

Political Process and Land Reform in Nepal

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Abstract:

Landlessness and political struggles in Nepal are deeply inter-related. Landlessness in Nepal is rooted in a long history of feudal land governance, political inertia and nepotism. Furthermore, the skewed landownership patterns practiced were deepened by a deeply discriminatory and strictly hierarchical society that excluded women, ethnic minorities and tribal groups, especially, those of lower castes and classes. Due to this prevailing exclusion and discrimination, the call for land reform as a rallying cry has long been used by politicians as a tool for political mobilization and for garnering support in Nepal. However, despite several political developments and repeated political commitments, the land reform policies have largely failed to redistribute the land to the actual tillers. The land and agrarian policies introduced by several governments, since the 1950s, to address the demand for land rights and to distribute land to the tillers have either been flawed or poorly implemented or lacks political commitment. All political powers despite their rhetoric, have failed to transform the traditional feudal agrarian system in which a small elite class continues to oppress majority of the poor Nepali population, to this day. Hence, the failure of the political parties to adopt radical land and agrarian reform policies also depicts serious democratic deficit in Nepal.

With the end of the decade-long civil war in 2006, Nepal has been on the crucial path of transformation. But, the prevailing political instability and lack of accountability in governance have put the issue of land reform on the backburner thus, further failing to deal with the multiple causes and problems associated with landlessness. Nepal's history itself is testament to the fact that unequal land ownership is a threat to social cohesion, political stability and economic prosperity. Therefore, unless the political establishment ensures access of poor people -from the different strata of the society who have been historically marginalized - to land and land-based resources, there is always a threat to Nepal's fragile democracy and peace. Successful land and agrarian reform in Nepal is an imperative for equitable and democratic development, including for the economic, political and social transformation of Nepal as a whole.