

## GIVE ADVANTAGE THE DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

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### Shifting Government's Approach

Poverty in Nepal has escalated, not eradicated; induced, not reduced; and elevated, not alleviated. The National Planning of Nepal (NPC) estimated in 1976-77 that 36.2% of the total population are living below poverty line. The Nepal Rastra Bank estimated in 1984-85 that the number increased to 42.6%. In 1988-89, the percentage of people living below the poverty line was 40.0% according to the NPC, but the World Bank estimated to be 71.0% and the World Bank and UNDP came up with a figure of 66.0% by using M. Lipton's methodology of defining a poor. In 1992, the NPC estimated that the number increased to 49.0%. In the field of poverty reduction or alleviation or eradication, it appears that DONORS have turned out to be DONORS, that is, DOING NOTHING Really Significant. The time has now come to transform DONORS to DOERS, that is DOING Everything Reasonably Significant.

During the autocratic partyless Panchayat period, late King Mahendra had initiated the Praja (read the Chepangs) Development Program to uplift the quality of life of the Chepangs. The money allocated for the Chepangs might have uplifted the quality of life of the government bureaucrats but not of the Chepangs. During this period ethnic approach other than this particular program was thought to be political, divisive, "communal", and anti-national. After the restoration of multiparty political system in 1990, it was only 1995 the then government of the Nepal Communist Party (UML) initiated nominal program for the upliftment of the Dalits, such as Musahar, Dom, and Dusadh. All national political parties have expressed their respective party's commitment to establish an academy for the upliftment of the Nationality Groups and of the Dalits. This year, the government set up, as a temporary measure, separate national committees for the development of nationality groups and for the Dalits. As both committees are highly politicized and the positions and funds are (mis) used by the ruling political party, these have more symbolic than substantive values. The symbolic value is the shift in government policies with respect to ethnic groups and the Dalits that it is no more a taboo for any organizations to pursue ethno-centred development.

As the National Planning (NPC) of His Majesty's Government (HMG) of Nepal has very recently endorsed the Concept Paper of the Ninth

Plan with twenty-year perspective on poverty alleviation. HMG-N has planned to lower down the percentage of people living below the poverty line down to 10% from the current 49% in the next twenty years by solely relying on the Agriculture Perspective Plan.

Unfortunately, Nepalese planners, policy makers, development experts and practitioners, political leaders and "mainstream" academia have been insensitive towards continuing feminization and ethnicization of poverty in the country. However, recently there has been some indication of change in their frozen perspectives. Some INGOs and social scientists have taken some socially correct (SC), if not "politically correct" (PC), positive steps in identifying the disadvantaged groups (DAG).

### Positive Initial Steps

CARE-Nepal's Disadvantaged Group Strategy Paper of October 1996 is its prime example. CARE-Nepal defines disadvantaged group as "those group of people who are identified to historically socially and economically discriminated against and/or who have been denied opportunities and access to resources thereby leading them to further poverty and exploitation "and" the main criteria for identification of DAG is that a group or individual first fall under the low social status group. then the same group should be identified to be having low economic status. When the group to be extremely disadvantage."

CARE-Nepal further states, "An important aspect and contributing factor to extreme poverty and exploitation has been illiteracy. Not surprisingly most low cast and exploited members of Nepalese society have been deprived of this basic right. CARE has identified this category to be an important indicator for identifying DAGs." CARE-Nepal has listed the following low caste and ethnic groups having low social status.

Low castes : Kami, Sunar, Damai, Sarki among hill low caste groups; Kasai, Pode, Chyame, Kusle and Halhule among the Newar low caste groups; Dom, Halkhor, Dusadh, Chamar, Khatwa, Musahar, Teli and Sundi among the Tarai low caste groups; Gaine and Badis of Western Nepal; indigenous ethnic groups including Chepangs, Rautes, Danuwars, Meches, Koches, Chhantaals, Jirel, Tharus and Satar; and bonded laborers and widows.

Academic analysis supports CARE-Nepal's approach as a correct approach. Analyzing literacy data of the 1991 Census, Devendra Chhetri, in his article titled "Variations in Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Major Ethnic Groups of Nepal: Some Implications" published in a journal **Population and Development** of July 1996, writes: "Identification of disadvantaged or poor group is necessary in poverty alleviation programmes. Generally, economic characteristics such as income, consumption or land holding are used to identify

disadvantaged groups. But these characteristics do not capture other aspects of poverty, like literacy. An illiterate person is less likely to emerge from poverty." Chhetri's five clusters of different caste and ethnic groups, cluster one corresponds to the "most disadvantaged" to cluster-5 as the "most advantaged" caste and ethnic groups, are as follows:

*Cluster-1* : This cluster consists of four major tarai ethnic groups, Chamar, Dusadh, Mallah and Musahar. the literacy rates within the cluster range from 4.2 percent to 12.0 percent.

*Cluster-2* : This cluster consists of the four Pahadi and seven Tarai ethnic groups. the four Pahadi ethnic groups are Damai, Kami, Sarki and Tamang, and the seven Tarai ethnic groups are Dhanuk, Kewat, Kurmi, Kushwha, Muslim, Tharu and Yadav. The literacy rates within the cluster range from 22.2 to 28.4 percent.

*Cluster-3* : This cluster consists of one Tarai ethnic group, Teli, and two Pahadi ethnic groups, Magar and Sherpa. the literacy rates within the cluster range from 35.6 to 39.3 percent.

*Cluster-4* : This cluster consists of two Tarai ethnic groups, Bania and Sudhi, and six Pahadi groups, Chhetri, Gurung, Limbu, Rai, Sanyasi and Thakuri . The literacy rates within the groups range from 44.4 to 46.9 percent.

*Cluster-5* : This cluster consists of one Terai Group, Brahman (T) and two Pahadi groups Brahman (H) and Newar. The literacy rates within the group range from 60.4 to 61.8 percent."

A story retold by Khagendra N. Sharma, Gyanu Chhetri and Sita Rana in a report titled **Modest Study of the Current Socio-Economic Situation of the Lowest Status Caste and Tribal Communities in Nepal** prepared for the Save the Children (US) illuminates the gravity of problem faced by the people belonging to disadvantaged groups. They write, "Citizenship by descent is determined either on the basis of parents' citizenship certificate or on the basis of legal ownership of land or other immovable property. Many tribals like Satars and Musahars are denied citizenship because they cannot produce both of these evidences."

### How to Give Advantage to Disadvantaged Groups

I have some suggestions for the concerned actors to give advantage to disadvantaged groups. These are as follows :

\* If Nepal is determined to raise the quality of life of the poor and disadvantaged peoples and help to contribute in their human development, the best strategy to be pursued by the Nepalese planners, policy makers, and development practitioners is to adopt two pronged approaches to tackle the third dimension, that is, the under class :

1. caste and ethnic centered approach;
2. girl child and women centered approach;

These two anchoring points for poverty alleviation or human development, are very important if we look at the social structure of the Nepalese society. The failure of past development plans, policies and programs is mainly due to underestimation of the role of caste/ethnicity and gender.

\* HMG-Nepal and the Donors-bilateral, multilateral and INGOs-working for poverty alleviation should follow and improve the path charted by CARE-Nepal. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Dalits and indigenous ethnic groups such as Disadvantaged untouchable caste groups include Badi, Bantar, Chyame, Damai, Dhobi, Dom, Dusadh, Hajam, Kami, Kasai, Kusule, Musahar, Pode and Sarki/Chamar. Disadvantaged touchable caste groups in the Terai include Badhi, Barai, Koiri, Kewat, Mallah and Thakur. Among the disadvantaged indigenous ethnic groups priority should be given to still more disadvantaged groups, namely, Bankaria, Baramo, Barhagaunle, Bote, Bhujel/Gharti, Bhote, Byansi, Chepang, Chimtan, Chhantyal, Chhaintrotan, Danuwar, Darai, Dhanuk, Dhimal, Dolpo, Dura, Gangai, Hayu, Holung, Hyolmo, Jhangad, Jirel, Kisan, Kumal, Kusbadia, Kusunda, Larke, Lepcha, Lhomi, Lhopa, Majhi, Meche, Mugali, Pahari, Phri, Rajbanshi (Koch), Raji, Raute, Sattar/Santhali, Siyar, Sunuwar, Surel, Syangtan, Tangbe, Tajpuria, Thami, Thintan, Thudum and Topkegola and then to other disadvantaged groups, namely, Gurung, Tamang, Thakali, Newar, Magar, Manange, Marphali, Rai Limbu, Sherpa and Tharu.

\* HMG-N, donors and concerned external catalystist agents should learn from the experiences of CARE-Nepal working with the DAGs and from the Plan International who has helped the Nepal Tamang Ghedung to produce non-formal educational text books in Tamang Language and to provide non-formal education in Tamang Language.

\* HMG-Nepal has publicly committed to establish the National Foundation for the Upliftment of the Nationalities as soon as possible based on the recommendations made by a task force coordinated by Santa B. Gurung. For the moment, National Committee for the Development of Nationalities has been formed under the Ministry of Local Development. The committee has begun to work for over 61 indigenous ethnic groups. Various Ministries and concerned donors may work together with the existing National Committee for the Upliftment of the Nationalities and the National Committee for the Upliftment of the Dalits for optimizing the resources and the outcomes in basic education for various low castes and indigenous and minority

ethnic groups. Similarly, Various Ministries should work together with the Ministry of Women (actually the Ministry should be restructured as the Ministry of Women and Children) to optimize the resources and outcomes from basic education for the betterment of girl, child and women.

\* The government's policy of allocation of annual budget for the disadvantaged groups should be revised in two ways: one, the list of disadvantaged groups should include all such groups, and two, allocation of budget should be anywhere from a half to a two-third of the total development budget, rather than the current practice of extremely nominal budget.

\* Various Ministries and concerned donors should work together with various nationality groups, including the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh and its affiliated and non-affiliated ethnic organizations, various organizations of women, children, Muslims and the Dalits, to make a significant difference in all sectors including income, education and health, in a short period of time.

\* Also the concerned Ministries, particularly Ministry of Education and Ministry of Local Development and concerned donors may implement the recommendations made by the National Language Policy Recommendation Commission coordinated by Bairangi Kainla submitted HMG-N in 1994, the report of the task force on the Establishment of the Foundation for the Upliftment of the Nationality Groups, and a CERID report on Educational Status of Disadvantaged Minority Groups in Nepal.

\* HMG-N, including the National Planning /commission (NPC), concerned donors, indigenous peoples' organizations and Dalits' organizations should together develop Ethnic-sensitive Development Index (ESDI), Ethnic Employment Measure (EEM), and locally contextualized monitoring and evaluation framework and indicators for process monitoring and impact evaluation, not for input monitoring, of various development programs implemented for the disadvantaged groups.

\* HMG-N should break the ice by taking a bold step to devolve its power and authority to the local communities. Undoubtedly, local self-rule or local autonomy or right to self determination is important if the organized poor should become owner of their human development, instead of becoming its consumer.

### Conclusions :

Low caste-/ethnic and girl-/women-centered plans, policies and programs in all sectors is to pave a way for prosperity in Nepal in the coming twenty-first century. But a million dollar question is are all the planners, policy makers, development practitioners, including those who are working in development sector, and donors, including INGOs ready to listen and act now ?