

Livelihood Insecurity and Social Conflict in Nepal



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Abstract

The livelihoods of people in conflict-ridden countries like Nepal are threatened by various conventional and non-conventional factors. The decade long conflict and the ongoing peace process have altered the livelihood options in Nepal, creating new options while constraining others. This Chapter highlights the need for a proper understanding of livelihoods in Nepal in the current transitional context to develop a response strategy to address livelihood insecurity and to capitalise on the opportunities brought about by the political changes in the country. It also suggests some areas for further research and analysis.

8.1 Introduction

Livelihood insecurity has been identified as one of the structural causes of the armed conflict and continuing instability in Nepal (Upreti 2006; Hutt 2004). The decade long armed conflict was the result of economic insecurity, social discrimination and political marginalisation in the mid and far western hills of Nepal, and quickly spread across the whole country (Kumar 2006; Karki & Seddon 2003). Researchers, analysts and policymakers have now realised that peace and stability is not possible without addressing livelihood insecurity (Upreti 2009). In the following section some of the potential ways of addressing livelihood insecurity are presented.

8.2 Addressing livelihood insecurity

Livelihood insecurity is connected to many factors ranging from bad policies, poor implementation of policies and programmes, bad governance, climate related stresses, market distortions and price hikes, the weak purchasing power of people, and lack of employment opportunities, among other things. Livelihood security is primarily dependent on people having access to food that is affordable and available (see Chapter 4 for detailed discussion and Box 5.1 in Chapter 5 for the seven principles of food sovereignty) and the existence of diversified livelihood

options (Adhikari & Ghimire 2006; Adhikari & Bohle 1999; Seddon & Adhikari 2003; Upreti 2009; WFP & FAO 2006; SAARC 2005; Adhikari et al. 2000; Strasser 2009). Livelihood security is also affected by environmental security, skill training and vocational education, and the policy and institutional environment.

8.2.1 Food security

Food security is one of the fundamental bases of livelihood security (see Chapters 4 and 5). The Interim Constitution of Nepal acknowledges access to food as a basic human right, making the state responsible for upholding this right. Food security depends upon the availability of food, people's ability to access food and their ability to purchase it (Adhikari & Ghimire 2006). The state in collaboration with the people are responsible for ensuring food security, which requires appropriate policies, responsive institutions, appropriate operational procedures, and the commitment of the state and the private sector (Adhikari & Bohle 1999; Seddon & Adhikari 2003). Availability is becoming one of the major factors affecting food security in the remote rural areas and hills of Nepal, as transportation is extremely poor (WFP & FAO 2006). The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has also realised that food insecurity is an issue in its eight member countries including Nepal (SAARC 2005). One of the causes of food insecurity is the conditions imposed by international aid agencies on the granting of assistance (Adhikari et al. 2000). In Nepal, such conditions include the abolition of government subsidised food depots from remote food deficit areas.

8.2.2 Livelihood diversification

The livelihood base in Nepal is very narrow: most of the people in rural areas depend upon subsistence agriculture, daily wage labour and seasonal migration. In urban areas, poor people engage in daily wage labour for their livelihoods. Hence, diversifying livelihood options by providing alternative income options is essential to overcome livelihood insecurity. Tourism, ecotourism and rural tourism have great potential in Nepal for diversifying livelihood options. Other areas with potential for livelihood diversification include water-based development (e.g., hydropower, rafting, rural electrification and electricity-based small cottage industries); non-timber forest products, especially medicinal plants; and rural non-farm enterprises, cottage industries and small scale industries (e.g., wood carving, knitting and weaving, tailoring, vegetable farming, fruit cultivation, jam making, and poultry and pig farming). These activities can provide broader livelihood options to rural women and marginalised people, if the state is willing to support them through accessible finance, a conducive policy environment and market expansion (Upreti 2009).

8.2.3 Environmental security and environmental justice

Livelihood security is linked to environmental security. Environmental security, for the purpose of this chapter, is defined as freedom from social instability due to environmental degradation and the maintenance of the physical surroundings of society for its needs, without diminishing the natural stock. In other words, it is a state of human-environment dynamics in which the balance of the environment is maintained, environmental damage caused by human activity is restored, and resource scarcities and environmental degradation that may cause conflict are ameliorated. Hence, environmental security is the proactive minimisation of anthropogenic threats to the functional integrity of the biosphere and, thus, to its interdependent human component. Environmental security aims to achieve economic and social development without depleting natural resources (Upreti forthcoming). Hence, environmental security is a precondition for livelihood security.

Similarly, environmental justice is ensuring justice to people suffering from environmental inequity. The concept of environmental justice requires that the burden from the use of environmental services by certain groups should not be unfairly borne by those who do not receive the benefit (such as people living around garbage dumping sites or communities displaced by mines). The equitable redistribution of burden and benefit and securing ecologically sustainable livelihoods are essential for livelihood security.

8.2.4 Skill training and vocational education

The diversification of livelihood options requires vocational training and the development of the skills of rural people. The generation of alternative income options for rural people and migrant workers requires specific skills and vocational training. A state policy focusing on industrialisation will also create employment for those with skills. The Government, policymakers, international organisations and farmers' associations have to work together in this area to strengthen livelihood security.

Skill training and vocational education for youth is essential, not only for livelihood security, but also for peace and stability. Massive youth unemployment in Nepal provided the UCPN (M) with a reservoir of combatants during the armed conflict.

8.2.5 The policy and institutional environment

Underdevelopment and extreme poverty are major livelihood problems in Nepal. The overall economic conditions are characterised by extremely low per capita income – more than half the population is living below the absolute poverty line

with an average economic growth rate of two per cent during the last five decades. Hence, the Government's priority should be to break the vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment and remove the structural bottleneck in the Nepalese economy through rapid economic growth along with the equitable distribution of the benefits of such growth.

Stagnation of the agriculture sector is identified as another key problem in improving the livelihoods of the poor and marginalised sections of society, because it is the major factor in underdevelopment and poverty. Although the agriculture sector provides employment to almost 68 per cent of Nepalese people, its contribution to Gross Domestic Product is only 32 per cent. Rapid economic growth and poverty alleviation in Nepal is only achievable through an increase in productivity in the agriculture sector and the creation of alternative employment opportunities to absorb the excess manpower currently relying on the agriculture sector. The overall transformation of the agriculture sector is possible only by breaking the century-long feudal production relations where the farmers cultivating the lands do not own the land and those who own the land do not cultivate it. A High Level Land Reform Commission (HLRC) was constituted by the Government to recommend how Nepal should implement land reform to address equity and social justice, while at the same time enhancing the productivity of agriculture to contribute to broader economic growth. However, this Commission has not been able to complete its work due to the current political deadlock. Land reform has been a political rallying cry for more than five decades. Now scholars and researchers working on land issues are arguing that land reform is not just for economic growth, but is also essential for strengthening democracy, promoting justice and socio-cultural rights, sustaining the ecology and environment, and generally making society prosperous.

Nepal has a huge labour force, which is not fully utilised, and there is widespread unemployment and under-unemployment. Hence, Nepal's youth are compelled to seek risky, low-paid unskilled or semi-skilled employment in foreign countries. Educated youth are also attracted to working abroad, increasing the brain drain of educated and trained human resource. While remittances have contributed to the country's economy, their sustainability and regularity is uncertain, and they are not without personal and social costs. Creating employment opportunities within the country for youth and marginalised people should be the priority. This can be done only through massive sectoral development (such as hydropower, road-networks, irrigation and communication, as well as tourism and off-farm activities). Such sectoral development will also address the problem of widespread under-employment and disguised unemployment in the agriculture and rural sector. The Government's Three Year Interim Plan has captured some of these concerns. However, the political commitment to translate these policies into action is in question, and the Government lacks the financial resources to do so.

The Three Year Interim Plan has identified inequality and discrimination, economic dependency, the quality of services such as health and education, corruption and weak governance as some of the other sources of livelihood insecurity and conflict. Pervasive socio-cultural and economic discrimination and inequality on the basis of class, caste, region and gender also are a serious problem in the country. Political forces have concluded that these problems cannot be solved by a centralised and unitary political system. It is hoped that the proposed federal system will provide a broader basis for addressing these concerns by properly addressing the concerns of the various oppressed castes/groups including Madheshis, various regional groups, women, Dalits, indigenous and ethnic groups, and other marginalised groups. Unfortunately, Nepal is still in a transitional phase and in the process of drafting a new constitution; hence, it is not possible to address all of these concerns at present. However, if the new constitution is drafted with these issues in mind it could provide a broader framework for tackling these issues.

The inadequate and disproportionate development of physical infrastructure is one of the factors impeding the overall development of the country and fuelling inequality in society. Basic infrastructure, such as hydropower, road networks, electricity, drinking water, irrigation facilities and communication services, has not yet reached the majority who live in rural areas. The absence of a nationwide road network, low road access in remote districts, and the lack of expansion of agricultural roads are also hindering the economic transformation of Nepal. While the Three Year Interim Plan and the annual budget and plan for the year 2008/09 made some provision for infrastructure development, implementation is a major challenge in the current political situation.

The quality of the public education system and educational discrimination is of great concern and impacts directly on livelihoods. Large numbers of the population are still illiterate despite the huge investment by the Government. The quality of public schools, attended by the majority of children, continues to deteriorate. The divide between the well off and the poor is reflected in the country's education system: those who can afford to prefer enrolling their children in private schools because of the poor quality of the education in public schools. Consequently, there is a huge difference between the performance of public schools and private schools, which determines the level of opportunities open to graduates. The unregulated fees charged by private schools have increased class discrimination, prohibiting children from disadvantaged families from competing. The only way to end such discrimination rests with the Government's ability to provide quality and skill-oriented education in public schools. 'Education for all' and other various education policies are there to address these concerns, but have been largely unsuccessful so far.

The above discussion presents the various challenges and problems facing Nepal at present. A few of the main reasons for these problems and challenges are the high level of corruption and extremely weak service delivery of the public system. Political mistrust, competition and opportunistic behaviour among the major political parties, a lack of sufficient resources, and the ineffective and inefficient use of available financial and human resource are the major causes behind these issues. In relation to resources, several potential sources exist. The international community has indicated that it is willing to support the Government of Nepal if the governing system is transparent, functional and non-corrupt. The domestic private sector is willing to invest if there is a conducive environment for investment. The potential for foreign direct investment in hydropower and other sectors is also high if the Government is able to provide a secure investment environment. More importantly, the Nepalese people are supportive and willing to contribute to national development.

8.2.6 State restructuring for livelihood security

Nepal changed from a centralised, monarchical, feudalistic, and socio-culturally, politically and economically exclusionary state, to a federal democratic republic with the declaration of a republic on 29 May 2008 by the newly elected Constituent Assembly. Hence, the state structures (judiciary, bureaucracy, security) and the policies, rules and programmes of the old regimes are no longer adequate to deal with the changing context. It is essential to restructure them to meet public expectations and to ensure the livelihood security of the Nepalese people. State restructuring is a complex, risky and lengthy process that requires a huge amount of resources, time and commitment at the political level. Furthermore, it has to be done in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

Important governing structures of the state, such as the security apparatus, bureaucracy, judiciary and legal apparatus, are not responsive to the people; they are systematically structured to strengthen feudal and centralised governing practices. Hence, the very first step is to restructure them to bring them into the 21st Century and make them more responsive to the people. Some important governing structures to be reformed are:

Security sector

Nepal is currently in a transition from war to peace; it is, therefore, the right time to undertake a holistic restructuring of the security sector, including the restructuring of the Ministry of Defence, Nepal Army, Armed Police Force, Civilian Police, National Investigation Department and Intelligence Service, Ministry of Home Affairs, and other security related agencies. The armed conflict has had a very detrimental

effect on society. This period saw the militarisation of society, which consequently created insecurity. Nepal needs to address the sources of conventional insecurity like crime and violence, as well as non-conventional sources of insecurity such as food insecurity, livelihood insecurity and environmental insecurity.

Bureaucracy

The existing state bureaucracy is facing challenges in relation to competency in the changing context. The entire bureaucracy is politicised and unprofessional. Many of the staff in government offices and government managed public sector offices are inclined towards particular political parties or recruited to fulfil the vested interests of political parties instead of improving organisational performance and efficiency. The current oversized bureaucracy needs to be reduced and restructured to provide effective services to the people. The restructuring of the bureaucracy will also provide opportunities for livelihood diversification as the existing bureaucratic orientation is controlling in nature and not conducive to decentralised, people-centric development. Once the existing bureaucracy is restructured to facilitate the promotion of local ownership in development, it will enhance the performance of the development sector, expand employment opportunities and widen livelihood options.

Table 8.1 Major tasks to perform in the changing political context for livelihood security and to address the root causes of conflict

S.N.	Issue/sector	Reason/objective	Actors
1	Restructure of economic sector	To address poverty, inequality, discrimination and livelihood insecurity	Parliament, National Planning Commission (NPC), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), Nepal Rastra Bank, bankers associations, concerned ministries
2	Restructure of judicial sector	To ensure access to justice for the poor and marginalised and to address impunity	Parliament, Supreme Court, Nepal Bar Association, Attorney General, Judicial Council
3	Restructure of governing units	To ensure the meaningful participation of people in decision making	Parliament, Office of Prime Minister and Council of Ministers

S.N.	Issue/sector	Reason/objective	Actors
4	Refine electoral system	To increase the representation of non-represented people	Parliament, Election Commission
5	Redefine foreign policy	To improve international relations towards changing domestic and global contexts	Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)
6	Reform political parties	To make parties accountable to the people, strengthen internal democracy and promote good governance	Political parties, Parliament,
7	Reform religious sector	To move from an orthodox to a liberal system of government (religion secularism) and avoid religious extremism and biases	Concerned ministries, Parliament, religious networks
8	Reform social sector	To provide better health, education and other social services To provide social security to people and safety net measures for vulnerable people To address the problems of the conflict victims, internally displaced people, and the families of people killed and wounded during the conflict To promote reconciliation and provide a conducive environment for better livelihood options	Parliament, concerned ministries
9	Strengthen human rights apparatus	To promote and ensure the rule of law	Parliament, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), security providers, concerned ministries
10	Implement transformative land reform	To promote social justice based and productivity oriented land reform for economic development	Parliament, Land Reform Commission, Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM), Prime Ministers' Office, NPC, MoF
11	Redefine access and utilisation of natural resources	To promote and protect indigenous knowledge and practices, and to conserve and protect biodiversity	Parliament, concerned ministries, associations related to natural resources, private companies

S.N.	Issue/sector	Reason/objective	Actors
12	Restructure security sector	To provide national security and human security To control criminals and disreputable people, arms traders and human traffickers	Parliament, Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), Nepal Army, Armed Police and Civilian Police, Central Investigation Department

8.3 Further research needs

Chapters 1 to 7 have discussed the many important dynamics of livelihood insecurity associated with conflict and tension. One of the important conclusions is that too much generalisation and the oversimplification of the realities of a socially complex and politically unstable society do not provide in-depth insights about the diversity of people, their livelihood strategies, coping mechanisms and plurality. This book has presented the livelihoods of the people of a conflict-ridden country as a very complex, interrelated and interconnected phenomena. The issues that have emerged from the discussion in the different chapters and some other issues directly related to the content of this book are presented in this section as areas for further research, analysis and debate to strengthen the various dimensions of livelihoods in a country in transition from war to peace.

8.3.1 Strengthening analytical frameworks for the study of livelihoods

The discussion in Chapters 6 and 7 clearly demonstrates that the different analytical frameworks and tools developed so far to study the livelihoods of people are strong in some aspects, weak in others and even silent in some important dimensions, such as negotiating power and resources. The strengths of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) lies in the understanding of the various types of capital that contribute to the livelihoods of people, but needs further elaboration to deal with the psychological and inter-personal dimensions of the individual actors and their livelihoods. The Rural Livelihood System (RLS) is strongly conceptually orientated to inner realities, covering emotional, spiritual, and psychosocial dimensions, and even attempts to combine the important elements of the SLF. Its focus on rural systems and individuals and, hence, its wider conceptualisation and operationalisation, is a major step forward. Other livelihood approaches developed by different non-governmental organisations are mainly development oriented and are weak conceptually. Important work has been started in the conceptualisation, operationalisation and strengthening of analytical frameworks for the study of livelihoods, but further efforts are needed to refine and expand these frameworks.

From the above discussion it is clear that livelihood realities are related to policies, governing systems and institutions. However, a livelihood analysis alone is not sufficient to examine the institutional context. Analytical frameworks related to governance and policy analysis have to be introduced here. Conceptually, governance is a set of values, policies, technologies and institutions through which societies manage their political, economic, social and environmental resources in a transparent, accountable and sustainable manner. The 'good governance' concept, promoted by many development agencies, aims to provide adequate space for each and every citizen to exercise his or her rights and accomplish his or her duties. Traditionally, governance was perceived to be the activities of the government; now it is understood as a process that should involve all the stakeholders in a society. Hence, good governance is the framework for the rules, institutions, values and policies by which a society manages economic, political, and social processes and ways of exercising power in the management of resources (Upreti 2009). Hence, governance in the context of livelihoods is a critical process that helps achieve sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental quality for people. The quality of governance directly affects the livelihoods of the people. Poor governance causes poor delivery of services and promotes conflict, mistrust, and corruption and, consequently, the marginalisation of the poor and powerless in society. In contrast, good governance promotes mutually supportive, transparent process and equitable and democratic practices wherein people enjoy a secure livelihood. However, in order to achieve good governance, an understanding of the livelihood realities of the people is crucial.

8.3.2 Spatial dimensions of livelihood strategies

Multi-locality livelihood strategies are becoming a regular phenomenon (Thieme 2006) with globalisation and in the changing global and local context. Internal and international migration is becoming a powerful livelihood strategy. To keep up with people's multi-locality (rural to urban, villages to cities, villages to big cities and capital to international) livelihood strategies, the framework for livelihood studies also needs to be broadened. Similarly, changes in society and in state policies brought about by the spatial dimensions of livelihood strategies need further research and analysis to understand their complexity. However, a lot of conceptual and empirical progress has been made on the spatial dimensions of livelihood strategies (cp Müller-Böker 1991, 1999).

8.3.3 Participation of displaced people in socio-political spheres

Chapter 7 demonstrates that the lack of participation of displaced people in policy decisions and socio-political spheres affects their access to services and influences

the processes and outcomes of these policies. Hence, in-depth analysis of the relationship between people's participation in policy making and the livelihood outcomes of specific groups of people is needed. A blanket approach cannot address the livelihood needs of IDPs and other groups (women, children, disabled, conflict victims, elderly people, etc.).

Displacement in Nepal is largely understood to mean conflict induced displacement. However, large numbers of people (far more than induced by the conflict) are displaced each year due to natural disasters and calamities (e.g., more than half a million people were displaced by floods in the far western Terai in September 2008 and the same number again in the eastern Terai in August 2008); their livelihood strategies and coping mechanisms are not receiving enough attention in studies and analysis.

8.3.4 Property versus possession debate in livelihood studies

One of the important issues emerging in the livelihood debate is property versus possession. From the livelihood perspective, property ownership, particularly of land, may not be important if people possess land as tenants and can generate a living from it. In a society with feudalistic production relations and a subsistence agrarian economy, land ownership is viewed as important to sustaining livelihoods. Hence, an in-depth analysis of property versus possession vis-à-vis livelihood strategies is needed to conceptually contribute to the livelihood debate.

8.3.5 The relationship between power and livelihoods

Power plays an important role in negotiating the livelihood strategies of individuals and groups. Level of awareness, social status, knowledge and skills, social networks, access to centres of power and access to resources shape the livelihoods of people. However, the relationship between power and livelihoods needs further research and analysis to establish a definitive relationship between livelihood strategies and power in a society.

Both external (international) and internal (domestic) actors engage in creating livelihood opportunities, setting the policy framework and creating institutional arrangements. Their relationships, ability to manoeuvre each other and the power balance between them affect the creation of livelihood options for local people. This relationship also needs further analysis.

8.3.6 Policy formulation and implementation

In a power-skewed society, the people to be affected or benefited by a particular policy are often excluded from the policy formulation process. Policies are negotiated or

renegotiated mainly at the centre by political leaders and policymakers/bureaucrats. Such negotiated policies affect rural, marginalised, poor and powerless people the most. Agrarian policies and their implementation determine the livelihoods of people. However, an understanding of the determinants of policy production, dissemination and revision in the context of a developing country like Nepal (particularly in the changing political context) is important to positively contribute to the livelihood debate.

8.3.7 Vulnerability and resilience

Vulnerability to social, economic and political threats and stress create livelihood insecurity. Furthermore, the physical weaknesses of individuals and natural calamities create additional vulnerability. However, local people have developed coping strategies (social, economic, political) and resilience mechanisms. It is important to study the coping strategies and resilience mechanisms that help people to overcome or minimise vulnerability.

8.3.8 Land, food security and climate change

Livelihood issues are directly connected to some of the new issues and challenges facing Nepal, such as climate change and related non-conventional insecurity issues such as arsenic contamination, acid rain, prolonged drought or unusual precipitation, and glacier lake outburst floods. Such issues are contributing to land use change and negatively impacting on the food security situation, which is creating livelihood insecurity. A thorough analysis of the relationship between climate change, land use issues and livelihood insecurity is, therefore, necessary to better understand the issues and formulate appropriate responses.

It is increasingly being realised that indigenous knowledge is important in the livelihood strategies of people in the context of climate change and climate change adaptation strategies. Some pioneering work has been done in Nepal by one of the editors of this book (Müller-Böker 1991, 1999). However, very few people are presently engaged in this field. This is another area that needs research and analysis to further develop our understanding.

8.3.9 Emerging policy and institutional frameworks in post-conflict countries

Global experiences in war-torn and conflict-ridden countries (UNEP 2006; Aditya et al. 2006; Colletta et al. 1996; Schmidt 1997; OECD 2001; Nyheim et al. 2001; Murdoch & Sandler 2002; Fitzpatrick 2002; DFID 2002; Adedeji 2005; Upreti 2006) have demonstrated that policy frameworks used during times of war or earlier policies and strategies do not work in post-conflict situations. Policy frameworks

often have to be generated from peace agreements and are driven by the new needs and opportunities brought about by the changing political context. New institutional arrangements, new regulatory provisions and new operational procedures are needed to tackle the changing circumstances. Hence, it is necessary to examine the emerging policy and institutional frameworks in Nepal to better understand the livelihood options and opportunities for people. Research on natural resources governance focusing on rural land policy, irrigation policy, and access to and use of natural resources by marginalised sections of society is essential to understand the livelihood options of rural people.

8.4 Conclusions

Addressing livelihood insecurities in a troubled, insecure and transitional political environment is a new challenge for policymakers, planners, politicians and researchers in Nepal. However, haste in devising policies, strategies and operational arrangements without a proper understandings of the relationships between elements of the changing context and livelihoods (including livelihood constraints, opportunities and possible threats) could lead to further complications and the consequent failure of response strategies. Hence, the thorough research and analysis of livelihoods in Nepal in the new context is needed. New policies and institutional frameworks are needed in the post-conflict situation; hence, existing fundamental sectors such as the security sector, judiciary, and bureaucracy must be restructured to appropriately respond to the demands of the changed political context. Addressing livelihood insecurities and expanding livelihood options for poor and marginalised people requires coherence between research and policy; they must complement each other to enhance the outcomes. A holistic understanding of livelihood issues and operational strategies requires a combination of the livelihood perspective and governance framework.

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