

Abstract

In 2015, the Pakistani government approved the largest rural development project in the country in the province of Sindh. Funded by the EU, under the banner of community-driven development (CDD), the project aims to eradicate poverty in one of Pakistan's most resource-rich regions. Situated in the Indus delta, rural Sindh is endowed with abundant cultivable farmland while remaining home to the poorest and most dispossessed, caught in local-global dynamics that perpetuate this reality. Areas such as Sindh that have long remained zones of agro-resource extraction, land struggles and ethno-nationalism, are recast as development frontiers for modernist aid-driven development interventions such as CDD that aim to better the lives of the 'poor'. Often, the techno-politics of aid disregards the dynamics of dispossession and structural inequalities that drive precarity, that this research project aims to center. Aid-receiving communities in Sindh are caught in social hierarchies perpetuated by landlessness and bonded labor, underwritten by caste differences. This project examines the changing contours of this contested social space, by exploring how the aid frontier is constituted, how it is experienced by aid-receiving communities differentiated by caste, and how new political practices and shifting cultural identities of marginalized communities can raise questions for the Pakistani state and national imaginary.