmes for the allotment of state land to landless women farmers.

Poor people in rural areas across the flood-affected regions could be classified into three categories, according to level of land security: those with no agricultural land and no security of residential possession; those with no agricultural land but secure residential entitlements; and smallholders. The position of groups within these three categories and of individuals within groups depends, among other things, on social status, group solidarity, and political mobilization.

The impact of the floods and displacement, and expectations about return and restoration of land and homestead vary greatly between these categories. Those who own agricultural land, even in the unregulated *katcho* area, expected to be able to resume possession of their lands without too many problems. Families with secure homestead entitlements were also confident that they would be able to return to their homes and rebuild them, if they had the material resources to be able to do so. Those with insecure residential entitlements depended on economic ties with their place of residence – or dependence on a landlord or employer – to regain access to homesteads.

Families and individuals within all three categories of land security, including those who own small areas of agricultural land, are engaged in active contests of various types over control of land with their peers or with more powerful stakeholders in the rural economy. Even those whose land entitlements have not been seriously affected by the floods faced routine forms of insecurity under normal conditions. The floods and post-flood recovery, therefore, offer opportunities for setting in motion longer-term reforms which may lead to more equitable access to land and security of entitlements.

International best practice recommends that dedicated attention be given to land issues, and particularly to the security of land rights of vulnerable groups, as part of the policy response to natural disasters. These ideas are reflected somewhat in the policy framework outlined by key International Financial Institutions (IFI) and Government of Pakistan.

It is more challenging, however, to translate these guiding principles into concrete policies, strategies, and sectoral priorities. Existing DNA policy proposals in key sectors such as housing and agriculture have skirted around the issue of land rights, the inequality of land ownership, and insecure residential rights. These proposals have not made any institutional or financial provision for either the acquisition of land for those who are landless and the land insecure, or for creating more secure rights for people living in vulnerable conditions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://floods2010.pakresponse.info/FactsandFigures.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> It is conventional to refer to land on either side of a river as though looking downstream, or in the direction of the flow. In upper Sindh, the right bank is due north-west of the Indus, while in lower Sindh the left bank is due east of the river. The *pukka* region is also sometimes referred to as the 'settled area' in Sindh.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2 for details of survey site selection and map.

<sup>4</sup> The incomplete coverage of the *katcho* areas is also acknowledged by NADRA, which announced that it would take measures to overcome this. It is also widely reported that durable construction was barred by law in the *katcho* area (ADB *et al.* 2010: 157).

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## Appendix 1: Checklist of questions included in the rapid assessment survey

- a. Family roster
- b. Previous place/s of residence
  1. Exact location, as precisely as possible – village, deh, taluka etc. Goth, or para if possible. Vasti in south Punjab
  2. Probe if family members also lived in some other place too – either because of migration, seasonal migration, transhumance (seasonal movement of people with their livestock over relatively short distances)
    - i. Try to identify other possible places nearby or far away from the identified place of residence with which family has connection
    - ii. Some family members might live elsewhere – abroad, Karachi, or some other village or area and send remittances
    - iii. Family members (daughters) might have been married and gone to another place
    - iv. There may be short or long cycles of seasonal migration and transhumance
  3. Characteristics of the identified place of residence – physical, demographic and social, political
    - i. Probe how the respondent has identified his/her place of residence – speaking about goth/vasti, deh/mouza; probe what they think are the boundaries of their settlements by asking about neighbouring settlements too
    - ii. Their idea of the physical infrastructure in their village/settlement: school, proximity to road, electricity, health facilities – probe to establish if these things were available in their village/settlement or outside; if outside then where and how far; other physical characteristics, i.e. urban or rural, surrounded by farmland or other localities
    - iii. Social characteristics – households by caste, their own caste and kinship group and its presence, others in the settlement or nearby
    - iv. Institutional and political issues regarding place of settlement – whether owned privately, someone else’s private property (if so whose), leased, customary qabza- start probing here about possible sources of contention in regard to settlement or their presence in the settlement. Settlement on government records in any way? Goth Abad? Mukhtiarkar record? Process of that and its history. Other stakeholders, whether more or less powerful than the respondent, specific instances which could be cited to know more about nature of contention

4. Connections with the identified place of residence
  - i. Born there, children born there, parents or grandparents born there
  - ii. Went to school there, children go to school there
  - iii. Place given as fixed address, say in CNIC
  - iv. Voted there, since when, how frequently
  - v. Other links such as electricity connection, LHV visits
  - vi. If moved from elsewhere then where, and some history of migration
  
5. Previous livelihood activities
  - i. Main livelihood activities - own farm, tenant, farm labour, other types of work
  - ii. If own land then probe about how much, what crops, last harvest etc; how did respondent come to acquire land? Inherited, bought, qabza on state land; in records; details of such transactions, processes, stakeholders
  - iii. If tenancy - then details of its history. Since when, for whom, how much land, changes over time. Sharecropping or other terms, details of terms. Tenancy contract associated with migration, credit. If credit associated, how accounts maintained? Any formal record of contract. Who is the landlord? Lives there? Live on landlord's land? Probe conditions of work and coercion.
  - iv. Labour - regular work with one employer or casual with several? Link between employers and place of residence; seasonal work; harvest etc
  - v. Livestock - own and/or *sambhaal*; what arrangements; sources of fodder
  
6. Flood and displacement experience - chronology
  - i. Chronology - what next, what next, what next, what next etc. let's try to be as precise about timelines if not dates; and about different family members' movements
  - ii. Flood losses: focus on grain store
  - iii. Probe Watan card issues - a side issue but important
  
7. Contact with/news of place of previous residence
  - i. Anyone left behind, or people going back and forth, any contact; what is happening there
  
8. Present livelihood and social service access
  - i. Probe present livelihood - rations provided by govt/others; charity; any work; children's schooling etc. - probe the strength of local social network etc in having access to shelter, food, care.

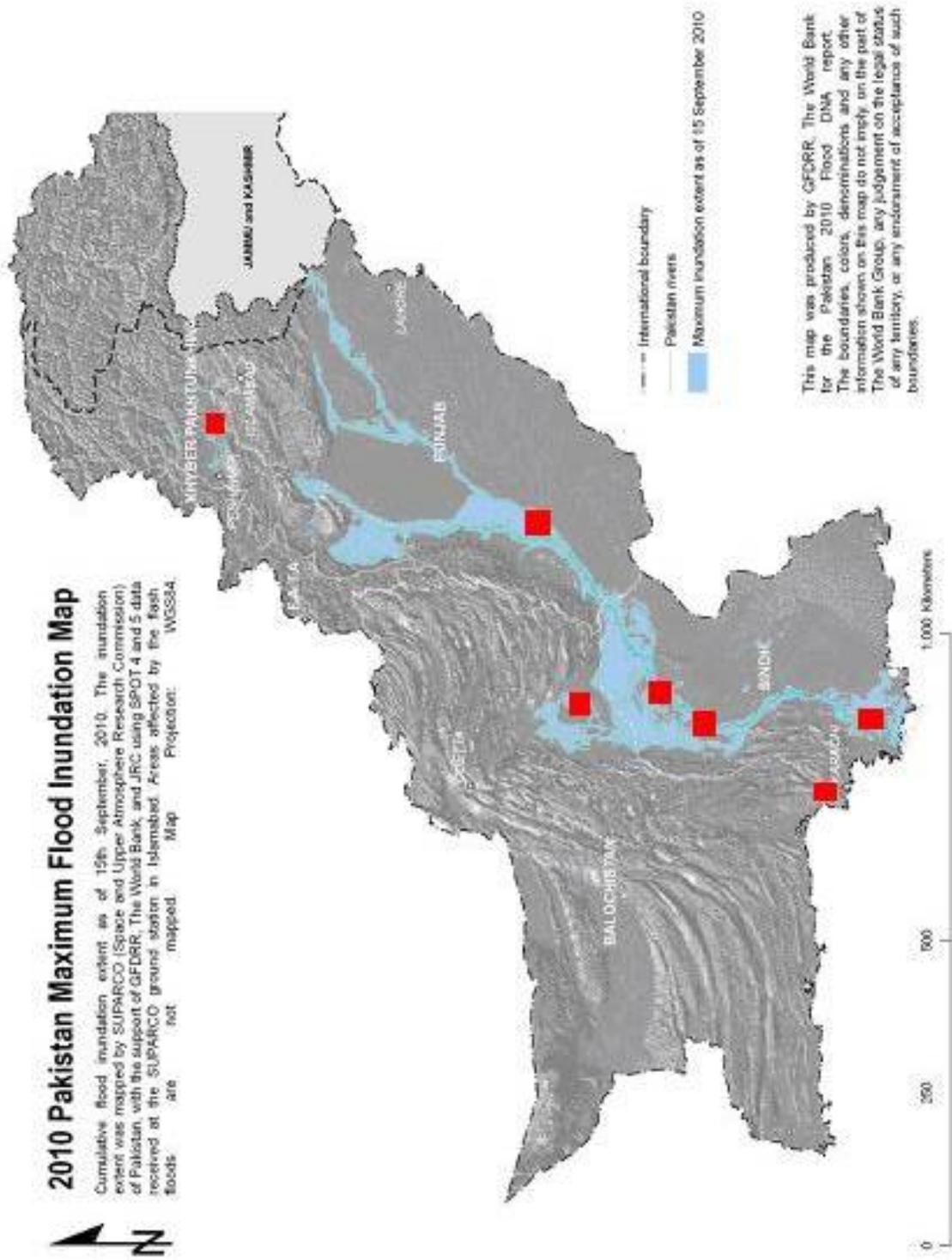
9. Return and land/residential insecurity issues expected on return
  - i. Why would you want to return and under what conditions will you return? Probe beyond obvious things such as getting ration and water receding
  - ii. Why would you want to stay or move elsewhere and under what conditions would you stay or move elsewhere? Probe beyond obvious things such as getting ration and water receding
  - iii. Probe specific issues that have arisen as people have made contact with previous place of residence – it is important to probe stories as they emerge and tease out security/insecurity issues
  - iv. Probe specific issues that have arisen as people have tried to resume possession of agricultural land

## Appendix 2: Site selection for rapid assessment and map

It was decided that at least some sites would be visited in each of the following regions: the plains region of KPK, southern Punjab, upper Sindh right bank, lower Sindh left bank, and eastern Balochistan. In the event, fieldwork was also carried out in a number of IDP camps in Karachi and surrounding areas, where it was possible to meet with people from upper and lower Sindh, Balochistan and southern Punjab. Fieldwork in the flood-affected region was carried out in Nowshehra in the plains region of KPK, Alipur and Kot Addu tehsils of Muzaffargarh district in southern Punjab, Shahdadkot (at Qambar) and Dadu on the right bank and the *katcho* of Larkana in upper Sindh, the Jati taluka of Thatta on the left bank in lower Sindh, and Usta Muhammad and Rojhan Jamali in Jaffarabad district of Balochistan. Survey sites are marked in red on the map below.

The individuals and groups included in the fieldwork consisted of those who had returned home after having been displaced, as well as those who had not returned home, either because flood waters had not receded, or due to some other reason. The selected interviewees included smallholders, landless tenants, and landless labourers. In all, a total of 45 separate interactions (including individual interviews and group discussions) were carried out across the country between 15 October and 25 November 2010. Of these 45 interactions, 25 were carried out with men, 16 with women, and the remaining four with mixed male-female groups. A majority of the interactions (28 out of 45) were with individuals or families who reported that their primary occupation was tenant farming. Nearly all of the tenant farmers were landless. Of the remainder, there were eight households who reported that cultivating their own crops was their primary occupation, while the remainder were mostly casual labourers.

A majority of the rural households in all districts except Muzaffargarh did not own any agricultural land. This means that only a minority of the rural households enjoyed unfettered property rights, even on the land on which their homesteads were located. Agricultural self-employment either as owner-cultivators or as tenants was the most common occupation for adult males in all districts except Nowshehra. In two districts – Muzaffargarh and Nowshehra – low-wage labourers, including many agricultural labourers, constituted over a third of the male workforce, while in other districts the ratio was around one in five. The prevalence of tenant farming, measured as the proportion of farmers who were landless tenants, and as the proportion of total cultivated area operated by tenants, varied greatly between the districts. In Jaffarabad in Balochistan, landless tenancy was the predominant form of cultivation.



Source: ADB, WB, and Government of Pakistan (2010)

## Appendix 3: Women's Land Distribution Programme and flood impact

Details of land distributed in the first phase, and due to be distributed in the second phase of the Women's Land Distribution Programme in Sindh, Pakistan								
S#	District	Distribut ed (acres) in the first phase	Number of beneficiaries in the first phase (Please note: In first phase land was also given to male beneficiaries)			Land distributed in second phase	Total for both phases	Severity of Floods Situation (land flooded, population displaced)
			Male	Female	Total benefici aries			
1	Hyderabad					46	46	Moderate
2	Tando Mohammed Khan					139	139	Moderate
3	Thatta	9,220	7	983	990	1244	10,464	Severely affected
4	Khairpur	9388	319	377	656	21226	30,614	Moderate
5	Sukkur	4125	197	50	247	7318	11,443	Moderate
6	Kashmore	2800	33	150	183	2258	5,058	Severely affected
7	Badin	5148	166	385	551	2400	7,548	Not affected
8	Shikarpur	3,590	65	125	190	432	4,022	Severely affected
9	S. Benazirabad	114	0	12	12		114	Moderate
10	Sanghar	638	18	41	59		638	Not affected
11	Mirpurkhas	779	67	75	142		779	Not affected
12	Umerkot	769	40	92	132	2177	2,946	Not affected
13	Jacobabad	1695	175	65	240	3067	4,762	Severely affected
14	Ghotki	881	0	201	201	466	1,347	Moderate
15	Larkana	664	8	100	108	411	1,075	Severely affected

16	Kambar-Shahdadkot	1,069	6	156	162	5023	6,092	Severely affected
17	Dadu	461	77	11	88	2198	2,659	Severely affected
18	Matiari	69	6	9	15	229	298	Moderate
19	Jamshoro	110	0	13	13	4160	4,270	Severely affected
Total		41,520	1,184	2,845	3,989	52,609	94,129	

Source: Monitoring Report, December 2010, Participatory Development Initiatives (PDI)

## Acknowledgements

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*The authors gratefully acknowledge advice received from Hussain Bux Mallah and Irfan Ahmed Khan, and research assistance provided by Batool Raza. The authors take responsibility for any errors in this report.*

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This paper was written by Azmat Budhani and Haris Guzdar.. Oxfam GB acknowledges the assistance of Hussain Bux Mallah, Irfan Ahmed Khan, Batool Raza, Claire Seaward and Fatima Naqvi in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

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Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-84814-881-9 in June 2011. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.