

Poverty Reduction Program through Adaptive Management of Ecosystem Services: The Concept Notes for Nepal

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Introduction

Nepal being a small country is unfortunate in terms of its overall progress, particularly in economic development. It has suffered a lot because of Maoist insurgency which has largely destabilized the country's progress. Upon restoration, the country's political parties were not able to tackle the problems largely due to their ineffective leadership and absence of appropriate vision. However, international donors are providing assistances for the development of country. Political instability is one of the factors which have led this country to fall into the trap of current stage of destitution and a strenuous effort is needed to bring this country out of vicious cycle of poverty¹. Poverty is increasing in Nepal; as it has been shown by mass exodus of youth from this country in search of employment in the third country. A few years back youth exodus was in the order of less than thousand people per day; now reportedly it has crossed more than 2,500 youths² per day who leave the country. This is because the country does not have any youth employment programs, no industries and other development activities which have forced the youth to disappear completely from the country. As a consequence, in the hills and mountains of Nepal, almost 25 percent of farm land has been barren and traditional livestock herding³ has disappeared. Most of the houses are devoid of young people. There are no appropriate means of living given to the young. That is why young people are leaving the country and in Terai the situation is same; agriculture labor is not available, so in most of the places labors are imported from India on expensive wages. The question arises what will happen after 10 years? How the economy of the country will be maintained and who will be there in the country? This is true for both the educated and uneducated youth. On the contrary the government of Nepal is counting on the remittance economy that has been deposited by the young people from foreign countries and the process is continuing. The planners, policy makers and politicians of the country are trying to make this process more lucrative and strong. Now they are getting revenue so they are happy but in the long run the country will be doomed and the energy and skills of the youth will be drained in another country which they could have otherwise invested here in Nepal for the development of the country. This will be a great loss to the country. Therefore the Government, donors and contributors for the development of Nepal have to think and act to make employment available for the youth of this country, so that, they will be retained here and the youth's energy and skills can be utilized for the development of Nepal.

Mother Nature is providing all the resources for living; such as food, air, water and most of the natural capital; so whatever is there for survival is through nature. Natural capital is harvested and then

converted into manmade capital and wealth in terms of money. The protection of nature means to protect humankind. Nature is utilized but how can it be paid back. Protection and care, conservation and proper management are the tools for payment to the nature. It is called payment for ecosystem services. The rural areas are endowed with enormous amount and types of natural resources such as land for agriculture; water resources that can harness hydropower, irrigation, and domestic uses; forestry for commercial timber and for medicinal plants and other valuable non-timber forest products, fruits and livestock potentials. These resources are all ecosystem services to human kind and proper management and utilization of these resources would not only support the continuity and sustainability of their services but will also generate most of the human needs, wealth and prosperity. So the present paradigm of development has to be changed in terms of adaptive ecosystem management where infrastructure development and economic development should be carried out in one package and the global problems such as climate change, biodiversity degradation, greenhouse gas emission and others will also be taken care while implementing this new paradigm of development.

Existing Condition

1. Nepal has more than 3,000⁴ Village Development Committees (VDCs) as the lowest form of political institutions. Many VDCs make a district and each may contain 500 to 10,000 populations. The VDCs are all rich and they have everything that they require to have there but the people in the VDCs believe they are poor and destitute and need assistance from the government and donors. This kind of mindset is prevailing everywhere in the villages and the people make an effort to migrate to nearby urban areas where they think they will have better economic opportunities (60% rural-urban migration⁵). The VDCs in Nepal are getting Rs 500,000⁶ per year from the government for their development activities and reportedly 90 percent of which is being spend on the construction of rural access road haphazardly.

⁴National Population and Housing Census 2011.

⁵State of Migration in Nepal, Research paper: Sanjay Sharma, Shibani Pandey, Dinesh Pathak and Bimbika Sijapati Basnett.

⁶Review of the Criteria and Grant Allocation Formulas for Block Grants to DDCs and VDCs in Nepal, Dr. Jamie Boex, June 2012.

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¹Human Security in Nepal: Concepts, Issues and Challenges, 2013.

²My Republica, Hari Bansh Jha, Stories of pain, October 22, 2014.

³An Overview of Agricultural Degradation in Nepal and its Impact on Economy and Environment, Bashu Dev Deshar, 2013.

2. Each VDC in Nepal is endowed with agricultural land: upland and low land suitable for different kinds of crop production, rivers which have potentials for hydropower generation, irrigation and drinking water supply; forest and forest products, which have potential for timber harvesting and production of herbal medicines, livestock, grazing land, human resources which at present are facing a serious unemployment status and majority of them are being exported to labor international market.

The Concept for the Implementation

1. Three representative VDCs one in high altitude, one in mid hills and one in Terai should be selected for study. The study should cover i) inventory of the household, land properties, land holdings, existing crop production, existing forest and forest types, geology, and soil type, rivers and rivulets and their flow characteristics, ii) existing facilities such as road access, electricity, irrigation facilities, schools and other religious sites, business facilities, products and iii) population, demography, households, ethnic composition and religions and others. This gives us baseline information of the VDCs.

2. Introducing Natural Resource Accounting System (NRA) in the VDC office where all properties in the VDCs will be recorded possibly in terms of money. A system will be designed and registered in a computer so that it can be retrieved as and when required. A system of valuation of natural resources will be established in monetary terms and will be used.

- VDC officials as well as the VDC authority will be trained to use and maintain the Natural Resource Accounting system;
- This type of accounting system would provide a basic understanding on the community wealth and their valuation in terms of currency that the community owns, and
- Preparation of the plan of action in terms of strengthening economic activities and environmental conservation to be implemented and get an output within 5 years of implementation period.

3. Feasibilities and Strategic Planning: When baseline and identification of potentials of further development is completed, strategic planning for the establishment of different economic development projects will be carried out particularly for agriculture and livestock production and processing, vegetable and medicinal plant cultivation and their processing, power development, community land irrigation and drinking water supply, tourism, possibilities of mining and establishment of cottage industries and establishment of industries for which the raw materials are available in the areas. The strategic plan and feasibility studies that will be prepared should contain the details of implementation and operation with economic analysis in long term.

In case of implementing project like hydropower, community drinking water supply and industries, the community may require an initial investment of large amount of money. In such case, the community may apply for loan from financial institutions by making community wealth as collaterals for specified time and the loan will be paid through the benefits of the projects that are being implemented in the course of time.

Benefits/Outcome

The communities within the VDCs will have shared benefits of all economy accrued from the economic activities. Some of the benefits will be allocated to spend on social services within the VDC such as

education, drinking water supply, hospitals and health posts etc,

- This kind of community involvement in the development process of VDCs will make the people more confident, promote leadership quality, promote the sharing habits and absolutely change the mindsets of the people involved. This will minimize the gaps between 'have and have not'. So, eventually the society will be changed to positive minded from present day pessimistic society.
- Employment will be there, the young do not have to leave their place in search of jobs and gender disparity will be removed.
- To make their VDCs green, plantation will be carried out substantially in the area where cultivation is not possible; the forest cover will be no less than 60 percent of the total area, thereby enhancing the greenery and carbon sequestration process.
- These kinds of programs can make the community people to live in harmony and they will develop an attitude of solidarity among themselves
- This program will lead to poverty reduction, green and zero carbon economy and ecologically more sustainable and socially more acceptable.
- The influence of political party will be less and the elected representative will be stronger and more logical and less corrupted.
- The present Rural Urban Migration will be reversed since the employment opportunities will exist in rural areas, the skilled urban people will be likely to migrate to developed rural areas, and Many more.

Institutions

The elected officials of VDCs are political; however the institution and the officials for the implementation of project activities for economic development should largely be neutral and unbiased. So the community of VDCs will elect an unbiased committee in order to take the overall responsibility of implementation of the proposed activities, however it should operate within the jurisdiction of VDC Act of Nepal. In the process, cooperative institutions will be formed in order to make transactions of business and Village level Development Banks (VDBs) will also be establish for money transaction, if necessary. VDC Assembly will develop rules, norms and code of conduct and will be approved by VDC Assembly and VDC office. VDC Assembly will also nominate a 5-member conflict resolution committee.

This process will empower the VDCs of Nepal, and exercise full power of process of devolution based on Decentralization Act of Nepal and the local level VDCs will become economically independent and prosperous.

This is the model developed for Nepal; but it can replicate for other poor countries of the region. It is assumed that this model would be better than the existing piecemeal approach of Poverty Reduction.

This is the major issues in humanity; it is an issue of protecting humanity and the human being. Millennium Development Goal rightly targeted that " Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day"; however the programs

⁷We can End Poverty: Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015; UNDP 2013.

that we see today is not adequately effective to achieve this target; So comprehensive programs are requiring to achieve partial fulfillment

of the target. So I recommend a program “reducing poverty through Adaptive Ecosystem Management” It is a comprehensive program that will solve the problem permanently but it takes time.