

Nepal's Rural Scene: How It Looks Like ?

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Nepal possesses climatic and topographical variations, regional variations, poles apart variations in the case of few urban but mass rural areas and populace. In the urban Nepal, we find inundational drainage system, terrific traffic rush, unruly pedestrians, shameless beggars, decreasing kitchen gardens, new buildings obstructing the old ones, demonstration effects, parasitical still boastful attitude towards rural people, so-called productive business houses doing jobs of millions by telephonic or telex and photo fax calls. And in the rural front, which is more important in the present context, we have mass illiteracy, unpromising cultivation because of terrorised terraces, traditional and costly custom, rites, with employment almost to all, but full employment almost to none, liquidating age old self-reliant economy, less hygienic houses with thatched roofs, almost muddy/dusty roads, not lessening inequalities, lack of productivity (from qualitative and quantitative aspects), institutional approach but not much nullifying the traditional ones composed by village Mahajans, braindrains, paucity of warehousing provisions, irregular monsoon because of disturbed silvicultural kingdom, draining away of top soil of the hilly farms, target groups becoming subject to claim only for residues, etc.

Let us discuss the same a bit with statistical support. Our rural income, consumption, savings fall under an abject poverty.

Percentage of unemployed to total labour force in rural areas - a decade ago - stood at 5.52 (10 and above age), even if we do not take care of people of under age, or disabled minors (who do not fall under economically active population). Highest percentage of rural unemployed to total labour force was as high as 6.74 in the Central Region, with lowest as 3.64 in Western Region followed by 6.60 in Far Western Region, 4.62 percent in Eastern Region.

The core side of prescription for reducing existing level of under-employment would naturally be the creation of off-farm job opportunities, off-farm works in rural areas through appropriate development programmes.

If this root of additional works may not be created, migration from rural to urban areas - which stands at 4 percent (533600 in total) per annum of total population (population totalling 13.24 million in 1980) will continue. It was evident that the migration rate was stronger in hills (40.97 percent) followed by mountains (40.47 percent) and terai with 11.58 percent. At that time it was well thought of the fact that

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migration from hills and mountains specially to terai areas was not without limit in view of shrinking forest areas. In other words, as a corollary, hilly areas must develop their capabilities to absorb their own population with gainful employment. As it is needed to develop capability of the hilly areas as to harness/tap the potentialities of the land, no less important factor is to safeguard with stern measures the ecological environment of the terai. Crop land of hills alone may not absorb the population, endeavours towards integration of crop with livestock on integrated cropping system alongwith forest plants must be stepped up. As a support or alternative to this, some other supplementary or new industrious jobs shall have to be found out for quick implementation.

With reference to inequalities, per capita income, etc., the situation in rural areas is graver. Average family net income (rural Nepal) stood at Rs. 5569 or U.S. \$ 464 decade ago - this amount consisted of Rs. 3588/- (\$ 299) or 64.43 percent as income from agriculture and the rest Rs. 1981 (\$ 165) or 35.57 percent from non-agriculture. Even income from agriculture can be categorically divided as to incur highest returns from irrigated land, and less from non-irrigated land. And this average per capita rural Nepal was of Rs. 950 with share in mountains being Rs. 782 against Rs. 932 in hills. The resultant effect was that terai had a marginal surplus over expenditure for dire necessities. Terai's share of income was Rs. 1005. Agricultural production in 1980 except that of wheat declined - this was a reason for decline in income in rural areas. Poor natural resources, soil erosion in hills, paucity of capital and inputs, undeveloped human skills were also the fundamental reasons for such a decline. It is grimly realized that these hurdles are not lessened even to-day.

Irrigation, average of holding, topography are the dominant factors for judging land's productivity with provision of mitigating hurdles arising out of the term, "below poverty line". In other words, non-irrigation, less average for cultivation and high altitudinal factors have shown signs of stepping up people to turn to below poverty line. Landlessness is higher in mountains. Same is the case with people falling below poverty line. Among different farm households falling below poverty line, small farm category succumbed to result highest number to be below poverty line - 268816 hailed from small farm category; large-farm land household category comprised 10.28 percent.

Small and marginal farm land category categorised the biggest groups (60.25 percent) against landless as 10.95 percent followed by medium and large land household category (about 14 percent each).

Average per capita calory intake of those under below poverty line - 1401 against the necessity of survival rate of 2256 calories. The deficits in calory intakes in Far Western Region (49 percent), 47 percent in Western Development Region, 15 percent in Central Region and 25.62 percent in Eastern Region, with a resultant effect of average rural deficit of calory intake by 37.90 percent.

Institutional coverage, coverage of people by organized supplies of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers, water, etc.), has remained low or almost non-existent for about half the number of our districts. Extension facilities though claimed to have been making steady head way are yet to be made within reach of the rural poor.

Regarding credit facilities from the organized sectors, viz., the Sajha (Co-operatives), Agricultural Development Bank, commercial banks amounted to 24 percent of the total requirements in 1977 - this percentage has been making steady progress after that period onward, as revealed by the survey works conducted by Nepal Rastra Bank.

Market facilities in rural areas - to the extent of 75 percent of the total - were concentrated in terai, hills and mountains with hurdles of snow falls and rugged nature for road transportation systems are very much deprived of the rural marketing privilege. There are isolationist markets too. In the absence of economic interdependence, there is no integration. Infrastructural facilities naturally should constitute transportation, communication, electrification, training, workshop, developed markets for both (to buy rural surplus and to sell as required by rural people). Many districts have been opened for journey by bus, or by air with still more is near isolated areas. Rural communication service is being slowly developed in a way as we find small progress made in power, electrification not only by the hydel source but by non-hydel energies comprised by solar, etc., but the latter progress is most minimal. Examples are coming in regarding the closure of pump sets, rice-oil-dal mills due to difficulty in procuring petrol and diesel. Similar painstaking moves need to be made regarding meeting health hazards as poisonous and inadequate drinking water.