

Reviving the Fields: Determinants and Policy Implications of Agricultural Land Abandonment in Nepal

Janak Raj Joshi, Reshma Shrestha (Nepal), Arun Pratihast (Netherlands) and Umashankar Pandey (Nepal)

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SUMMARY

Agricultural land abandonment has emerged as a pressing issue in Nepal, with far-reaching implications for food security, rural livelihoods, and sustainable resource management. Large areas of productive land remain uncultivated for years, particularly in the hill and mountain regions, where outmigration and socio-economic transformation have altered traditional farming systems. This study investigated the major barriers preventing the utilization of agricultural abandoned land. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including household surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews with key stakeholders across diverse agro-ecological zones, the study identified interrelated economic, social, institutional, and environmental factors that constrain land re-utilization. Low agricultural profitability driven by high input costs and lack of subsidies has diminished farmers' incentives to cultivate. The study found that labor shortages due to youth migration, land fragmentation, insecure tenure arrangements, limited access to irrigation, improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, credit, and modern agricultural technologies are the primary obstacles. Furthermore, inadequate market access, lack of integrated policy and weak enforcement, and declining interest among younger generations in agriculture exacerbate the issue. Environmental challenges such as soil degradation and climate variability further reduce the attractiveness of farming. The study highlights the need for integrated policy interventions that promote cooperative farming, secured land tenure, rural entrepreneurship, and the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices. Strengthening institutional coordination among Nepal's three tiers of government and providing targeted incentives to encourage both local and returnee migrants to invest in agriculture are essential steps toward reviving abandoned farmlands. Addressing these multidimensional barriers is critical to enhancing agricultural productivity, ensuring national food security, and fostering sustainable rural development in Nepal.

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