

Agrarian Reforms and livelihood Security

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Peasants toil their sweats to work hard in the field. They make land fertile and green. They work in the field all the seasons and all the years. They are born on the soil, they are brought in that soil and they began to work and produce more on that very soil with their tireless laborers. However, those very peasants are land less, marginal farmers, squatters, agricultural workers and even bonded labors. They are dying of hunger and starvation. They have never become the owner of the land where they worked generation together. The land is in the hand of few feudal and landlords who have never touched the land and seen the land that are in their names.

Peasants in the region are exploited, discriminated and even tortured by the feudal and landlords in the villages. They are cheated and discriminated by the feudal bureaucracy when they approach to the concerned authorities for their work done.

A vast majority of toiling peasant comprising of land-less, marginal farmers, sharecroppers and agricultural workers who produce food for everybody in our nations but the irony is that who do not have basic human rights to feed themselves.

Women are dominated in all aspects in agricultural as well as other sectors of society. Women's work in the field and in the households are considered invisible and unproductive labour despite women's labour constituting at least 50 percent of the total work in agriculture.

Women also have limited or no economic rights. Women, in general are not given equal rights over property including land. Furthermore, women do not readily have access in most cases to credit facilities to Banks, education and training thus they are not able to pursue any economic independence for themselves. Even working as land laborers, women still receive less wages than men despite the workload of both being equal. Peasant women in South Asia suffer double or even triple as peasants, as mothers, as sisters, as wives and as children.

How do we define food security? It is the fundamental right of the people and the communities to decide and implement their agricultural and food policies and strategies for sustainable production and distribution. It is the right to produce food sustainably and the right of access to productive resources such as land, water, seeds, bio-diversity, etc, for sustainable utilisation.

Almost eight years back, in 1996 the World Food Summit was taken place in Rome. The heads of the states on that occasion had come up with the statement which is know as "Rome Declaration" on which they had stated that "we consider it intolerable that more than 800 millions people throughout the world and, particularly in developing countries, do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs". In means that when we were about to enter into a new millennium, still there were 800 millions people in the world mostly in developing countries do not get two square meals a day. The heads of states had also shown their commitments to halve the hunger by 2015.

However, when they met again five years later in June 2002 in Rome and evaluated their performance in reducing the targeted hunger. They themselves proclaimed that they were far-far away to meet the target. The FAO at that time had commented on the assessment of the heads of the sates that they were not able to achieve the set goal of reducing hunger because of their lack of political commitments. In fact it was only partially true as it happened not only a lack of a commitments but it happened because of the lack of access of individual and communities over the productive resources.

South Asian Region is economically known as a region of agrarian based economic. In Nepal approximately 90 percent of population live in villages and 76 percent of the total population is depended on agricultural for their livelihood. Geographically it is a small country but rich in bio-diversity. Out of 75 districts 55 lie in Mountain and that normally face food deficit problem. The plane Terai area is called a fertile sector for production of staple grain and other cash crops. It used to supplies food grain to some extent to the mountainous areas. It is ironical that a country's economy is based on agriculture has been becoming a food importer. People are dying of hunger and starvation in the developing countries. It is happening everywhere in the World. In the past the surplus food from Terai used to be compensated in food deficit areas particularly in the hills. Not only this the country used to be called a net food exporter country around in 1975s. Now even the Terai belt has suffered to produce enough food to feed the rapidly increasing population in the area. The issue of food security needs to be addressed and analyzed from the perspectives of human rights, equity and social justice with the framework of access to and control over production, distribution and consumption patterns.

Impacts of Globalization and WTO in Agriculture

Over the past few years the price of agricultural products has slumped massively in most of the countries in South Asian Region. Peasants toil their sweat for its production but are forced to sell out on even not without getting their wage. The main reason for slumping the price of the agro products is because of the flood of cheap paddy into the country. It is because of the liberalization policy through which the dumped and low quality of agricultural production have been imported.

Once Nepal was the third largest country in Jute production. However, after peasants had been deprived of getting a reasonable price or profitable price of jute, they burned it out and left to cultivate it again. Now our jute factories are importing jute form other countries. Now sugarcane is becoming one of the main cash crop of the country but the sugarcane farmers have been struggling for getting a profitable price of their products. If effective policy to enabling the farmers producing sugarcane is not adopted, they would also be discouraged in farming sugarcane.

Government is leaving the agricultural sector behind and stopping the facilities that were provided to peasants by the state. Previously, the government used to declare the support price of the staples food grains and the line agencies used to purchase such grain. However, after implementing the liberalization policy in the country no such provisions are available and the government its agencies have totally left dealing of fixing support price of the farm products. As a result peasants' have to compete with the subsidized import that flooded from the developed countries and Multinational Companies.

Agricultural loan is very important factor in the process of the production. However, the interest of the agricultural loan has become very costly. Every where peasants have to pay extra money as bribe to get a loan. At the same time the interest of loan is too high. Bank accepts deposits from the peasants by giving only 5 percent interest whereas it lends loan to peasants by charging up to 21 percent interest. Why is so much difference? Therefore, arrangement should be made for the annual payment of interest and installment payment to the principal. The system of compound interest should be abrogated.

In the past government had given enough subsidies on agricultural loan, small irrigation, fertilizers and seeds. However, since a couple of years the subsidies that was given to peasants and agricultural producers has been completely removed. Now no more subsidies is given in agricultural input. It has resulted to increase further the cost of the production. Peasants' concerned has been to establish the subsidies as of the previous rate.

Having not received the profitable price of the farm products and being deprived of getting a subsidy over agriculture inputs, peasants are getting frustrated in agriculture as their occupation. As a result production is decreasing, which has directly effected on the national food security of developing countries.

SAP policies are complementing the WTO of trade liberalization. WTO has also included the MNC's agenda of further control of our economy, politics and culture through policies in foreign investment, services and intellectual property rights.

Our food security has been severely endangered. The globalization process has been forcing us into cash crop production for dollars to pay foreign debt our food crop production have been reduced to non-subsistence level.

WTO agreements particularly on agriculture (AOA) and other related agreements have directly effected our agriculture, food security and livelihood. These agreements are intensifying the liberalization process in agriculture. As a result the life of general peasants have become bad to worse. The globalization process that has been promoted by the anti-people policies of WB, IMF and ADB in our context. Basically two three things have to be seen and analyzed while we do assess of the impact of WTO policies in our agriculture. Those can be described as follows:

Issue of agrarian reforms

We believe that the genuine land and agrarian reforms is the precondition of ensuring individual food security. The main means of production in South Asia is land and the main productive forces are peasants and agricultural workers. However, the land as a main means of production has been kept by a feudal and land lords. So, those forces must have the access over the land resources. The peasants who work in land for twenty four hours are deprived of land rights. The most productive land that is in the hand of rich has not been well utilized. This adverse situation has to be abolished and the progressive production relation system needs to be established for two reason; one is for social justice and another for productive increase.

Regarding the increase of productive capacity of land, one study has shown that the productivity of the land decreases when the land goes the bottom-up from the hands of the poor to the rich. For example a small peasant can produce harvest worth 12 thousands in one hector but in the same productive zone, the rich farmers who have over 5 hectares of land produce just 6 thousands. This proves that small farmers worked hard and produce more harvest even in adverse land.

Agrarian reform helps the followings to accomplish:

- Eliminate the poverty
- Create infrastructure for industrialization
- Motivate the peasants to work for betterment of their life
- Eliminate the exploitation in the agriculture and peasants
- Establish the principle of Jamil, Jal, Jungal, Jadibutti Jantako (Land, water, forest and bio-diversity should be in the hands of peasants)s

The system of dual ownership of land should be put to an end in favor of the tenant farmers. The tenancy right should be given to tenant farmers who have been tilling the land for a long period of time without having established legal tenancy right.

Land less, marginal farmers, agricultural workers and bonded labour should be given with land sufficient to sustain their livelihood.

Prompt registration should be made of land tilled by peasants without having been registered to their names on various grounds by dispatching teams on the spot to undertake field verification publicly.

While talking about the agrarian reforms the following tasks are to be accomplished:

- Abolition of dual land ownership
- Tenancy reforms
- Ceiling on land holdings
- Plotting or consolidation of land
- Land use policy
- Solving the issue of trust land
- Land recording and information system

Land use and land policies

Land is that means of productive resources that is limited and can not be extended. Therefore, it has to be used properly and well. The total land should be divided into two parts: agriculture land and non-agriculture land. The agriculture land should not be permitted for non-agricultural i.e. residential and industrial use. Forest land should also be developed as agro-forestry. The land that can be usable should be proclaimed as agriculture land. Such land must be used. There should be some kind of penalty if the land is not used. If such land is not used continuously for two years without appropriate reasons. The penalty should be increased and finally the ownership should go to the state. The people involved in non-agricultural sector should be discouraged to buy agricultural land. The present practice of using of agriculture land for the development of residential areas, township and industrial areas should immediately be discouraged.

Another important component to resolve the problems of food security is to identify and priorities the crops according to the quality of the land, climate, environment and geographical specialties so that production could be increased.

Unused and wasted lands are to be made worth cultivating and settlement.

Special programs should be carried out to develop dry riverbed into agricultural forest and arrangement should be made to settle land-less peasants in appropriate places.

Land tax dues, rent and arrears of trust (Guthi) currently being tilled by peasants should be completely written off and such land should be converted into Raiker or public in the name of the farmers using the land.

Issues to be discussed

We as peasants view with deep concern the following issues are directly related to the agrarian reforms:

- Issue of landlessness
- Indebtedness
- Rural unemployment
- Indiscriminate cash crop production
- Lack of pricing and marketing support policies
- Destruction of bio-diversity and plant genetic resources
- Women depriving of right to own land and other properties
- Lack of policy or poor implementation of minimum wage enactment
- Exploitation of sharecroppers
- Most laws and practices deny fundamental rights of peasants and people.