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Square peg in round hole: Agriculture development strategy of Nepal

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Increasingly the mountain agriculture is witnessing the greater extent of land under utilisation across the region with its repercussion to local food system, farmer's income and environmental sustainability of the fragile mountain ecosystem. There are many ecological, socio-economic and cultural factors influencing land use changes across the mountain region. Ecologically, the mountain environment is bio-physically fragile, vulnerable with highly fragmented and diversified agriculture land, which makes it difficult to adopt modern, commercial, large scale farming practices. Similarly the recent climate change phenomenon is putting farmers in pressure to adapt their farming system. As a result, small scale subsistence farming is in risk as well as less profitable in terms of generating cash income as compared with commercial, large scale and high input agriculture. The socio-economic factors such as landlessness, decreasing access to productive natural resources, low return on labour and other investment and increasing demand for cash to pay for health, education and other social services causing disincentives to the farming communities to continue the farming in hills and mountain region. Culturally, there is no longer view on intensive mountain farming as a viable option for household economy; therefore many young farmers are abandoning their farms. Another, the discourse of men growing up in the mountain has encouraged a view of rural villages as being traditional places to be live in the past and of urban areas to be desired. These causes and consequences have not been properly accounted while formulating agriculture policy framework, making failure of policy implementation. This desk study reviewed the process and content of agriculture policy formulation in Nepal. It is observed that the policies are not informed by evidences and inadequately represented the experiences and knowledge of practitioners. In the content, though the recent agriculture polices sought for a basis for radical change in agricultural sector with multiplicity of complex institutions, substantial infrastructures, technology-based increase in resource productivity and its strong multiplier effects, these policies did not aimed to uplift the vulnerable people and their weak livelihood strategies; and, it is not aimed at food security problems in the mountains. It suggests that the Eurocentric agriculture approach is not suitable for Nepal. The mountain agriculture with its specific characteristics must be treated differently than of the plains. Adaptive Agro-ecological Approach (AAA) that best fits with social, cultural and ecological systems can only be the viable and sustainable solutions to addressing climate change and food insecurity challenges in mountains.

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