

International Conference On 'Agrarian Questions and Comprehensive Solutions'

March, 2014

Context

“Land reform” has been a much-pronounced phrase in the Nepali political-economic discourse since 1940s, before establishment of democracy for the first time in Nepal. But neither the political slogan of 'land to the tillers' or the state-driven land reform initiatives have been effective. Deprivation of land rights is synonyms of poverty because those who are poor they are landless and tenant and insecure in livelihood and food. Moreover, in the context of Nepal, land is also the power, prestige, property,



From left, Ms. Jill Car-Harish (II); Honorable Mr. Keshav Badal; Mr. Krishna Raj BC, (MoLRM); Honorable Dr. Yuwaraj Khatiwada(Central Bank);Dr. Madiodio Niasse, (ILC)

security of shelter, food and livelihood. Ironically, those who are poor they do not have the land landownership although they have been tilling the and for the generation. So it is not only the issue of land rights it is the issue of human rights, social justice and livelihood security.

Out of total 14718,000 ha land of the country, 3100,000 ha is under agricultural production. Over 70 % of peasants operate on less than one hectare of land while 22 percent of Households are still cultivating other's land and nothing owned. 25% families are landless farmers whose livelihood is dependent upon agriculture. More than 60 percent of households are belonging to very poor and marginalized family category (Small tenants, sharecroppers, and landless laborers) in Nepal.

During the people's movement 2006, it raised the voice on land and agrarian reform on behalf of poor and marginalized farmers. As per their voice, the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) 2006, Interim Constitution (IC) 2007 along with Periodic National Development Plan 2007-2010 and 2011-2013 included the agenda of land and agrarian reform and also promised for scientific land reform. However, there is still no visible action. Even though, they included the agenda of land and agrarian reform in the documents but there are still no clear policy, legislation and actions regarding this issue. Therefore, it is necessary to dialogue with the political parties and government agencies to build proper policy and legislation on land reform.

In the last election 2013, most of the political parties included the land agenda in their election manifesto however it had to mobilize the landless and marginalized farmers even to form the High Level Land Reform Commission. To influence the political parties and government, the landless and marginalized farmers are being organized and mobilized. There is a need for more discussion on genuine land and agrarian reform and capacity building of land rights facilitators, advocates and leaders in order to strengthen the people's movement and continue building opinion on land



reform and pressurize at the policy level. For this, Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC) and National Land Rights Forum (NLRFF) are strong on politics of mobilization but still lacks the politics of knowledge and land reform. So to strengthen and support Nepal's initiatives, ample experiences and learning in Asia, Africa and Latin America will certainly help to strengthen the exchange of learning and internationalize the issue.

Most governments have no priority for land reform and agriculture investment to support the poor people. Land reform is not only an issue for Nepal, but is also global issue. Since land and agrarian reform is political issues, there is a need of international support and support to the government of Nepal and political parties. Each country has its own experiences and learnings on land reform and social mobilization.

Objectives of the Conference

The main objective of this conference is that the participants from selected countries discuss and analyze the Land and Agrarian Reform related issues from their countries' perspective, as well as, region and gained the learning and experiences on land rights movement and land and agrarian reform. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Exchange the learning and experiences on land and agrarian rights movement, land and agrarian reform approaches and models between Nepalese farmers, land rights leaders, activists, parliament members, government officials and CSOs members.
2. Build the knowledge on land and agrarian reform models, approaches and policy provisions.
3. Influence Nepali parliament members, political leaders and CSO members on land and agrarian reform issues.
4. Build the alliance, networking and coordination for regular exchange and knowledge sharing on land and agrarian reform.

Different Events of International Conference

i. Field Visits: The main objective of the field visit was direct interaction to Nepali landless, tenants and small holder farmers especially Village Land Rights Forums (VLRFFs) members and District Land Rights Forum (DLRF) members including government stakeholders and international people so that both people can benefit i.e. Nepali farmers and international participants. The groups were divided into three groups and visited Mahottari District (East), Nawalparasi District (West) and Rasuwa (Middle region) of Nepal. There was a participation of total of 21 International Participants and 11 National Participants. Field Visit was carried out from 26-27 February, 2014.



Discussion with Pipalbot VLR of Rasuwa District



Discussion with Charghare VLR of Mahottari District



Discussion with DLR, Nawalparasi District

ii. International Conference on ‘Land Reform and Non- Violent Land Rights Movement

The International Conference on ‘**Land Reform and Non-Violent Land Rights Movement**’ was held in National Land Rights Resource Center Thimura, Chitwan on 28 – 2nd March, 2014. The three days conference was enthusiastically conducted in an open atmosphere, touching upon many interesting topics. Participants had an unique opportunity to share ideas and demands, to exchange experiences and discussions, and accordingly to propose measures of collective action and strategies. The program specially focused on non-violent movement; social security; democratisation and people’s rights. At this conference, the participants expressed many original views and made many constructive suggestions from different perspectives on all areas of the conference’s concerns. Further it has also been important to work together, to debate about alternatives and to link our struggles.



With the discussion and sharing session, six major action points were identified and through the group discussion, strategies were prepared of each which includes:

- i. Mobilization of People’s Organization
- ii. Issue of Women and Land Rights and Joint Land Ownership
- iii. Campaign Against Eviction (Forest Encroachment and Displacement)
- iv. Formation and mobilization of Agricultural Co-operatives
- v. Revision of land policy and laws (National Level Advocacy)
- vi. Coordination and networking with district and national level political leaders

iii. International conference on ‘Agrarian Questions and Comprehensive Solutions’

This conference was planned for two days; first day discussion with government of Nepal i.e Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) working on land and agrarian issues while on second day, major discussion was held with political parties and parliament members. The plenary discussion was held on 3rd – 4th March, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu. The modalities of workshop were key paper presentation and roundtable discussion. *On 3rd March 2014, Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC), International Land Coalition (ILC) and International Initiatives (II) facilitated the conference.* The main objective was to influence the Nepalese government, political parties and



CSOs on land reform issues as well as international participants gaining knowledge on Nepal's experience. Further the farmer leaders from different countries presented their experience and learning on the domain of land rights movement. Besides, it also included paper presentations from different countries on land and agrarian reform. ***Forum for Agrarian Concern and Studies Nepal (FACT-Nepal) facilitated the conference on 4th March 2014.*** In this day, it basically focused on discussion

with political parties and parliaments members.

Welcome Remarks- Suresh Dhakal, Vice Chair of CSRC delivered a welcome speech and presented the issue with regard to land and agrarian rights. He highlighted the conference proves to be a good platform for exchange of country experience and learning. Further he stressed on the formulation of collective action, strategies and need of effective approach to internationalize the land rights issue.

Som Prasad Bhandari, Chairperson of National Land Rights Forum, NLRF has been campaigning towards the non-violent land rights movement and genuinely working for landless farmers and land-poor. In the process of land rights movement, good achievement and success have been made. We have to further strengthen the movement with international networking and non - violent action.

Mr. Marciano Virola (Jun), Asian Farmers Association (AFA) from Philippines, certainly struggle is difficult but through organizing, mobilizing and enhancing non-violent social movement; we can ensure social justice and fight against oppression as well.

Ms. Dewi Kartika of KPA (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria/Consortium for Agrarian Reform) from Indonesia issue of Nepali farmers is similar to Indonesia farmers. Although there is sound law regarding agrarian reform, there is lack of implementation. So we need to struggle together and strengthen the ongoing land rights campaign.

Ms. Puspa Singh of Ektaparishad India, Ektaparishad have been promoting for the non-violent movement and land rights movement since 25 years. Certainly the self-reliance and confidence is must for struggling for the land rights and moving ahead with the campaign.

Mr. Nabi Noor, National Peasants Coalition of Pakistan (NPCP), NPCP has been struggling and have been campaigning to raise the issue of land reform in major political agenda. We all asian countries including Nepal must unite together for proper agrarian and land reform.

Mr. Zahidul Kabir, Kendrio Krishok Moitry (KKM) from Bangladesh, As per the experience of Bangladesh, Agricultural issue is local issue and need to be addressed from ground level. For this we need proper agrarian reform and side by side we must advocate from local level to national level and expand up to the global level.

Dr. Rigoberto Rivera of Accion Campesina from Latin America, Venezuela, Land reform issue is for those who genuinely work on the land. We have to learn from the various country

experiences on history of land reform and issue of land reform process or collective action and transformation.

Ms. Jill Car-Harish, Coordinator of International Initiatives (II), II is working on land and livelihood issues and promoting the use of non-violent action. Pro-poor struggle for people based land reform is commending in Nepal. This is the way to gain the comprehensive solution. Through the field visits, I am much impressed by people's organization mobilized from community to district to national level incorporating the issues of indigenous community, gender issues, and bonded labour respectively. In between this, there are challenges but we need to collectively unite and have to look forward for greater equity and social justice for all.

Honorable Mr. Keshav Badal, Parliament Member and Chair of Badaal High Level Land Reform Commission, the landlessness is big problem in Nepal, so we are struggling for proper land reform. We are here to collectively work together and we have to learn from different country experience to implement and address the land and agrarian issues.

Dr. Madiodio Niasse, Director of International Land Coalition, Land is very complex issue and politically sensitive as well. But it is vital for rebuilding a nation and addressing the repression and injustice. For the proper solution, we have to promote the inclusive social deliverance.

Honorable Dr. Yuwaraj Khatiwada, Governor of Central Bank of Nepal, We are talking about the poverty reduction but first of all land must be focused with it. Considering that land is the major productive issue, we have been advocating land rights issue but it should be continued with the national to international level ensuring the inclusive growth, human security and sustainable development. Land is a social, political cultural and environmental issue, so how the land reform issue is to be prioritized is another concern. When we talk about the issue of food security, we must talk about the food availability. To address this, we need effective strategies leading to social transformation and people's empowerment. Further in Nepal, we are in the phase of drafting and finalizing new constitution. So we all who are working for land rights movement; must be alert about how we are ensuring the land rights within constitution only then law and policies related to land can be effective.

Mr. Krishna Raj BC, Acting Secretary Ministry of Land Reform and Management (Chair of the Session)



The key note speakers and sharing of national and international guest speakers indeed provided an opportunity to deepen our understanding on land and agrarian issues. Land and agrarian issue is crucial around the world. Scarce land resources directly ties into economic, political and social power in any agrarian society. The issues of land rights for women, dalit, marginalize and landless people are meaningful in order to provide social justice, land tenure security, increase productivity, and reduce poverty; ultimately keeping the sustainable peace in the country. Formulation of national land policy is being undertaken for implementing land use plan. Drafting of legal framework based on international practice to implement land use policy is also underway. Improving access to land of women, dalit and marginalized people and in addition protecting land rights of tillers, increasing

the productivity in agriculture, enhancing land tenure security, environmental protection, food security, land governance and improving the service delivery are key aspects of land policy.

We look forward for support of national, international guest, political parties and CSO's to improve and finalize these policies. The other important activity to be prioritized is providing access to land and housing strategies to semi-bonded labour. Drafting of legal framework for bonded labour implementation will provide land and housing for bonded labour. The absence of democratically elected powerful government resulting in the slow implementation of the agreed 13 points of action plan for land reform formulated on the basis of two reports of High Level Land Reform Commissions (HLLRCs) constituted in the past. Thus MoLRM has been seriously prioritizing to implement this by creating political consensus. To enhance the land rights of women, Government of Nepal has given subsidy in registration (25% to municipality area and 40 % to remote area). We have to emphasize that land issue is to be ensured in constitution. We need to frame our legal system to shape our land administration system in pursuant to commitment made globally. Sustainable peace is possible in Nepal, only after resolving the complex land related issues in favor of large section of landless and marginalized peasants. We appreciate the support of international guest and development partners to address the complex land issue in appropriate way to achieve the sustainable peace and transformation of Nepalese society. Thus, this platform will indeed provide an opportunity to learn and share experiences on land related issues from learned and imminent audience to adopt best practices.

Then the Roundtable Discussion was carried out accordingly. This session was chaired by Bimal Phnuyal of Action Aid International while the session was overall facilitated by Dr. Suresh Dhakal, Vice Chair of CSRC.

Hari Rokka (former parliament member), Political analyst stressed that the landlessness problem can be addressed considering the three aspects i.e. structural, input and market respectively. As per which distribution of cultivable land to the landless households as a means of livelihood, end of dual ownership of land, agriculture Credit (Micro-finance) and Insurance, Food deficiency and market mechanism, new modeling of production mechanism, infrastructural development were some of the major concerns focused with it.

Mr. Ghanshyam Bhusal, Polet Buero, Member, UML shared that why the land issue has been considered as a Communist issue. Campaign for ensuring housing rights of landless people is being focused subsequently. To address the problem of landless people, first we must be clear on either we are prioritizing uncontrolled marketization or righteous socialism.

Hon. Gagan Thapa, Parliament Member and Central Committee Member of Nepali Congress highlighted that landlessness is in itself the problem while small land holding is another important issue. The debate is ongoing on Revolutionary or Scientific land reform which is to be addressed effectively. Further he stressed that clear indication of land ceiling and how to address the issue of absentee landlordism is another priority of concern.

Synopsis of the Session - Bimal Phnuyal, Action Aid International

I am very much positive towards this conference and appreciate all of queries and concerns. Land Reform was supposed to happen earlier, but there have been no any changes from Land Act of 1961. Majority thinks an unstable political party is more responsible for this. But we need to understand that we all are responsible in our own place. Recently newly elected members have been introduced, so through regular



consultation with political parties, leaders, we have to take positively and provide feedback, suggestions which will ultimately build new steps and contribute to holistic development of Nepali society. Further as per the process of increasing the recognition of Nepal in international level, how development process is to be carried out and how land reform has been addressed with it is much important.

The political parties have assumed land issue as older issue. But land issue must be respected and prioritized. We must be well aware that land and agrarian reform issues both complements each other and cannot be seen solely. So we should be able to bring this land related issue in top level which will open the transformation process. Through the sharing, presentation and queries we must be alert that land reform model cannot be imported from any country. The key task is understanding the social, historical and present situation and do proper analysis being based on fact, evidence, and find alternatives from the country experience. Model must be learned from success and failure of country experience and valid principle which could be applied upon accordingly. The issue of land and agriculture development should not limit in words only, ideology is important and we the citizen must be alert how it can be mobilized.

On 4th March, 2013, the Second Day Conference was held in the facilitation of Forum for Agrarian Concern and Studies Nepal (FACT-Nepal). In this day there was an intensive discussion with political parties and parliaments members. The session was followed by roundtable discussions and paper presentation. There was a presence of different political leaders and international delegates including Hon. Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, Ex. Prime minister and Leader of UCPN Maoist; Hon. Agriculture Minister Hari Prasad Parajuli, Mr. Pari Thapa, General Secretary of CPN (Unified); Hon. Jeetendra Narayan Dev, General Secretary of MJF, Mr. CP Gajurel, Vice Chair of Maoist, Mr. Deependra Bahadur Keshetri, former vice chair of planning commission, Dr. Madiodio Niase, ILC Director, Mr. PV Rajgopal, Ektaparishad, Dr. Rigobero Rivera, Action Campesina. Further interaction between national and international participants regarding land policy also supported to draft the comprehensive land use laws based upon international experiences.



Glimpse of Second Day International Conference, Different Political Party representatives participating in Round Table Discussion Program

Major Outcome of the Program

- International Conference provided the participants a unique opportunity to share ideas and demands, to exchange experiences and discussions, and accordingly to propose measures of collective action and strategies.
- The prioritization of mass movement and active non-violence in the struggle for land rights leading towards social transformation
- Field visit program provided a clear understanding to international delegates on the working modalities of CSRC and NLRF through a direct interaction with Nepali farmer leaders, especially VLRf members and DLRf members. Similarly the community people also gained different country experience on non-violent land rights movement.
- The International Conference brought together all of the political parties together for one collective goal and discussion. And influenced members of parliament, government of Nepal and political leaders on land and agrarian reform and contribute to collaborate to initiatives of land reform.
- Enhanced knowledge and skill on land rights movement and land and agrarian reform among the farmers leaders, land rights activists, land rights team and NES members of Nepal.
- Enhanced the knowledge and skill on land and agrarian reform, land rights movements, models of land reform among the participants and contributed to develop the actions in respective countries.
- Influenced to endorse 'National Reform Action Plan'
- Strengthened alliance, networking and coordination for the exchange of ideas and experiences in coming days and also much strengthened the ILC network in Asia.