

Household Economies of Chepang People in Chitwan

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to characterize a typical Chepang community in Chitwan district with reference to their economy at household level based on the study conducted in Lothar Village Development Committee. Chepang are considered to be one of the highly marginalized communities in Nepal having traditional subsistence based small economies. Their houses are small with mud floor, stone walls and straw roofs. One third of the Chepang households do not have toilets. They rear small number of mixed livestock in a house eg. Cattle, buffaloes, poultry, goat and pig. They do not have household amenities like freeze, telephone, television, computer, motorcar and motorbike; but have mobile phones. More than ninety percent of Chepang go to jungle to collect one or the other types of edibles like githavyakur, wild fruits, and chiuri. Ninety five percent of Chepang people do not have bank account, thus rely on their friends and relatives for borrowing in household needs for money. Chi-square test reveals highly significant association between size of landholding and food sufficiency months, level of education and annual income, purpose of taking loan and sources of loan; as well as estimated annual income and account holding in bank.

Key words: household economy, marginalized, household amenities, wild edibles

1. INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a home to nearly 26.6 million people, which comprises numerous multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious groups (CBS, 2010). Nepal ranks 157th out of 186 countries listed on the basis of Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2013). Poverty, malnourishment, epidemics and death from preventable diseases, famine and hunger are common phenomena in Nepal and exist in a wide variation depending on rural-urban divide, geography, gender, and caste-ethnic groups.

The average life expectancy at birth is 68.4 years (UNDP, 2014) with per capita annual income of approximately US \$490 (World Bank, 2012). The official estimate of people below poverty line is 25.16 percent (CBS, 2011). The incidence of undernourishment as measured by the insufficient calorie intake is estimated at 40.7 percent in the country, with the consideration of minimum calorie intake requirement of 2,124 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day set by the NPC (FAO, 2007). These are differentially distributed across the population groups of Nepal. The figures are alarming among indigenous communities in Nepal. Especially the problem is severe among 102 ethnic and marginalized caste groups including Chepang.

The Government of Nepal has identified and recognized 59 indigenous nationalities of Nepal through the enactment of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities

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Act, 2002. Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has further classified the 59 indigenous groups into five groups comprising endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized, disadvantaged and advantaged group (NEFIN, 2013). Chepang community is one of the highly marginalized groups living on the hilly and steeper slopes of primarily Chitwan, Dhading, Gorkha, Makawanpur, Lamjung and Tanahu districts of Nepal. According to the Population Census 2011, the population of Chepang is 68,399, which comprises 0.26 percent of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 2012). They are spread over 54 VDCs covering the neighbouring districts of Chitwan (38%), Makawanpur (37%), Dhading (19%), Gorkha (6.5%), and Lamjung and Tanahunin smaller number. The primary lifestyle of the Chepang people includes hunting, foraging for wild roots, fishing and traditional farming near forests (Gurung 1995; Ellis 2000).

Chepang are considered to be the youngest communities to initiate agriculture in Nepal (HMG, 1974). Chepang are known as people living in hills with difficult physiography (Rai 1985; Thapaliya 1987). Their traditional settlements lie on steep slopes in the Mahabharat and Churia range between 500 to 1500 meter from sea level. However, these days Chepang settlements are also found below 500 meter from the sea level. Two modes of agriculture are practiced in Chepang community; the first one is their indigenous slash-and-burn farming, and the second one is terrace farming in permanent agricultural land. According to Caughley *et al.* (1971) Chepang started agrarian life only recently i.e. some 120 years ago; before that they used to live partly in forests and caves. The maize production can suffice only six months in a year (Gurung, 1995). In recent years, Chepang have also started commercial vegetable farming on small scale. The important hindrance in their agro-practice is unavailability of irrigation facility (Gharti-Magar 2005). Similarly, insufficient land with difficult topography, poor land husbandry and their traditional life style are other factors limiting food production.

The study on Chepang was begun from as early as 1857 A.D. with Brian Hodgson's first account of Chepang people. Since then many foreign as well as Nepalese scholars have been studying various aspects of this peculiar ethnic community. These studies have portrayed the Chepang as living in isolation with traditional lifestyle. Most of the literatures describe Chepang people's economic aspect emphasizing backward economy and traditional lifestyle. The conviction of researcher is that as for other indigenous communities, Chepang too do not insulate from the general effect of globalization and modernization process. Due to the effects of modernization, their household economies have swing in the gulf between traditional and modern pattern. The interest of the researcher is to see the typical kind of Chepang household economy and describe associated attributes of such economies. The general objective of the present study is to analyze economic aspects of Chepang people and their livelihoods strategies in Lothar VDC of Chitwan district.

2. DATA AND METHOD

This study aims to describe economic characteristics of the Chepang community. So descriptive as well as inferential approaches are adopted; for which both qualitative and quantitative data are taken. This study has been carried out in the Lothar VDC of Chitwan district. The Lothar VDC of Chitwan district has been selected as it has the highest Chepang population among all the VDCs

of Nepal (RSN, 2013). Lothar VDC has 766 households and the population is 5047; out of which 2583 are male and 2464 are female (CBS 2012). With reference to about 78 percent Chepang population in the VDC, the estimated Chepang households is to be 598 in the VDC. By following the simple guideline for the generalizability of findings, standard sample size as suggested by Pant and Wolff (2008), 234 households are taken as sample size. Systematic sampling procedure is adopted to solicit information whose list were obtained from the election commission of Nepal web site updated for the second constituent assembly election. Collected data are entered into SPSS 20 version software to generate output. Frequency table, bivariate table, mean, range, standard deviation, variance, correlation analysis and chi-square test result have been analyzed to figure out inter variable relationships.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Economic Characteristics of Chepang People

Chepang people's lifestyle and economic activities are among the issues, which have been accounted from very early period of Chepang study. In this part of discussion, some of such issues are taken into consideration to figure out their background characteristics like structure of houses, toilet types, household assets and amenities, use of forest food products, etc. Some of these characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Chepang people generally reside in small traditional houses. Table 1 show that every house of Chepang is made of floor with mud. 85 percent of houses have their walls made of stone and 15 percent have wooden materials. 60 percent of the houses have roof of dry grass, 33 percent have tin, 5 percent have RCC roof and rest 2 percent have used slate. Thus, it can be seen when it comes to floor construction, there is complete homogeneity with mud floor, walls are a mixed of stone and wooden and roof is the most heterogeneous structures in houses ranging from dry grass to tin, RCC and slate. Livestock are the important household asset and wealth in the rural areas. Generally reared livestock in Chepang communities are cattle, buffalos, poultry, goat, pig along with ducks and pigeon. Table 2 speaks that on an average, each Chepang house has 5.43 cattle, 0.73 buffalos, 13.62 poultry birds, 0.44 pigs and 14.09 goats. Every household has a maximum of 20 cattle with a range of 20, 4 buffalos, 35 poultry birds, 10 pig and 45 goats. It is found that Chepang people are livestock growers with good contribution in their household economy and diet.

Household assets indicate the general prosperity of the individual household. Chepang communities, in general are lagging behind in all those household facilities due to their poverty, illiteracy, backwardness and poor social services. In the Chepang communities, only 27.35 percent Chepang have electricity, 0.85 percent have television, 58.12 percent have mobile phones, and 0.43 percent have motor bike, and non-have motor-vehicle, freeze and computer.

Chepang communities originally are highly dependent on the wild edibles to supplement their diet. Before they started farming, they were totally dependent on forest products at different forms like githa, vyakur, wild root and fruits, prey from hunting; which shows their proximity to forest for survival. After they came in sedentary farming, their dependence on forest has reduced but as a customary practice they go to jungle in lean seasons. Table 1 shows the same community is dependent on the different forest products differently. More than 90 percent of Chepang households depend on different types of forest products on varying degrees.

Table 1: Economic and demographic Characteristics of Chepang

Structure of Houses			Number of Livestock in a Household		
<i>Description</i>	<i>Particular</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Average Number</i>	<i>Maximum No</i>
Floor	Mud	100	Cattle	5.43	20
Wall	Stone	85.04	Buffalo	0.72	4
	Wooden	14.96	Poultry	13.62	35
Roof	Dry Grass	62.39	Pig	0.44	10
	Tin	33.76	Goat	14.09	45
	RCC	2.14	Dependence on Forest Products		
	Slate	1.71	<i>Description</i>	<i>Particular</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Availability of Household Amenities			Collection of Edibles	Yes	91.3
<i>Description</i>	<i>Particular</i>	<i>Percent</i>		No	8.97
Electricity	Yes	27.35	Githa-Vayakur	Yes	85.90
	No	72.65		No	14.10
Television	Yes	0.85	Wild Fruits	Yes	44.87
	No	99.15		No	55.13
Mobile Phone	Yes	58.12	Chiuri	Yes	64.96
	No	41.88		No	35.04
Motorbike	Yes	0.43	Prey	Yes	5.13
	No	99.57		No	94.87
Motorcar	No	100	Financial Transaction of the Respondents		
Refrigerator	No	100	Loan Status	Loan Taken	70.51
Computer/Laptop	No	100		Loan Not Taken	29.49
Occupation of Chepang Households			Purpose of Loan	Household Expenses	60.26
<i>Description</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Maximum</i>		Business	3.85
Agriculture	4.32	16		Foreign Job/Study	4.27
Business	0.13	5	Sources of Loan	Loan Not Taken	31.62
Service	0.03	2		Money Lender	8.97
Foreign Employment	0.07	1		Neighbor and Kin	59.40
Wage Labor	0.08	2		Bank/Cooperatives	1.28
Study	0.02	3		Loan Not Taken	31.62

Source: Field Survey, 2014

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The opening of bank account is a matter of education and wealth. To understand the importance of working with the bank along with knowledge of account opening and transaction process needs persons to be educated at least literate. Wealth is another important aspect by which person feels the necessity of opening bank account and depositing cash for safety, saving and interest earning. Table 1 shows that 95.87 percent respondents do not have their bank account opened in any bank and financial institutions. 70.51 percent of the study area Chepang have taken loan for any purposes and the corresponding figures for not taking loans is 29.49 percent. While disaggregating the purpose of taking loan 60.26 take for day to day household expenditures while business and foreign purpose is bleak, i.e. 3.85 percent and 4.27 percent respectively. Roughly equal proportion of the household expenditure loan are taken from informal sources e.g., family, friends and relatives. The respondents who approach to money lender which is also informal source is 8.97 percent while the contribution of formal sources e.g. Bank and cooperatives is meager (1.28%). Well below one third of the respondents do not take any loan (30.34%).

Occupation is one of the proxy indicators for the level of empowerment of the individuals. Chepang people have been identified to adopt subsistence farming practices in low productive terrain. They also practice barter type businesses to exchange the handicraft they produced with the food stuffs. Table 1 shows that Chepang are basically dependent on agriculture with 92.93 percent engagement in subsistent business, followed by business (2.79%), wage labor (1.65%), foreign employment (1.47%) and still lesser proportions in service and study. On an average, a household has 4 persons engaged in agriculture as their main occupation; less than one individual per household in other occupations.

Land Holding Size and Food Sufficiency among Chepang

Chepang community is primarily agriculture based. Subsistence agriculture is the main source of the livelihood of Chepang people. Land is of marginal productivity, unirrigated rain fed small terraces. Moreover, the land is sloppy tracts of which it is difficult for cultivation.

Table 2: Land Holding Size and Food Sufficiency Months among Chepang Households

Land Holding Size	1 to 3 months	3 to 6 months	6 to 9 months	9 to 12 months	Total
Landless	1.28	8.97	1.28	0.43	12.39
Below 1 hectare	1.28	23.50	26.92	9.83	61.54
1-5 hectare	0.85	3.85	10.26	3.85	18.80
More than 5 hectare	0.00	0.85	1.71	4.70	7.26
Total	3.42	37.18	40.17	18.80	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 2 shows that 12.39 percent respondents are landless, 61.54 have below 1 hectare of land, 18.80 percent have 1 to 5 hectare of land and respondents having more than 5 hectare are 7.26

percent. Seeing from the food sufficiency status, 3.42 percent Chepang has food sufficiency for 1 to three months, 37.18 percent have food sufficiency for 3 to 6 months, 40.17 percent have their food sufficiency for 6 to 9 months and 18.80 percent have food sufficiency for 9 to 12 months. From such analysis, the highest proportion of Chepang fall having land holding less than one hectare and only 18.8 percent of Chepang has food sufficiency for up to 12 months. All of the rest are food insecure.

Chi-Square Test for Relationships between Variables

Table 3 presents the result of Chi-square test result for relationships between different variables under study. The variables having highly significant relations are land holding size and food sufficiency in months meaning thereby that the land pays for the food sufficiency (land is of good quality). Annual income is related with the level of education indicating the role of education in family wellbeing. Having bank account opened in any type of bank or financial institutions is a matter of income and taking loan from particular source like bank or informal channel is purpose specific. So, also other variable relationships which are simply significant at 5 percent level and some other variables which are not related are shown as not significant.

Table 3. Chi-square Statistics for Socio-economic Variables of Chepang

Variables	Pearson Chi-square	Degrees of freedom	P-value (two tailed)	Remarks
Land holding size vs food sufficiency in months	62.301	12	0.000	***
Land holding size vs estimated annual income of HH	16.413	6	0.012	**
Level of education vs estimated annual income of HH	60.876	6	0.000	***
Level of education vs size of land holding	8.686	9	0.467	
Literacy status vs estimated annual income of HH	4.086	2	0.130	
Purposes of taking loan vs sources of loan	2.934	9	0.000	***
Level of education vs status of bank account	8.672	3	0.034	**
Estimated annual income vs kind of membership in community organizations	12.282	4	0.015	**
Estimated annual income vs status of bank account	14.229	2	0.001	***
Estimated annual income vs status of loan	1.098	2	0.577	

Source: Field Survey, 2014

*** significant at 1% level of significance

** significant at 5% level of significance

4. CONCLUSION

Agricultural modernization and livestock promotion is the normal route to initiate reform in the Chepang communities. Right from their barter economy, Chepang people are business minded, so their economic condition can be improved by directing them on the small businesses for the youths. Chepang communities look grossly overlooked in case of community infrastructures e.g. school, health post, transportation, electricity and financial institutions. Massive network expansion of such public infrastructures along with local organizations helps promote community development. Since education has positive effect on several other socioeconomic variables, educating Chepang people is the most effective way to lift them out of poverty and backwardness.

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