

## CHALLENGES OF LAND USE IN NEPAL AND WAY FORWARD

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### **Summary**

Nepal is an agricultural country with more than 35 percent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is being contributed by agriculture.

However, most of the agriculture farms are dependent on subsistence based farming rather than commercialization. Lack of scientific use of available around three million hector of land, Nepal's farm productivity is far less than that in other developing and developed countries.

Increasing outflow of youths to neighboring India and overseas countries in search of greener pasture, our farm land are increasingly left fallow which has eventually threatened of food insecurity in the country.

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Lack of farm commercialization and scientific management of land as well as growing urbanization in the cultivable field are some other challenges facing Nepal.

Nepal has history of more than 200 years in the efforts of managing land. Until the year 2000, Nepal government used to categorize the land on be basis of fertility. The government then divided land into three categories- land used for agriculture, commercial and housing proposes.

In an effort to introduce the scientific land use system, the government has set out Land Use Policy 2012 which envisages controlling rapid urbanization and haphazard use of land to ensure proper utilization of the scare land across the country.

However, lack of effective acts to implement the policy, unrestricted use of land for non-agriculture purposes such has real estate has increasing every year. Worse still, rise in encroachment of public land by landless squatters and other individuals as well organization is still on the rise.

Full Paper

## CHALLENGES OF LAND USE IN NEPAL AND WAY FORWARD

Karunakar GHIMIRE, Nepal

### **Introduction**

Nepal is a land-locked country located between big neighbors-India and China. More than 70 percent of total 27 million people in Nepal are directly or indirectly dependent on land as their basic means of livelihood. However, lack of farm commercialization has limited the contribution of agriculture only at one-third of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.

The scarce land in Nepal has been threatened from different phenomenon such as encroachment of public land, haphazard use of land without scientific use system, increasing fallow land due to lack of farm workers and increasing urbanization in fertile land. However, issue of land has been always a political issue in Nepal as more than one million people are still landless and different political parties are using them as a 'vote bank' in every election for parliaments to local bodies.

On the other hand increasing population, land slide and soil erosion have posed a huge challenge to the management of land in the tiny Himalayan nation-- Nepal. Land in the hilly remote areas are increasingly becoming fallow and deserted due to rapid migration to urban areas where land is also under growing pressure of over population which has ultimately led to the encroachment of public land to shrinkage of arable land on the back of increasing urbanization and development of development infrastructure.

Squeezing volume of land due to above mentioned reasons has emerged as the threats to not only land management but also the food security in Nepal which , despite the agricultural country, is still dependent on import of food from neighboring India to fulfill supply deficit amid growing demands for food.

Increasing migration of youths from rural farm land to urban areas within the countries and international labor destinations is another challenge in managing the land for agriculture commercialization in the country. Despite the fact, there were rafts of measures were taken through polices and laws to ensure the proper land management in Nepal, scientific land use is still far cry.

Though the government has been attempting to manage the land for last around 200 years, the scientific use of land is still far cry. However, the government's National Land Use Policy 2012 has raised some rays of hope in scientific management of land but lack of necessary acts to implement is still a challenge in Nepal.

## **Historical perspective**

Though history of land management in Nepal dates back to some two hundred years the government initiation to manage the land on the basis of its utility is not so old. In 1853, then King of Nepal Surendra Shah had tried to encourage people to properly use land so as to promote local agriculture production. Land Survey Act 1962, Civil Code 1963, Land Act 1964, Land Administration Act 1968 and Land Revenue Act 1978 are the major government initiations to put effective data base of land, encourage people to cultivate new arable land and to collect more land revenue. However, those acts failed to address the issues relating to proper utilization and management of land. (Acharya, 2011)

The government had categorized the land into Abbal, Doyam, Sima and Chahar as per the agriculture fertility and use, until the year 2000. Then the government initiated the practice to categorize land into agriculture land, commercial land and housing land for specialized use of land. The 5<sup>th</sup> amendment of Land Act 1964 in 2001 made the provisions of constituting Land-use Council, classification of land on the basis of use, restriction of use of the same land for dual purposes and discouraging of fragmentation of land. (Acharya, 2011)

## **Current status of land use**

Only about 21% out of the total area of the country (147,181 sq km) is cultivable in Nepal.

Agricultural land (2,498,000 ha in 2001) is distributed across three different ecological belts. (Land Reform Monitoring Indicator, Nepal, Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC), Nepal, 2012 pg 2)

The mountain areas account for 6.8% of available agricultural land and 7.3% of the total population of Nepal; hills 40% of available land and 44.3% of the population and the terai 52.9% of the land and 48.4% of the population. The average land holding size is 0.96 ha with 32.1% of households being landless (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2002: page 45, Nepal).

Out of the total land holdings, 1.4% landowners own 14% of arable land. Of the total cultivable land, about 9% is under the tenancy system (CSRC, 2005 page 3).

As per the fresh government data, cultivable land in Nepal covers 27 percent of the total land where as forest , pasture , snow covered area and water area constitute 39.6 percent, 12 percent, 17.2 percent and 2.6 percent areas respectively. However, government lacks specific policy and programs to properly use these resources. It is high time for the government to come up with the land use programs to utilize the

land on the basis of nature of soil, fertility, geographical situation, environment and climate as per the existing act.

Keeping in view the increasing challenges on land management, the government has this year formulated 'National Land Use Policy 2012 to introduce the scientific use of land so as to ensure the maximum utilization of land on sustainable manner.

The government has classified the land into different categories on the basis of utility of land, has not yet be implemented. The policy had envisaged to control the urbanization destroying farm land, allocate separate land for industrial purpose and discourage the people to leave fallow land.

As per the policy, land could be used for seven purposes: agriculture, residential, commercial, industrial, forest, public and other purposes as deemed necessary. The policy is regarded as the major breakthrough in scientific utilization of land given the haphazard use of lands without any proper planning. The policy has envisaged to discourage to leaving fallow land without cultivation, protect 40 percent of land for forest, discourage uncontrolled fragmentation of land, managed development of housing maintaining the balance between environment and urbanization, proper protection of land with historical, religious, tourist and cultural importance as well as to encourage maximum use of land for agriculture purpose. (National Land Use Policy 2012, Nepal)

In the absence of successful land and agrarian reform in Nepal, the historical injustices in land distribution and exploitative relationships inherent in a feudal agrarian system remain intact. (CSRC, 2012, page 4 )

Unequal distribution of land among the people has also another challenge in land management. Total 47%of land-owning households own only 15% of the total agricultural land with an average size of less than 0.5 ha,whilst the top 5% t occupies more than 37% of the land. (CSRC, 2012 page 4 )

The number of holdings more than doubled in the last 40 years, mainly because of population growth and continuous dependence of people on land.

Land fragmentation is another problem in the country. There are about 3.3 parcels in each land holding, and the average size of a parcel was 0.24 ha in 2001. Such a small size of a parcel is also not conducive when using modern inputs, especially when building infrastructure such as irrigation facilities.

## **Current efforts on land management**

Despite long running political instability in the country, Nepal has come up with the Land Use Policy, 2012 that has tried to manage the land with scientific way to ensure better and sustainable utilization of land. Success or failure of the policy depends on the seriousness of the government to execute the policy as per its letter and spirit so that our existing land could be utilized on balanced way for specified purposes envisaged in the policy.

The Government of Nepal instituted land reform commissions in 2009 and 2010, both of which produced land reform reports, which were made public in 2011. The recommendations are praised by all stakeholders but there remain doubts about implementation.

## **Major challenges in land management in Nepal**

- Lack of workforce to work in the farm
- Increasing trend of leaving fallow land amid rising migration to urban areas
- Rising outflow of youths to overseas and India for employment
- Deforestation, soil erosion and landslides
- Rapid urbanization in cultivable fertile land
- Increasing encroachment of public land by different individuals and organizations
- Fragmentation of land with increasing number of households
- Haphazard of use of land without keeping in view of its impact in environment and food security
- Concentration of land in limited people

### **Way-outs**

The government should implement the land use policy by enacting related laws that support the scientific land management initiations from the government.

The government has to encourage farm commercialization gradually shifting from widely traditionally farming methods to as to support in restoring food security within the country lessening increasing dependence on imports to stabilize food supply.

In a bid to lessen the concentration of population in urban areas, the government has to create job opportunities to rural youths or encourage them into the agro farming to retain them in the hilly areas that are also potential in commercial farming.

Amid limited government resource for the investment in agriculture, the government has to mobilize the non-governmental organizations and ask international donors to expand farm commercialization and implement the scientific land use system in the country.

The government has to discourage human settlement in fertile land so as to lessen the threat of food scarcity in the country.

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