

Call for Papers: Understanding the Land Issues and Agrarian Reform in Post Conflict Nepal

Coordinating editors

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Issues relating to land ownership and tenure are highly contested and controversial globally as well as nationally. In context to Nepal, land has been a complex, dynamic, and contentious issue for centuries. Control over land was central to the political power of the Rana regime, while land tax was the core source of revenue. Since Nepal was declared as a democratic country in 1951, land reform has been a key issue of discussion for each successive government. Slogans like "land to the tiller" have become a popular agenda for each political party with different understandings and interpretations. Despite waves of so called land reforms, has been unable to bring the fundamental changes at the grassroots level i.e. changes in the life of rural people.

It is a fact that inequality in land distribution (skewed and inequitable land distribution) is one of the greatest barriers for enhancing economic growth and consequently the agricultural sector, which is one of the major contributors to the Nepalese economy, remains stagnant. The rise in landlessness and inequality, both corollaries of decades of failed land reforms, has fuelled tensions across the rural/agrarian society and contributed to the decade long violent conflict (1996-2006).

After 2006, land issues have once again been strongly reflected or discussed in several political and policy documents such as Comprehensive Peace Agreement 2006 and Interim Constitution 2007. Specifically, Article 3.7 of CPA notes that it will implement a 'scientific land reform' program. The Interim Constitution 2007 also aims to ending feudal and semi-feudal land ownership, and ensure land right of landless, land poor and marginalized groups. However, these constitutional provisions contradict with existing policies and laws to guaranteeing socio-economic rights of those people as well as for the overall socio-political and economic transformation of Nepal. There are also quite different approaches of land reform viz redistributive, reformist and transformative (socialist) are in place in global context with *pros and cons* for varied successes and failures. There is considerable debate regarding the best practice, particularly when land reform can be categorized as either an economic (efficiency and prosperity) or socio-political issue (social equity and justice etc).

Most critically perhaps, the impasse in resolving the land question in Nepal can be linked to the socio-political and power structure embedded in Nepali society for centuries, and deeply entrenched inequities and historical injustices. For example, contemporary

landlordism can be traced back to the Rana tax collection bureaucracy and land grant distribution and there is continuity as well as change in land ownership structures, with descendants of political elites still owning vast estates across the country. Moving on, the 1960s and 70s saw the policies of Panchayat era which saw a further increase in landlessness despite the cosmetic 'land reforms' of the period. Resettlement of the Tarai provided relief to land poor household of the hills, but in some regions increased landlessness amongst indigenous cultivators of the plains who lost land due to indebtedness or became bonded labourers for the new settlers. The reactionary ethnic politics of the period also increased the population of farmers lacking citizenship, and thus a claim to land resources.

While the power of some Rana and Panchayat era landlords is waning in more recent decades, new patterns of land inequality have emerged. Rising costs of living, agrarian stress and debt continue to result in increased distress sales of land, while its corollary – rising urban prosperity – is increasing the purchases of land by city dweller. Phenomena such as land speculation are resulting in further transfers of land from the marginal farmer majority to a minority of urban based land owners. While representing new types of ownership, the feudal production relations often remain the same with sharecropping for absentee landlords widespread in the Tarai and middle hills, while in other contexts, land is being diverted from productive use, being used for peri-urban housing development or plotting.

In contrast to the largely unsuccessful policy response, the Nepali land rights movement is active from a political to civil society level to lobby for equitable access to land and restoration of social justice. From a civil society side, landless and land poor people at the grassroots are being empowered to claim land rights and pressurize the mainstream political parties as well as policy makers for pro-poor policy formulation and its effective implementation. Without broader political consensus among political parties, it seems incomplete. Though civil society is directed towards political process, there is a missing link between political and technical considerations of land reform. Further investigation is therefore necessary to understand the gaps for bringing broader political consensus among political parties and actors.

Taking all those facts and figure together, land is a structural issue (being a source of economic, social and political power) and it determines rural social structure as well as state governance. Due to these, it is highly debated, controversial and contested. Nepal's history also suggests that land has been at the centre in every political transition either before 1951 and after. Therefore, this special issue of *New Angle: Nepal Journal of Social Science and Public Policy*, attempts to investigate a diverse range of land issues from a theoretical/conceptual, policy and practical perspective. It will also be directed towards identifying pragmatic solutions with informed understanding on land issues and thus will proceed for informed debate and dialogue in Nepal.

The following issues will be taken into consideration, but not only limited to:

- Theoretical and conceptual dimension of land reform focusing on the positions and understanding of political parties (Revolutionary Land Reform/Progressive Land Reform/Scientific Land Reform)
- Demystifying land reform and land governance discourse in Nepalese context and beyond that (South-Asian context)

- Contentious land issues in the constitution making process of Nepal (constitutional and legal routes to land reform and its possible consequences), including land issues in federal discourses
- Right to land, food sovereignty and land sovereignty in current debates from constitution making, policy and practices.
- Land issues linked with inclusive and socialist democracy (democratization processes addressing land and agrarian concerns including political mobilization)
- Community land rights, devolution of land governance, and land administration
- Political consensus on issues and modalities of land reform amongst political parties and the political economy of the land policy making process
- The peri-urban land market, speculation and domestic land acquisition (land plotting) in Nepal
- The impact of land relations on agriculture, the role of landlord-tenant relations on productivity, as well as small versus large farm efficiency.
- Land and labor related issues such as social protection and security of bonded/semi-bonded and agricultural labourers
- Land right movements for social equity/justice as well as civil society land monitoring
- Mapping and understanding linkages and relationships between land and caste, gender, and ethnicity, including indigenous land rights/claims.
- Key issues such as legal ambiguities, legal pluralism, land disputes, compensation/restitution, restoration and recovery of productive asset/land in post conflict Nepal
- Issues related to land seizure and property return in post-conflict Nepal

This is not the comprehensive list rather it attempts to compile and propose the possible pertinent issues that can contribute to ongoing land reform debate/contemporary land issue as well as land issues in post-conflict situation of Nepal.

For this special issue of NEW ANGLE and workshop would welcome papers that shed light on these and other changes that that land reform process is undergoing in contemporary Nepal. In line with the overall aims of the journal Papers must be research based, rather than speculative or review articles.

What kind of articles do we encourage?

The editors seek to include articles which are based upon concrete data collection, preferably field based. However, rigorous analysis of secondary/historical sources will also be appropriate. On the other hand, the journal will avoid entirely speculative or theoretical articles. Instead we would like to encourage articles which record the results of completed investigations (published in full form elsewhere), or detail hypotheses and raise questions emerging from on-going work.

The journal will not encourage full length research papers, for which there are more appropriate outlets. It is anticipated that instead, New Angle will encompass the intermediate ground between journalism and academic field work, and in doing so, will stimulate public debate through disseminating research findings in an easily accessible format.

In terms of language, the emphasis will be on contributions in English. However, we will be open to contributions in Nepali depending upon the needs of the author. For the first issue, all papers, regardless of the submission language, will be published in both Nepali and English.

Format of submissions

Articles must subscribe to the following format:

- Articles should be no more than 3000-4000 words. We will also include 1-2 special research articles in each issue which can be up to 8000 words in length. If you are interested in submitting such an article, please be in touch with the editors in advance.
- All articles should include an abstract of 100-150 words (250-300 words for special research articles).
- Referencing should be in the Harvard style.
- Spelling should be in UK English.
- Articles should be in an MS Word compatible format, with a font size of 12, and 1.5 line spacing.
- Short quotations should use single quotation marks, while longer quotes should be indented.
- Photos can be included, but should be no more than 4x6 inches, and will be published in black and white.

A cover photo may be requested from authors of special articles.

If you'd like to have your paper considered for publication as part of this special NEW ANGLE issue on Land Issues in Post conflict Nepal, please send papers to sias-info@sias-southasia.org by the 30 May 2015.

For more information on New Angle and the Nepal Policy Research Network, visit <http://www.nepalpolicy.net>.