

# Unit 11

## *Socio-Economic Issues of Development Plan from Indigenous Peoples' Point of View*

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### ABSTRACT

*Development is a great issue and challenge for the people of the third world countries. Although, the practice of planned development in many countries started only after Second World War, the issue of the effect of it to the life of poor society or country is now under question. Development activists argue that rural people and the people of certain class, caste, sex or territory of Nepal still remains deprived despite the implementation of the planned development activities. It is revealed that the poverty rate of Nepal is still 31 percent on an average and it is higher among Dalits and Indigenous groups of people. So, social activities, political, and development activists have shown great concern on the drawbacks of the development activities implemented so far. Considering these views, This article focuses on the hindering socio-economic issues of underdevelopment of rural people of Nepal. This article has critically raised questions on the relevancy of current development practices and has offered some alternatives to be undertaken as a way forward for the Indigenous people of Nepal.*

### LOCATING THE CONTEXT (FLASH BACK TO THE RECENT PAST)

Before starting to enter in the development plans of Indigenous people, It is relevant to draw attention about the socio-economic situation of our recent past. Many scholars have argued that the feature of the Nepalese is dominantly semi-feudalistic in nature (Blaikie, Cameron & Seddon, 1980, Mishra, 2004) and it is under the process of transition in to capitalist society.

After the World War II, many countries that are newly freed from the colonial rule concentrated their brain towards the economic development. Nepal also started to prosper its people's life through the program planned development from some 50 years ago. But, due to the different political, religious, social and economic causes, Nepal could not achieve the result as it was expected. This failure slowed the pace of socio-economic progress of Nepal, especially in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nepal remained very behind in comparison to its neighbor countries. Some researchers (Blaikie, Cameron & Seddon, 1980), had clearly warned that the (then) Nepal's development practice is stagnant and it is a serious threaten to the state in coming years. Researchers have said that the rural area of Nepal is the periphery of periphery and people are forced to continue the stagnant economic activities based on semi-feudal system of agriculture. Researchers had argued that the economic system is highly dependent on agriculture and the farmers are divided in to different strata. Analyzing the different strata among peasants, Blaikie, Cameron & Seddon have further (ibid) said, vast majority of the population of Nepal are peasants producing primarily for their own consumption...rich peasants much have in common with the small commodity producers of the urban petty Bourgeois. The poor peasant is often virtually indistinguishable, except by the lands he owns, and from those almost totally depends of their livelihood on working for others, such as tenants and sharecroppers on the estates of the large landowners, agricultural labors employed by the larger farmers and rich peasants, and artisans dependent on the system of annual fixed payments from other peasant households in return services (p.88).

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Division of peasants (the main productive force) into different strata shows that Nepal's rural people's situation was enough pitiful. It is because, peasants themselves were distributed into the different groups of conflicting interests who could not unite to seek the political, social or cultural rights. Nepal's rural people's status at present too is not admirable, and in the past the rural life became harder and harder. There were no alternatives of the farming or related to agricultural activities.

In the midst of such a situation, Maoists started the war of the people. Locating the causes of the Maoist struggle, Chaitanya Mishra (2004) has analyzed some factors. Mishra has given so many causes to outbreak the people's movement including the dominance of Hindu ideology, high caste and male dominance as a feature of semi-feudal rule. Maoists urged to transit such discriminatory society to the capitalist one. Highlighting the other social causes of the People's war, Mishra further (ibid) says, "...the structural causes that may lie behind the Maoist struggle...are absolute poverty, underemployment, inter-household and regional economic inequality, caste, gender, ethnic and region based oppression, and the relationship between the household and livelihood(p.4).

As said by Mishra, Nepalese people still are suffering from the multi-forms of deprivation. Our planned development activities could not be oriented towards pro-poor people (especially the ethnic and Dalits). To develop such a difficult situation, development activists usually blame to the failure of development model (Chambers 1983). Chambers argue that the present development model in the underdeveloped or developing society is top-down in its nature. Many third world countries or communities are obliged to adopt top-down approach as a ready-made solution of all kinds of socio-economic problem. Dissecting the anatomy of the development project, Chambers has said that the top down model of development by the outsiders can not even diagnose the pain of rural poverty. Chambers criticizes that the outsiders fail to observe the rural poverty, because outsiders themselves have developed different cultures among themselves regarding the rural poverty. Expressing about malpractice in development, Chamber (ibid) further urges, "...pluralism in rural development has a third leg. The two cultures-academic and practical-share the top-down, core-periphery, center-outwards biases of knowledge. Both are therefore in danger of overlooking that other approach to understanding, from the bottom up, from the periphery towards core, from the remote towards the central. For the two cultures are cultures of urban based outsiders. The third culture of the rural people in a particular place is the true center of attention and of learning... (p.46).

It will link the saying of the Chambers with the situation of the poor people of Nepal. As explained by him, rural poor of Nepal are the outsiders and urban culture people could not learn the third culture of the rural people. The contradictory relation between the rural poverty and urban treatment could not reduce the urban poverty. In general, development means change, evolution, growth, metamorphosis (Stavenhagen, nd). But in case of our country, the meaning of development is to depend on faith.

## **PRESENT ISSUES**

When we talk development, we should not forget that meaning and practice of development is very complex. The practice and philosophy of development is not as easy as we simply use to make a sense of development. It has multiple dimensions. Definition and meaning of development not only differs from society to society, but from individuals to individuals. Analyzing the multiple meaning of development, Stavenhagen (ibid.) further writes, ".....we must ask development from where to where and from what to what? From small to big? From backward to advanced? From simple to complex? From poor to rich? From lower to higher? The issues are many and complex, yet we have happily accepted the term development in our social scientific tool box and we carry out development studies or even practice..... (p.2).

Stavenhagen's argument is acceptance. Actually, it is a difficult task grading the poverty of different groups of people and implement development activities to improve their life. No one can apply a universal framework of development to the communities characterized by various features.

In this context, it is better to focus this writing on the sociological perspectives rather than the pure economic one. It is also easy to analyze the concept of development social economist Amartya Sen's point of view. Sen (2000), is interested to analyze the development phenomena comparing this with the freedom. For him, development is freedom. Freedom from all types of constraints, sources of unfreedoms. Sen has advocated that the removal of major sources of unfreedom (like illiteracy, hunger, ill health, or so on) is development. He further has highlighted the nature of development (ibid) as, development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom, poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunity as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states (p.3).

From this quotation, we can draw an outline that development is not only the increase of economic growth rate. It covers broader social, cultural, political phenomena. To become developed means to become free from social and economic deprivation, to have adequate opportunities to engage in personal and social development. In the same book, Sen has described about 5 types instrumental freedom, namely-political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantee and protective security, which are integrated and competent to each other.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE DIFFERENT INDIGENOUS GROUPS OF PEOPLE**

In this small section of writing it is not relevant to go to review the reports of entire development plan developed by planning commission. We also don't go through the criticism against development produced by the different organizations including Indigenous People's one. We will simply take the data that indicate the overall situation of the poverty rate of the different groups of people. Then we will interpret it from the different theoretical and practical perspectives.

In case of Nepal incidence of poverty is higher among some ethnic groups of people and certain caste groups-Dalits (so called low caste people). Dalits are the most deprived groups socially and economically. Trend in the incidence of poverty by caste/ethnicity, according to Nepal Living Standard survey 03/04 is given below.

|         | Total Brahmin Chhetry | Terai middle caste (Yadavs) | Total Dalits | Newar | Hill Janajati | Terai Janajati | Muslim | Nepal |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-------|---------------|----------------|--------|-------|
| Poverty | 9 %                   | 21%                         | 47 %         | 14 %  | 44 %          | 36 %           | 41 %   | 31 %  |

Source: NLSS, II, 2004, Gajurel/Unequal Citizens

This table has clearly reflected that poverty rate is higher among Dalit peoples. Among other groups, hill Janajati come in second position whose poverty rate is 44 percent followed by Muslims (41 percent) and Terai Janajati 41 percent respectively. Newars have very low poverty rate (14 percent), Brahmin and Chhetry (19 percent) and Yadavs (21 percent) among different groups of people.

The rate of poverty is not only an incidental figure of the economic stagnation. it is also the socio-cultural ramification of the inequality (Gardner & Lewis, nd). Highlighting this concept Gardner & Lewis,( p.25) further writes, '...poverty is first and foremost a social relationship, the result o inequality, marginalization and disempowerment. It occurs in the North as well as the South...'. The high poverty rate of the Dalits and Janajati referred to the high degree of inequality and marginalization form the developmental activities.

In our understanding, the expectation from development plan for different groups of indigenous groups of people can not be the same because their socio-economic....in

situation is not same. Their poverty rate is not same. Their cultural values are not same and living environment is not same. In some cases, there is vast difference between different indigenous groups of people. Dahal (2062) writes that the problem of Dalit and Janajati can not homogenized because their level of development is different. He says that Thakali, one of the Janajati group has 75.66 percent literacy rate that is more than the Pahadia Brahmin and Chhetry (74.90). But one other group of Janajati (Chepang) has only 29.20 percent literacy rate. This shows that the percentage of poverty related to the different groups of people can not exactly represent to all groups of people.

## **ISSUES RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND ANALYSIS FROM DIFFERENT THEORETICAL STANDPOINT**

Here are some cases about the perception of development by different groups of people from different occupation.

“...my husband bits me drinking g liquor...he finished all property drinking...his health is not good...I have to look him....to take care of small children....have to earn the means of subsistence....I would like to admit my small daughter in fee free school...I will be free in day time when she goes to school....can go any where till evening.....” (34 years, semi literate ethnic woman living in Kathmandu, came from Sindhupalchowk).

“...I have a son....I would like to admit him in a good boarding school, so he can acquire good education from childhood. I will do anything for my child's education. I also can go aboard to earn money. I have a pain that I could not continue my study not because I was from poor family, but because I did not find good guidance from my family...for me development is one good job for my child's education...” (27 year old driver of Newar family from Kathmandu).

“I don't know what is development...being a political activist and a member of Tamang community, I think, my duty is to aware Tamang people for our political, social, economic right...ask for proportional representation in different public sphere (parliament) ...bring road to my village..., add teacher in local school from Tamang community....” (38 year old Tamang, local level politician, from Sindhupalchowk).

“language is our main issue...because language is our ethnic identity...it is our source of knowledge..., it is related to our culture...custom...tradition...territory...we can not remain Rai if we could not preserve our Rai language...for this we must make our school environment familiar with Rai language, In Rai majority community, official language should be the Rai language...” (A linguist student, TU, Kathmandu).

From all above expression show that different people from different community have different expectation, desire, and aim of life. If we think that development plan must address the people's needs, then it must fulfill each group of people's interests. Labor working woman tries to send her daughter to school because she does not have time to look her. In the same way, Newar driver did not show any interest towards the ethnic identity as politician and linguist showed their deep interest to preserve indigenous language and culture.

This means, the issues related to the development of indigenous people is multi-layered. It is political, cultural, educational, linguistic, territorial or so on. There is reasonable cause that many of the issues to become politics cum socio-cultural because political scenario of Nepal have drastically changed (1990 democratic movement, End of 10 years long People's war by Maoist, April movement of 2006, preparation and implementation of interim constitution, preparation for the constituent assembly election, declaration of the secular state, provision of proportional representation, abolition of long history of monarchy and declaration of the republic, ...etc) over the period of time.

In contemporary situation, ethnic groups of people are struggling against hegemonic domination by oppressive forces (political, cultural, religious, dominating philosophy, religion, culture, elite people, high caste leader, discriminating policies and practices, law and order, national and international imperialism

and so on) which are in power center and systematically functioning for the marginalization of the indigenous people's language, knowledge, technology from the past some hundred years (Sundar, 2007, Yonjan, 2007, Rai, 2007, Adhikari, 2007).

Actually, indigenous groups of people are not raising the issues on the impact of the globalization, expansion of the multi-national and or international companies that have played an important role to destroy indigenous system, knowledge, value culture of all groups of people in Nepal. They are busier to politicize all kinds of issues and bargain with state and state apparatus to address the issues. But ethnic groups of people's interest and style of demand making is highly fractured. There is a lack of attitude to reorganize, or integrate problem and sharpen the voice for the benefit of all. It is because of the variation of the status of the ethnic groups and the bargaining power of political/social activists.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES RELATED TO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT**

There is no doubt that the development is a relative term. Analyzing the contradictory concept of development, Devkota (1999) writes that the notion of development varies across the societies, cultures and ecologies. In Devkota's view, development program are facing many challenges for not being the people friendly.

There are different models of development. One of the popular models is modernization. It is also considered as a universal model (ibid). This model is top-down in nature, means development activities are imposed by the outsiders. Scholars of development study argue that such development planning failed to address the local realities, the pace of social change, subsistence system of the third world communities (countries). With this background of the third world country, Devkota further (ibid) proposes the development model as, ...the background...the readymade, top down, monolithic, mechanistic and overly borrowed blue-print approaches of development have been rejected in favor of grassroots-up, flexible, polycentric, participatory and social learning approaches which entail bringing people back to the center of development policies and practices in their own economic, political and socio-cultural context. (p.3).

Devakota strongly urged that top down model of development could not gain popularity because it is donor centered development practice. He has given high emphasis on cultural dimension of development because, for him without understanding the cultural realities, transplantation of the borrowed monolithic model of development could have reverse effect. From this point of view, Nepal's development activities are not people friendly in nature. Some scholars have highly criticized on the western model of development (Shrestha, 1998). Shrestha argues that the reality of the rural people exists in one side and development activities go from other side without touching core part of the problem. Criticizing the western model of development, he further writes, in country like Nepal, development is rarely a cumulative process, evolving indigenously through its symbiotic interaction with the expanding base of local knowledge and resources. it is predefined and predetermined in accordance with the Westerners assumption of superiority of the economic rationality, imbued with techno-fetishism..... (p22).

So, while analyzing the concept of people center development, as expressed by Shrestha, first of all the diverse realities of the people of specific historical, cultural and geographic context must be analyzed. By doing this, the suitable development model should be applied to address the problem and expectations of the local people. In our context, the most development plans are borrowed plans. So, they could not bring significant progress in the life of the rural people. We can see that, the poverty rate of the Janajati people is still high. Nearly half percent people are struggling with poverty. As said by Devakota, there are many challenges that the development activities have to address for correcting it to make people friendly.

If we analyze the development issues of IP from the dependency theorist's view, issues of indigenous people remained in periphery (Frank, nd). Frank says that development of underdevelopment is due to the process of colonization (economic, political and social) that is a part of imperialism. The nature of relationship between the colonizer (core) and the colonized (periphery) is always exploitative. Those which are in centers (core) are developed and most of the resources of the peripheries are exploited by

such cores. Those who are in periphery are marginalized in different ways. Analyzing the cause of underdevelopment, Frank further (ibid) writes, .....underdevelopment is due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of the world history. On the contrary, underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself.....(p.9).

Thus, Frank's opinion concludes that the underdevelopment (poverty) state of the indigenous people is due to the historical expansion of the capitalism. Frank has given the example of Japan, stating that Japan with poor economic resources but unsatillized could be able to industrialize rich economic sources Latin American countries were not able to do so.

Indigenous people's norms, values, beliefs, traditional systems are either marginalized or destroyed by the expansion of the modern technology/belief system etc. Modern education system could not include indigenous people's language (Khadka, 2007). Traditional voluntary organizations are replaced by modern national and international organizations (Gupta, nd, Sundar, 2007). Communal land ownership, Kipat system of some indigenous people is systematically replaced by modern Raikar system (Caplan, 2000). Women's identity and her surname after the marriage of the girls are changed by the state authority (Yonjan, 2007). Mass scale of deforestation in the Terai by the state authority (Blaiki, Cameron& Seddon, 1982) created conflict and tension in state authority and the small peasant. In the same way, in some hill area (indigenous healing system, nd) tourism sector caused heavy deforestation to make lodges and tourism activities has disrupted the social and cultural system., increase in unhealthy behavior like begging, high cost charging, thievery devalued the traditional healthy system of help, generosity, exchange, sharing.

Some of the radical activist from indigenous people has blamed that due to the process of Sanskritization, Hinduization or Bahunization, indigenous peoples' identity, language, and knowledge attached to that language, religion, land rights are either contaminated or destroyed (Netritwa Bikas, nd). But, if we analyzed indigenous people's situation from the utilitarian points of view the whole discourse could be thought in different ways. The process of globalization, spread of mass media has created a type of imitating culture. In the same time young generation has more interested towards English language, western culture. Inherited culture if has existed, it is existed in remixed form with western culture. Celebration of valentine day Christmas is equally popular among the young generations. Sometimes, we come across the experience that ethno-culture's existence is slowly moving towards museum. In this sense, the issues raised by indigenous people about language, culture, ethno-development looks like the agenda of political activists in the name of people.

## **WAYS FORWARD AND CONCLUSION**

Actually, ethno-development also has multiple understanding for different ethnic groups of people. In each ethno-communities' traditional development practice contradicts with the western development model. Actually, many indigenous intellectual has called the decolonizing methodology to be implemented to carry out research so that malpractices of western development could be reduced. In this sense, Smith (1999) argues that intellectual colonization is the main source or means of exploitation by the westerners that can be termed as neo-colonization. In the name of education/knowledge, different projects are penetrated by the westerners that caused serious threat in the knowledge, bio-diversity, cultural heritage, religious practices, and spiritual beliefs and so on.

Willingly or forcefully, we have to accept the global whim either it is in the name of globalization, education for all, poverty reduction or millennium development goal. Although these goals seem very sweet in listening, they have multiple tensions to institutionalize such goals for the justice of all people. Western model of democracy is sometimes constitutes as a myth to the marginalized class/ethnic groups of people. Democracy is for those people who are in power. Actually, western model of democracy undermines the culture and lifestyle, traditional way of living. In this regard, Sen (2000) writes, the threat to native cultures in the globalizing world of today is, to a considerable extent, inescapable. The one solution that is not available is that of stopping globalization of trade, and economies. Since the forces of

economic exchange and division of labor are hard to resist in a competitive world fueled by massive technological evolution that gives modern technology and economically competitive age (p. 240).

The Sen's argument is quite clear. This is the era of internalization of the capacity, quality, competency, ability, skill, economy, culture, religion everything. This is the era of value adding era. Who can add value that will grab opportunities. Add value in agriculture; add in technology, in education. This is the era of the problematizing the issues in national and international sphere. This is the era of connecting the local heritage with the global community to ensure a just and a peaceful world.

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