

Tension and contradiction in agrarian reform and rural reconstruction in Post-Monarch Nepal

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1. Agrarian reform and land reform are usually understood synonymously as they are embedded with the unequal agrarian structure in Nepal. A widespread objective of agrarian reform is to promote social justice by equitable distribution of land and resources. Agrarian reform includes the restructuring of land tenure, the means of production, and the provision of support services to the farmers and rural inhabitants.
2. In Nepal land is the principle determinant for classifying people into distinct classes. Due to the various state-led land grants, unequal socio-economic relations and growing population density, little 'free' land is available these days (Karki, 2001). More than 22 per cent of Nepalese people are landless in Nepal (CBS, 2004). Nepal has passed through many political upheavals and is experiencing diverse governing systems till date. But the issues of agrarian reform have not been properly addressed yet. Most of the landlords, who were granted state lands were not directly involved in farming but contracted with tenant farmers on a customary and hereditary basis.
3. Nepal still has a primarily subsistence-based agrarian economy. The agriculture sector contributes about 32.8 percent (Fiscal year 2008/09) to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Nepal. More than seventy per cent of the total populations are depended in agriculture sector for their livelihoods explicitly and implicitly. So far, the government has failed address the agrarian reforms especially in the rural area that deserve special attention from the state.
4. After the establishment of the multi-party democracy in 1990, the aspiration of people from democratically elected government became high. During this period major amendments in economic policies were made for the "fast economic growth" by adopting liberal economic policies and privatization. In this period, the *Badal Commission on Scientific Land Reform, 1994* was formed for contouring the scientific land reform policy in Nepal. The report submitted by that commission was considered to be important for the overall agrarian reform by peasant movements in Nepal. But, the recommendations of the report were not and implemented by the the successive governments.
5. In the outset Maoist war that started in 1996 CPN (Maoist) raised many socio-economic and political issues to justify war against state. Among them land and agrarian reform was one of the main issues in and around which lower class people in rural and remote Nepal were organised in support of "people's war". After the declaration of a republican system, two land reform commissions were formed to address heighten expectations of land poor but the reports of both the commissions were not fully owned and implemented by the successive governments.
6. The Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) signed between the Government of Nepal and Maoist rebellion (now UCPN Maoist and currently leading the coalition government)

has also emphasised on the issues of agrarian reform and access to natural resources. The first three year interim plan (2007/08-2009/10) and the on-going three years interim plan has also emphasised on agrarian reform. It has also focused on the eradication of feudal relation to land holding tradition. The segregation of land according to its utilization, distribution of land to the landless peasant families, ascertaining of the rights of peasants who work in absentee's landowners' lands have been focused to be worked out during this planning period.

7. At the same time, the government of Nepal is drafting *National Land Utilisation Policy, 2011*, which has plan to classify land in six categories (agriculture, residential, commercial, industrial, forest, and public) by land utilization pattern. As proposed progressive tax will be charged if particular land is found used for other than agriculture. 'Land to the tillers' has long been the issue of land right movement in Nepal in promoting and ensuring the demand for social justice in rural Nepal.
8. The only one but major problem we are facing till date is the lack of political commitment. One of the major agreements in CPA was to ensure social justice through land and agrarian reform. The debate of the return of sized land by Maoist cadre has still been not resolved despite the several attempts to take actions towards this ends. It is a subject of contentions within UCPN (Maoist) and among key political parties.
9. Similarly, in the constitution writing process, land reform has been the major area of contentions among the political parties as some parties are in favour of land reform with providing compensations for the land beyond the ceiling (the ceiling is yet to be fixed), while some parties are in favour of taking land above the ceiling without compensation. This issue has yet to be resolved.
10. Despite the political commitments in reforming land and agrarian structures all successive governments even after the post-monarch Nepal continue serving the interests of the land-owning class in the fertile lands of the rural areas as was throughout the history of Nepal becoming issues of political tensions, conflict and contradictions in Nepali polity.
11. All policies and legal measures introduced to bring reform to inequality in the agrarian structure failed to practically challenge the feudal and semi-feudal production relations, which have been responsible for creating perpetual indebtedness and appropriating surplus from the land-poor peasants and the rural proletariat in the Nepalese agrarian structure. The feudal landlords always get protected after every political change, because they change their political affiliation as power equation changes in the political arena. Therefore, even after the end of monarchy and big political changes in 2006, the very issues of land and agrarian reform are not addressed and still becoming subject of political tension and contradiction in Nepal.

New challenges:

- Large numbers of unemployed youth are working as migrant workers (both abroad and urban centre).
- Lack of labour force in rural and remote Nepal and women and elderly population are overburden.
- High expectations from state re-structuring committee and new constitution.