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Role of Land Fragmentation in Rural Development: A Bhutanese Perspective

Bhutan is a small mountainous country (38,394 sq. km.) situated on the Southern slopes of the Eastern Himalayas. The terrain of Bhutan is mostly rugged and mountainous which limits the land available for agriculture, farming and human settlement. Only about 12% of the total land is available for subsistence farming and human settlement. The increase in population with an annual growth rate of 2.5% also increases demand for the limited available land resource. Some of the urgent concerns regarding land have been recognized as landlessness or limited size of land holdings, limited access due to the geographical terrain of the country, shortage of labour within the household and natural disasters occurring in the country.

Any further land fragmentation is a grave issue for Bhutan. It impedes the rural development by limiting opportunities for farm mechanization and commercial farming. The inheritance system, allowing a piece of land for every child, further aggravates the situation. Drawing on a range of rural development strategies, field observations, and

opinions from experts the land fragmentation scenario in Bhutan is portrayed. It is demonstrated how land fragmentation has not been delved into as a particular issue in rural development but how it has featured as a prime concern. Causes and consequences of land fragmentation are analyzed and measure how to improve the current situation are presented.

Key words: land fragmentation, rural development, rural-urban migration, Bhutan.