

## Agro-tourism and Rural Development in Nepal

Kaini Malati

### Abstract

*In this paper more focus towards the rural areas development is given. Remarkable agricultural production is being gained by active involvement of rural population in available agricultural land. In this article the review is focused on agro-tourism. The main purpose of this paper is to know the situation of rural areas in the context of agro-tourism. Tanahun district has been selected for this review study where 1.22% of the total population is working within 1.05% agricultural land of the country. Agro tourism allows close link of outsiders with the inhabitants of rural villages where small farmers have been involved in traditional way of agriculture. This type of integration surely helps for running homestay and employing rural youth. Thus, agro-tourism can become the best option for socio-economic promotion of rural areas in the district. This type of development model will certainly be helpful for the development of rural areas in other Provinces.*

**Key words:** agro-tourism, development, economy, promotion, rural areas

### Introduction

Nepal is very beautiful nation with nice landscaping. Agricultural and tourism activities are adding up more beauties. The occupancy of land in Nepal is 28.7% by agriculture, (WB, 2019), 44.8% by forest coverage (MoF, 2019) and 26.5% by others. Mainly there are three ecological regions namely terai, hilly and mountainous. All these three are very supportive for playing important role in agriculture and tourism sector of Nepal. When agriculture and tourism are integrated, then the term is known as agro-tourism. This agro-tourism part is very much linked with the livelihood of people in rural areas of Nepal. Both agriculture and tourism are very important components for economic uprising. Agro-tourism is the one which helps for the sustainable development of rural areas.

#### i) Rural development

Rural Development is a subset of the broader term “Development”. This word rural development connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people. According to Robert Chambers, “Rural Development is a strategy to enable specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need”.

The 460 rural municipalities of Nepal are very much suitable for the development of agricultural and tourism sectors. The development of rural areas is surely better through the implementation of the agro-tourism activities.

## ii) Agro-tourism

Agro-tourism can be defined as a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production or processing with tourism in order to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining and educating the visitors and generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owners (Koirala, 2019). The organic agricultural productions are also going out in better way.

Organic agriculture is regarded as one of the important approaches to agriculture and food production. This organic agriculture system is environmentally sustainable and can generate several positive impacts to rural society. Hence, the approach to link organic agriculture with agro-tourism is one of the best ways for maximizing the economic scenario of rural areas. This has helped and will certainly help to make agro-tourism more popular and fascinating among tourists. Agro-tourism allows visitors to come in close contact with the inhabitants of small, rural villages and to be involved in traditional ways of agriculture still existing in this age. In agro-tourism, tourists can find the answers to their questions about different indigenous agricultural practices, such as how crops are harvested, graded and preserved, how vegetables can be grown organically, how freshly picked fruits are converted into delicious marmalades, and so on (Koirala, 2019).

Nepal is known as an agricultural country in the world. This agriculture sector is having direct involvement of 60% people (MoF, 2020). However, the farmers are not able to get expected benefits due to lack of modern technology and ideas. Farming systems and crop production in Nepal vary across the agro-ecological regions of tarai, hills and mountains.

## **Objective**

The main objective of this paper is to know the socio-economic situation of the concerned area and then make recommendations for future development.

## **Methodology**

In this paper an effort has been made to review agro-tourism in Nepal. As this paper is a review paper, it methodologically adopts secondary sources of information collected from Government and Non-Government organizations, such as District Coordination Committee of Tanahun, Tourism Development Board, Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development and so on.

## Result and Discussion

### a) Agriculture and Tourism

Rice-based cropping systems, with wheat or maize as a secondary crop, are predominant in the plain and hill regions, whereas in the high hills and mountains maize, millet, barley and buckwheat are cultivated (Koirala, 2019). The crop diversities like flowering plants, spices, vegetables, medicinal plant species and mushroom species are cultivated in suitable places of all the three (terai, hilly, mountainous) regions (Joshi, Acharya, Gauchan, & Chaudhary, 2017). The figure 1 is showing the crop diversity richness within the three (terai, hilly and mountainous) regions of Nepal. Tanahun’s crop diversity percentage also lies within this figure 1.

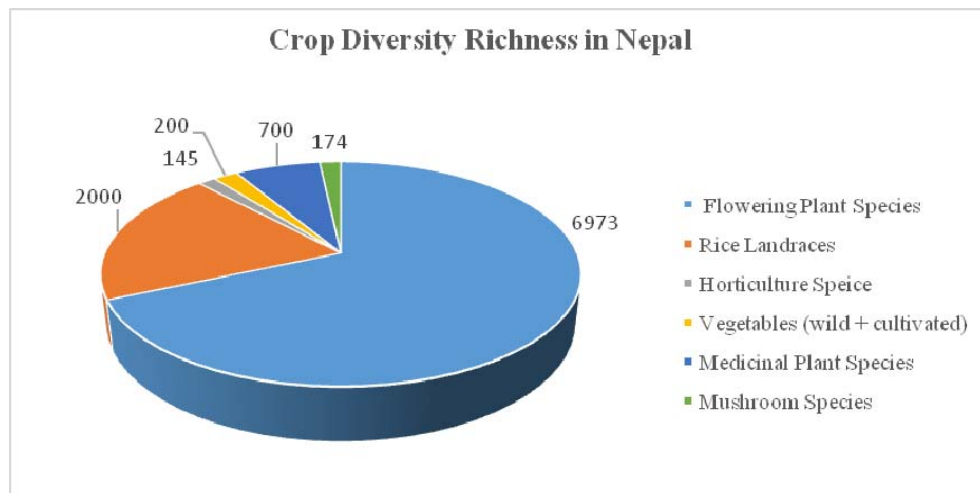


Figure 1: Crop Diversity Richness in Nepal

Source: Joshi, Acharya, Gauchan, & Chaudhary, 2017

Agro tourism allows close connection with the inhabitants of small rural villages where small farmers have been involved in traditional way of agriculture. Currently inside Nepal, sectors of agricultural business, industry (some agro based industries), rural marketing centers and information technology (IT) are working ahead collaboratively. These services are running by both skilled and semi-skilled human resources. Different agricultural apps developed by these IT knowledgeable human resources are playing important role for the socio-economic promotion through agriculture. More flow of tourism in the name of agro-tourism is enhancing, through this method. At this time the contribution of agriculture is 27.7% (MoF, 2020) and by tourism is 7.9% (MoF, 2019) to the GDP of Nepal. The contribution will be better by the use of social activities relating agro-tourism. For more socio-economic promotion, social activities like traditional agricultural skills showing, use

of own cultural activities by different ethnic groups during farming times, hospitable tourism activities must be forwarded by rapid movement of rural youths', concerned rural areas active population. Nepalese economy is now moving a bit ahead from agriculture and tourism. Nevertheless, there is no one sector that contributes significantly to the economy thus far, except agriculture. The per capita GDP increase in production per year averages only 5.2% (MoALD, 2019). In comparison to the population growth rate of 1.35%, the average annual economic growth rate is 2.3 % still low (MoF, 2020).

Nepal has plenty of natural resources, which makes agro- tourism more popular and inviting for tourists. The tourists are gladdened during the summer season to see the farmers involved in rice planting. The techniques followed for planting and harvesting by them differ from one region to another. Moreover, the agricultural products in every season providing the tourists with an once-in-a-lifetime experience. But for Nepal, agro-tourism has different economic and socio cultural aims and paradigm. The basis of the program is the revivification of the rural areas and reversal of urbanization. It brings tourists to the rural area from over populated cities. Thus, there is an urgent need to explore alternative businesses which show multiplier effects on economic development while harnessing the agricultural sector.

The tourism sector in Nepal received special focus only after the implementation of fifteenth plan which has envisaged establishing Nepal as a premier destination for world tourism, developing tourism as an important part of overall economic development and expanding its benefits down to the village level as its long term objectives (NPC, 2018). Then on in Nepal more focus within tourism sector after introducing Visit Nepal 2020 scheme. However, this scheme has been postponed a bit away from 1 March 2020, due to the pandemic COVID 19 spread throughout the globe including Nepal.

In this context, some of the places like Dhakuta and Ilam (of Province 1), Janakpur (of Province 2), Chitlang (of Bagmati Pradesh), Pokhara (of Gandaki Pradesh), Lumbini, and Swargadwari (of Lumbini Pradesh), Mahakali (of Sudurpaschim Pradesh) are showing good potential for tourism development. The culinary system is also playing important role in these areas. Now within this tourism sector, more focus is towards agro-tourism. To be more attentive towards agro-tourism, one potential district of Gandaki Pradesh is taken here as an example. Tanahun district is having many places where agro-tourism is possible to develop in faster speed. This district is emerging as tourist destination area and is equally renowned for its indigenous local but unique agricultural techniques. According to the Tanahun District Coordination Committee, there is richness in the agricultural and forest sector. This all happened by the hard laborious work of the people. This district shares 1.22% of the total population and owns 1.05% land area of Nepal. Figure 2 given hereunder shows that

agricultural land within the district is 42.08%, forest resources with shrubs is 50.52%, pastureland areas 2.78% and others 4.62%.

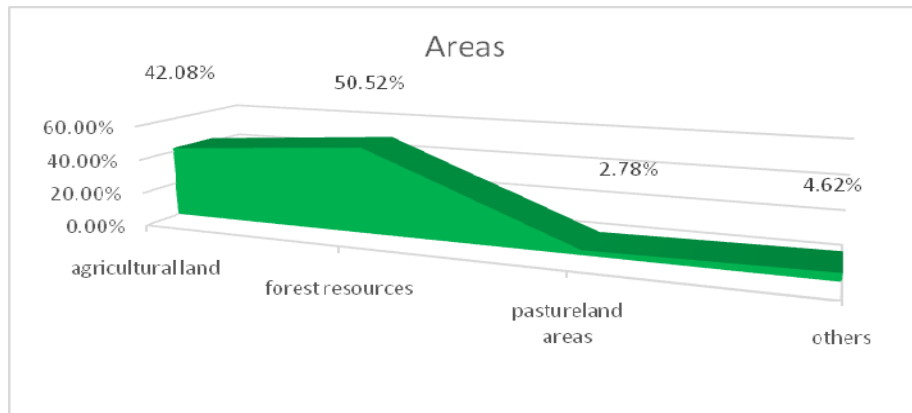


Figure 2: Areas

Source: DCC, 2020

It is learned that agriculture is prime occupation for Tanahun district. Hence, agro-tourism would be the best option for tourism promotion in this district. In this connection, figure 3 shows that paddy covering 373.8%, wheat as 215.9%, maize 298.5%, black gram 82.9%, vegetables 76.9% [mainly showing up of cauliflower, cabbage, tomatoes (local ones) out of all vegetables types], hill lemon 1100%, mustard (oilseed) 61.9%, coffee 27.5%, milk (of cow and buffalo both) 184.6%, mandarin 564.9%, sweet orange 25.6%, rabbit 1.4% of the total agricultural production in Tanahun district respectively.

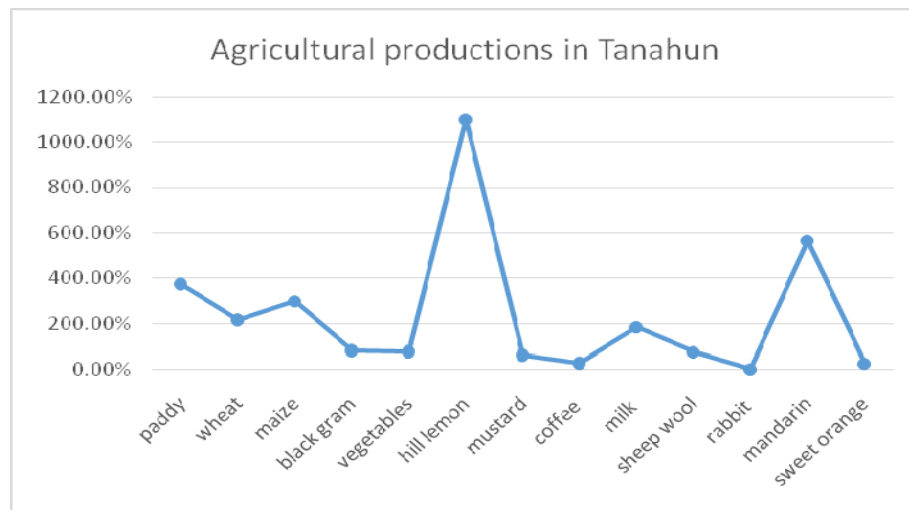


Figure 3: Agricultural Productions in Tanahun

Source: MoALD, 2017

Besides these major crops, potato, millet, barley and spices are other crops in the district. Tanahun is one of the supply centers for fresh vegetables to the markets of Pokhara and Kathmandu. On the other hand, Tanahun district is interdependent with other nearby districts, like Pokhara (Kaski district), Kathmandu for education, employment, health, agricultural production, forestry products, industry/business and the tourism development sectors.

### **b) Population**

The population of Tanahun is 323,288 having Females as 55% and Males as 44 %. Within the 10 Municipalities (4 Urban Municipalities, 6 Rural Municipalities) different ethnic groups like 28% Magar, 13.55% Brahmin, 12.17% Gurung, 10.79%, Chhetri, 7.5% Newar, 1.1%, Darai and 12.26% others are living. All of these ethnic groups are working very much actively for increasing good local agricultural productions. If agricultural productions are linked with tourism, the margin of benefit for farmers will increase. Therefore agro-tourism is very important for the development of Tanahun district. If socio-economic development activities in its beautiful, religious and historic places like Bandipur which is known as queen of hills, Chudi Ramga, the birthplace of Bhanubhakta Acharya, Vyas Gufa, Pancha Mandir, Thanimai Than, Teen Khole Devi Mandir, Chabdi Barahi, Nirjala Mai, Akala Mai, Aadi Mul, Dhorbarahi, Khadga Devi Mandir, Devghat Tirtha, Chhimkeshwori Mai Mandir, Siddha Gufa (Biggest Cave of South Asia) are implemented, livelihood of the rural people will be improved in a sustainable way..

### **c) Recommendations**

Tanahun is the beautiful district with various natural beauties, agricultural flourishing, religious places and other beauties. As mentioned above, the important religious spots of Tanahun are Vyash gufa, Pancha mandir, Thanithan, Teen Khole Devi Mandir, Chabdi barahi, Nirjala Mai, Akala Mai, Aadhi Mul, Dhorbarahi etc. Bandipur and Tanahunsur are well known for tourism. Some of the just mentioned religious places like Chabdi barahi, Dhorbarahi are also very famous places for religious tourism. These along with other beautiful places are becoming attractive points for providing culinary items, different ethnic groups cultural show during farming timings with hospitable nature for the tourists. This type of local agricultural productions of food items providing opportunities for tourists to do work in local people's farmlands, buy some agro-products they want is letting more development of agro-tourism in this area. For this some activities can also be done by the tourists as:

- Facility to view natural resources, wild animals, wild endemic species.

- Viewing and identifying the varieties of medicinal plants within forests nearby farmland without destroying them.
- Provision of nice farm stay to the interested tourists within the farmland areas as nice homestay system is already going on.
- Facility for tourists to cook food from local agricultural products in the cooking area made within farmland owner.
- Interested tourists are allowed to throw away grasses from agro-crops area, pluck fruits, dig the farmland, plough farmland etc.

#### **d) Minimizing COVID-19 shock through Agro-tourism**

The corona pandemic i.e. COVID-19 is irritating the world and in this case Nepal is not an exception. As of now (17 November 2020) 211,475 people are suffered from corona with total deaths of 1,247 and total recovered is 179,242 from this pandemic (Worldometers, 2020). As for the rural development of Nepal this article has focused on Tanahun as an example and in this district some are infested with corona virus. Due to the cause of this corona pandemic, currently thousands of Nepali working abroad and India have returned home and they are now jobless. Most of them are now free of corona virus and they can play important roles for the economic development of the country through agro-tourism. Due to this COVID-19, though tourism in general has been affected a lot, agro-tourism will surely support for the local and nation's economic development. Those returnees who have gained knowledge and skill in the farmland sector if used properly can boost up agriculture including agro tourism. However, they need government supports in training, and access to land and credit. Fertile agricultural land, natural resources, beautiful scenes are other plus points for the upliftment of agro-tourism. Through the hard work of these group of Nepalese people (corona recovered + returnees + active people inside homeland) will surely support for the development of both rural and urban areas. Their involvement in agro-tourism will certainly help the nation for sustainable development. The current lowering down situation of tourism will glow up fast and improve the economic conditions of the people. Nepal's beauty and diversity favor both agriculture and tourism and hence their integration will surely support for the rising of economic condition of rural people in a sustainable way. Nepal is rich in natural resources and hence, proper utilization of these resources will help people to develop their areas. Furthermore, the mixing phenomena of both agro-tourism and eco-tourism will certainly help the people for being self-reliance in many products. This type of model of economy will attract more young people to stay in their villages, resulting in reduced out-migration. Our young people will not have to face the problems in future as they are facing now.



## Conclusion

In Nepal, agro-tourism is the major part for the rural area's socio-economic development. For the proper rural development, Tanahun district's agro-tourism developmental plays important role. This type of development of rural areas in one Province can be a model for doing similar activities in other Provincial rural areas. For this, proper mobilization of rural youths within rural areas is very much needed. As rural development highlights the socio-economic development of rural areas, the integrated developmental of agro-tourism is the best option. This type of nice agro-tourism work in Tanahun district if implemented effectively will surely be helping all the other areas of Nepal towards agro-tourism development. After the chasing away situation of COVID-19 pandemic, obviously nice tourism development will be through promotional phase of agro-tourism. Another important point is that at this time the Budget of Nepal for 2020/21 has given more priority towards agro-tourism development, and also from the year 2019 Government of Nepal started supporting agro-tourism by setting up a mega agro-tourism project in Udaypur district of Province 1, setting up organic agricultural farm in two municipalities in West Rukum district, Karnali Province's announcement for focus programs on agro-tourism, five community-based agro tourism villages (MoALD, 2019). In this way more activities will be rising up inside Nepal's agro-tourism sector. The target of "Nepal National Tourism Strategic Plan (2016-2025) for making more tourists visiting all the areas (more towards rural areas) of Nepal and more contribution to the GDP of Nepal will surely be one of the nice portion for rural areas and also whole Nepal's development. The situation of poverty rate will be in the decreasing trend by this approach of development. Surely rural development will be sustainable and more people will stay in the rural areas.

## References

- AIC (Agriculture Knowledge Center). (2020). *Agricultural areas and products in Tanahun district*. Damauli, Tanahun: Agriculture Knowledge Center.
- Bhandari, U. (2016). *Agritourism in Nepal*. Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences. Chitwan: Agriculture and Forestry University.
- CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics). (2019). *Statistical Pocket Book*, Nepal. Ramshahpath, Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics.
- DCC (District Coordination Committee). (2020). *Brief Introduction of Tanahun District*. Damauli, Tanahun: District Coordination Committee.
- Gautam, B. P. (2011). Tourism and Economic Growth in Nepal. *NRB Economic Review*, 1-13. Nepal Rastra Bank, Research Department. Kathmandu, Nepal: Nepal Rastra Bank.



- Joshi, B. K., Acharya, A. K. Gauchan, D., & Chaudhary, P. (Eds.). (2017). The State of Nepal's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture. *The State of Nepal's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*, 1-17. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Agriculture Development.
- Koirala, S. (2019). Possibilities of Agrotourism in Province no. 4 – World report. Retrieved from <http://www.tunza.eco-generation.org>
- MoALD (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development). (2017). Statistical Information on Nepalese Agriculture 2016/17. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.
- MoALD (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development). (2017). *Agriculture in Tanahun District Area*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.
- MoALD (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development). (2019). *Personal communication*. Singhdurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.
- MoCTCA (2016). *Nepal National Tourism Strategic Plan (2016 – 2025)*, Government of Nepal. Singhdurbar, Kathmandu: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation.
- MoF (Ministry of Finance). (2019). *Economic Survey*, Government of Nepal. Singhdurbar, Kathmandu: Ministry of Finance.
- MoF (Ministry of Finance). (2020). *Economic Survey*, Government of Nepal. Singhdurbar, Kathmandu: Ministry of Finance.
- MoTCA (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation). (2010). *Homestay Running Policy 2010*, Government of Nepal. Singhdurbar, Kathmandu: Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.
- MoTCA (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation). (2017). *Visit Nepal 2020*, Government.
- Singh, K. (1999). Introduction. In *Rural Development Principles, Policies and Management* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (19-26). New Delhi: Vistaar Publications.
- WB (World Bank). (2019). *Agricultural land (% of land area) – Nepal*. World Bank.
- Worldometers (2020). Nepal Coronavirus: 211, 475 Cases and 1,247 Deaths – Worldometer. Retrieved from [www.worldometers.info > coronavirus > country > nepal](http://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/nepal)