

## Land Rights Movement in Nepal

Nepali peasantry was 'assured' of 'Land to the Tillers' by various political parties, even as far back as the 1940s. But a meaningful or significant land reform process has yet to see the light of the day. The much discussed 'land reform' programme of 1964, which commenced only during the last days of the Panchayat regime, saw no positive impact with most tenant and landless farmers in the country remaining under the control of powerful landlords.

Today, oppressed farmers, along with civil-society, are voicing their concerns and proposing alternative policies to gain their land rights. The discourse on land rights is deepening, and social mobilization for the goal of genuine land reform is widening. More importantly, the land reform agenda is being discussed at local community and district level forums, and no longer confined to the chambers of planning commissions, party headquarters or palace corridors. Mass action and interaction for land reform has evolved from the ground and as a result more than 15,000 tenant and landless farmers have obtained land rights.

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The experience of the Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), a Nepali civil-society organization focussing on capacity-building of people deprived of their land rights, has shown that those who gained freedom from landlords increased both their bargaining power for wages, and their participation in development activities. In Nepal, land is the major cause of conflict.

Forums of concerned groups and people's organizations, facilitated by CSRC, have evolved at different levels, bringing about local level interaction and awareness of land rights issues. People's organizations that have emerged and built up at village, district and national levels, are empowering themselves to form the backbone of success for the whole movement. The National Land Rights Concern Group (NLRCG) has also emerged as a forum in which other civil-society organizations, including NGOs and CBOs, can work together to strengthen people's organizations and advocate for cultivators' land rights.

One key lesson is that local movements must be linked with policy dialogue, and policy

information must be shared with the land-deprived people. Even educated people in Nepal are unaware of legislation and regulations concerning the right to land. In this respect, CSRC has been working with the landless poor and tenant farmers who have organized themselves to fight for their land rights. Major activities include context analysis, participatory planning, developing people's organizations, stakeholder analysis and pressurizing government agencies and stakeholders to support tenant and landless farmers.

Land reform is not merely providing land from one tenure group to another; it is about changing the power structure and socio-economic relations, and ensuring a better livelihood for peasants. Land reform has been taken to be an economic development – it is not only this; it is also freedom and release from bondage and exploitation. At present, landlord and patriarchal power has restricted human freedom and development. In Nepal, as in many other countries, the loss of land is the loss of livelihood, income, security, food, shelter and dign