

Land Governance in an Interconnected World

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Reorienting Political Economy of Inclusive Agrarian Transformation in Nepal

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INTRODUCTION

Nepalese agrarian society is changing rapidly from a subsistence form to commercial and industrial forms, and these transitions have gradually transformed the lives and livelihood of the people. Nepal's agrarian sector is depicted by: *i*) increased rates of rural poverty and the ever-worsening situation of rural poor; *ii*) dire social and gender inequality of marginalized groups; *iii*) a widening gap between haves and have nots, and *iv*) stagnating agricultural growth. Moreover, the resource poor are not able to match the pace of agrarian transformation and thus are further marginalized. Despite government attempts to mitigate these barriers to access, the desired socio-economic changes have not taken place, thereby stagnating Nepal's economy with rising inequality, structural poverty that has fueled tensions across the rural/agrarian society. Given these conditions, this paper intends to examine and reorient the modes, processes and trends of agrarian transformation considering the inclusive issues of marginalized communities (in terms of caste, class, and gender).

In context of ongoing theoretical and ideological debate, this paper considers key tenets of both the neo-liberal focus on individual contractual rights to property and the populist focus on right to land for those who labor are compelling perspectives while developing an informed choice and effective plan to address this critical issue.

Analytical Framework: Using the critical agrarian political economic perspective along with critical racial theory and the intersectionality approach, our analysis focuses on reorienting the modes, processes and trends of inclusive agrarian transformation based on comparative analysis between Nepalese empirical cases (caste-class-gender) and US best practices (race-class-gender) in an agrarian landscape.

Methodology: With the detailed examination and analysis of historical institutions, and formal and informal rules underlying transformation, it also focuses on stakeholder analysis involved in the reform—their objectives, interests, incentives, and motivations. The study uses qualitative data - including interviews and focus group meetings of farmers and policy officials - and policy analysis to generate its empirical evidences. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030, and Land 2030 offer innovative foundation and method of inclusive growth for rural and agrarian transformation.

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RESULTS

KEY FINDINGS:

Property rights and well-defined tenure security are the keys to ensuring equitable land access, land use and subsequent socio-economic rights, and determining the modalities of agrarian reform, such as state led, market led, society-led, or community led.

Constitutional route for legal reform and law making: The Constitution of Nepal 2015 (Article 25,36,40,51...) guarantees the people's rights over land in alignment with public interest.

Land and land-based policy processes have been initiated to formulate National Land Policy through the active engagement of state and societal actors.

Community-based and decentralized land governance in federalized context is one of the most promising approaches for determining and promoting local and regional land use planning.

Diverse livelihood opportunities by market and technologies should be people-centric, pro-poor and inclusive, focusing on the most marginalized and deprived communities.

Urban agrarian reform and urban agriculture is one of the ways to gain land access and land tenure of the urban and peri-urban fallow land for sustainable food and nutrition security.

The concerns of small holders and family farming, such as access to services, loan, institutions, and proper incentive and motivation should be taken into consideration.

Gender concerns of land tenure such as equal property rights and substantive legal reform, can address oppression and deprivation from an intersectionality perspective.

Land-Grant University Model as with *Historically Black Colleges & Universities* will open new avenues for engagement of academic institutions to better devise an inclusive agrarian transformation model, considering commitment to social diversity and local communities.

People's empowerment and mobilization of land poor from below is required for promoting non-violent methods of addressing historical injustice for inclusive agrarian transformation.

Communal and Customary land tenure is a promising method to address cultural rights and tenure security over land and forest resources for Indigenous and tribal communities.

Land rental market, responsible investment and land banks can ensure land availability and access through consolidation and land leasing arrangements.

US best practices in land justice should be considered, including progressive land tax, land trusts, farm land access, sustainable farm protection via state legislative proposals, farm cooperative federations, African American farmers' organizations and effective mobilizations.

Best practices from Japan, Taiwan and South Korea justly addressed property rights, compensation, public interest, welfare, effective farmers mobilization, reform campaign etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on a comparative analysis between Nepal's case and global best practices, up-scaling and out-scaling of the global and US best practices for addressing agrarian transformation (e.g. inclusive property rights, tenure security, equitable access, due compensation, efficiency, etc.) should be considered while devising the most pragmatic and inclusive agrarian transformation model. Hence, Nepal's agrarian transformation requires reorientation to become truly inclusive (mixed economy principle). Global transformation has employed land based justice and agriculture initiatives in the rapidly changing society of the 21st century. With comparative results (caste-race-class-gender), we recommend addressing historical privilege, inequity and injustices, and designing the respective multiple inclusive measures to address true disadvantages. Finally, the paper seeks to reorient the theoretical underpinnings of social equity and inclusive agrarian transformation differentiated policy in the service of social justice in Nepal, South Asia and the global community.



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