

**RURAL POVERTY RESEARCH PAPER SERIES**

Number 11

March 1987

**RURAL POVERTY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CASE STUDY  
OF CHAMPA DEVI VILLAGE**

**Jiba Nath Prasain**

HMG-USAID-GTZ-IDRC-FORD-WINROCK PROJECT

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY IN THE

FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN NEPAL

## FOREWORD

This Rural Poverty Research Paper Series is funded through the project, "Strengthening Institutional Capacity in the Food and Agricultural Sector in Nepal," a cooperative effort by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) of His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development. This project has been made possible by substantial financial support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the Ford Foundation.

One of the most important activities of this project is funding for problem-oriented research by young professional staff of agricultural agencies of the MOA and related institutions, as well as for concerned individuals in the private sector. This research is carried out with the active professional assistance of the Winrock staff.

The purpose of this Rural Poverty Research Paper Series is to make the results of the research activities related to rural poverty available to a larger audience, and to acquaint younger staff and students with advanced methods of research and statistical analysis. It is also hoped that publication of the Series will stimulate discussion among policymakers and thereby assist in the formulation of policies which are suitable to the development of Nepal's agriculture.

The views expressed in this Rural Poverty Research Paper Series are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of their parent institutions or of Winrock International.

Sarah J. Tisch  
Michael B. Wallace  
Series Editors

RURAL POVERTY RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

Number 11

March 1987

RURAL POVERTY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CASE STUDY  
OF CHAMPA DEVI VILLAGE

Jiba Nath Prasain

HMG-USAID-GTZ-IDRC-FORD WINROCK PROJECT  
STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY IN THE  
FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN NEPAL

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Objectives	1
Rationale of the Study	2
Literature Review	2
METHODOLOGY	3
Sample Design	3
Constraints in Data Collection	3
RURAL POVERTY IN CHAMPA DEVI	4
Natural Resources	4
Population	4
Education	5
Landholding	6
Income from Landholding	7
Animal Husbandry	8
Social Aspects	9
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	9
Summary	9
Recommendations	10
REFERENCES	10

---

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Age and Sex of Champa Devi Villagers	5
Table 2. Population Composition by Ethnic Group	5
Table 3. Number of School-going Children	6
Table 4. Types of Domesticated Animals by Ethnic Group	8
Table 5. Annual Household Income from Animal Husbandry	8

RURAL POVERTY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CASE STUDY  
OF CHAMPA DEVI VILLAGE

Jiba Nath Prasain\*

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is among the least developed of the underdeveloped countries. More than 90 percent of the population depends on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood. Increasing population, pressure on farmland, decreasing productivity, fragmentation and small landholdings all contribute to rural poverty in Nepal. Hence, poverty is not only an economical problem but also a sociocultural problem. A series of five year plans and programs in the last two decades have not yet been successful in reducing rural poverty--these are only the "rhetoric of development."

Unemployment and underemployment cause low production and low income, which ultimately result in poor capital formation. Thus, poor capital formation and poverty are directly correlated. A country with small and fragmented landholdings, a defective land tenure system, and an economy not technologically advanced is not in a position to cope with increasing poverty.

Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon (1978) point out the seriousness of the situation. The government bureaucracy has a limited capacity for achieving positive reforms, dispensing information, credit, and new economic inputs. Thus, the poor farmer is faced with a crisis of production, increasing impoverishment, and eventual destitution.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. To discover the extent of rural poverty with respect to villagers' economic conditions.
2. To examine the extent of rural poverty with respect to villagers' social conditions.
3. To provide policy-oriented measures for reducing rural poverty.

This study only analyzes landholding and animal husbandry as indicators of economic conditions. Similarly, for social conditions, only social customs, health, feasts, and festivals are examined.

---

\*Jiba Nath Prasain is a member of the Sociology and Anthropology Instruction Committee, Kirtipur Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

## Rationale of the Study

The inhabitants of the rural hill region have not yet employed the advanced technology in agriculture so that their labor utilization in agriculture is very high. They do not practice intensive agriculture, thus grain production per square hectare is low. Coupled with poor capital formation, this method of agriculture does not keep pace with the population growth or the ecological problems that have arisen in the hill region.

With this in mind, this study provides suggestive measures for reducing rural poverty.

## Literature Review

Several studies about poverty at the macro level have been carried out by agencies and individuals. All these studies cite the same general findings--unequal distribution of land, low rural investment, and the government's urban bias as--causes of rural poverty. (ILO, 1979). These conditions prevail in Nepal as pointed out by Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon (1978):

. . . the bureaucracy, which has grown enormously during the past eight years supported by the international aid has a very limited capability for achieving the positive developmental effects in Nepal. There is only the rhetoric of development.

Jain (1981) basically addresses the problem of poverty suffered by a large number of rural households in Nepal. The total number of poor households was approximately 1,458,920 in 1980. As measures to increase prosperity, he suggests greater credit from the banking sector, credit programs for livestock, drought animals, small machinery, agricultural equipment, expanded crop production, and additional income generation programs for improving the living standards of the rural poor.

Adhikari (1982) studies poverty by focusing on sociocultural and economic problems. Arguing that although socioeconomic factors are responsible for poverty, sociocultural factors are the predominant causes. Most of the rural population, in spite of their poverty, do not give due consideration to the future. Their ostentatious expenses on ceremonial occasions and entertaining usually lead into future homelessness. This fatalistic attitude toward life, supported by Hindu doctrines, no doubt have also been responsible for this state of affairs. When fate is considered as guiding the human life, human efforts to change it naturally seem futile. Therefore, regarding the elimination of rural poverty, one must give due attention to sociocultural practices which are the motive forces for productive activities.

Haq (1978) defines the term "poverty curtain" as a artificial separation of the world into two worlds and two unequal humanities--one embarassingly rich and other desperately poor on the basis of material wealth and philosophy. He prescribes policy actions to alleviate poverty by attacking it directly. A direct attack on mass poverty is primarily a political, not a technocratic decision requiring an entirely new alliance to implement the policies instead of traditional alliances between the army, bureaucracy, landlords, and industrialists. Funda-

mental institutional reforms, with control over the means of production along with changes in distribution of public services in the poorer section of society are necessary. Need-oriented strategies especially basic human needs have to be identified. Moreover, the concept of self-reliance should be encouraged as a comprehensive philosophy of life. According to Haq, if these steps are taken in preparing and implementing development strategies poverty alleviation will proceed.

The National Planning Commission survey (1978), "Employment, Income Distribution and Consumption Patterns in Nepal," found that the percentage of the population falling below the poverty line is 43 percent in the mountains, 42 percent in the Tarai, and 18 percent in the hills. Thirty-three percent of the rural and 23 percent of the urban population live below the poverty line. In terms of minimum subsistence consumption and minimum subsistence income, 33 percent of households on the basis of the former and 40 percent of households on the latter are below the poverty line. This survey is the first official information regarding income, employment, consumption patterns, and poverty.

#### METHODOLOGY

This study uses a microcosmic inductive approach to observe economic conditions by analyzing landholding patterns, crop production, employment outside agriculture, and animal husbandry. The understanding of simple and small groups paves the way toward understanding rural poverty in the country as a whole.

##### Sample Design

Forty households were selected from population data obtained from the Champa Devi village panchayat office. The study area contains seven heterogeneous ethnic groups. It is assumed that the 40 households represent the socioeconomic and sociocultural characteristics of the village. People above 50 years of age have been selected as the key informants because they can compare the socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects of the village over time.

The method of participant observation was used to collect data on the village settlement pattern, agricultural practices and the general economic condition of the people of the study area. Structured as well as unstructured questionnaires were used to collect data on income from agriculture and animal husbandry, household expenditures, and on attitudes towards poverty, education, population, personal identification, and value systems. Primary data were collected from the field during 20 days of field observation.

##### Constraints in Data Collection

It is natural that a researcher has to face many problems and constraints in the course of collecting data. Respondents did not want to respond freely and frankly. Many informants suspected that the researcher was from the government and seeking information to increase taxes. In spite of this, the researcher succeeded in establishing good rapport with the villagers.

## RURAL POVERTY IN CHAMPA DEVI

Champa Devi village lies at the southern corner of Kathmandu District at an elevation of approximately 5550 ft. above sea level. The village is bordered by the Chobar village panchayat to the east, the Matsenarayan village panchayat to the west, the Baire village panchayat to the north, and Dolu village panchayat to the south. A fair-weather motorable road links the village with Tribhuvan University and a metal-led road links it with Kathmandu.

There are four grocer's shops and three tea stalls on the way to the high school. These grocer's shops and tea stalls service as gathering places for the village people during leisure time. Since there are no large shops in Champa Devi the inhabitants of the area buy necessary goods either from the adjoining market Naya Bazaar in Kirtipur or from Kathmandu.

Although the study area is close to Kathmandu, this is not reflected in the everyday lives of the villagers.

### Natural Resources

Champa Devi village does not have any noted natural resources. The forest area has already been deforested and now only the denuded hillock remains. There is a possibility that an afforestation program will be launched, and a plot of land was afforested by the local people ten years ago. Although this area is located outside Kathmandu, the location is suitable for the establishment of hotels for the development of tourism. The Champa Devi peak provides a view of the natural scenery of the Kathmandu Valley as well as the Himalayan mountain range.

### Population

The population of the village is 3114, of which 1623 are men and 1491 are women (Table 1). The area is densely populated considering its hilly topography.

Nearly 56 percent are under 11 years old. This means that majority of the village population is economically dependent, while the rest of the villagers have disguised employment in subsistence agriculture. Employment outside agriculture is very limited and only in a few institutions.

In this study the population has been sub-divided into three categories to include all the ethnic groups living within Champa Devi in the sample. On the basis of ethnic composition, the population of the study area is categorized into three main headings, high caste, Matwali (or middle caste), and the occupational castes (Table 2).

---

Table 1. Age and Sex of Champa Devi Villagers

Age-group	Men	Percent	Women	Percent	Total
Below 6	219	14.0	226	15.0	445
06 - 10	202	12.9	206	13.6	407
11 - 15	171	10.9	182	12.1	353
16 - 20	180	11.5	171	11.3	355
21 - 25	157	10.0	114	7.5	271
26 - 30	154	9.8	112	7.4	276
31 - 35	132	8.4	126	8.4	258
36 - 40	166	10.6	101	6.7	207
41 - 45	83	5.3	81	5.4	164
46 - 50	65	4.2	69	4.6	134
51 - 55	33	2.1	38	2.5	71
56 - 60	32	2.0	34	2.2	66
61 - 65	16	1.0	19	1.2	35
66 and above	13	0.8	12	0.7	25
Total	1623		1491		3114

Source: 1984 Champa Devi Panchayat Office Records.

---

Table 2. Population Composition by Ethnic Group

Ethnic groups	Number of population	Percent
High caste		
Brahmin	153	11.7
Chhetri	1472	48.0
Matwali		
Newar	311	10.1
Tamang	598	19.5
Occupational castes		
Kami	47	1.5
Damai	75	2.4
Sarki	51	1.6

Source: 1984 Panchayat Office Records.

---

### Education

Development is only possible if the majority of the population are educated. Education helps to maintain social order and harmony, and provides constructive ideas for individuals and nation-building. If Nepalese society is to develop and be prosperous in all respects, educational rather than political development should be emphasized. However, policymakers have concentrated on elite education. For example, a student of class ten pays monthly tuition fees of NRs.45 (in general school), while a University student only pays NRs.29.

There are two schools in the study area, a secondary school, Bhairab High School and a primary school, Chun Devi. The high school has 465 students, of which 288 are boys and 177 are girls.

It is clear that all children of school-going age do not attend school because of desertion or death of parents in the household, cultural rigidity regarding girl's education, or poverty. Table 3 shows that while there are 1115 school age children, only 734 actually attend school.

---

Table 3. Number of School-going Children

	Boys	Girls	Total
School age children	553	562	1115
Number of children attending school	529	205	734
Total	1082	767	1849

Source: Champa Devi School and Panchayat Office Records, 1984.

---

The number of students at the primary level is relatively greater than the lower secondary and secondary levels. This is because children do not have to pay tuition or buy textbooks for primary school. While this has raised the overall level of literacy, poor villagers still cannot afford to educate their children much further than primary school.

#### Landholding

In Nepal the average landholding is small--only 0.2 ha. Landholdings in the study area are small because of two factors. First, although Kathmandu Valley land is very fertile, the study area is rugged and mountainous. The nonirrigated land is not very fertile and per ropani yield varies from one to three muris (one ropani equals .126 acres; one muri equals 2.46 bushels). Irrigated land, situated in the low land area, is more fertile than nonirrigated land. However, the inhabitants of Champa Devi possess small amounts of irrigated land, with a per ropani yield of three to six muris.

Second, landholdings are reduced by the frequent fragmentation of land among the male descendants. Legally as well as socially, each son in a family has a right to inherit the ancestral property after marriage or reaching the age of maturity. This defective land tenure system is particularly prevalent in the study area. Hence, the villagers are going to be poorer in terms of landholding in the future. The population has increased significantly in the past couple decades, yet total farmland is more or less the same. To some extent, villagers have begun cultivating the upland forest area. Regarding this economic condition, one of the household heads reported:

When I was a small boy my father had 30 ropani of land. We were five brothers and three sisters. When all the children of my father got married we gradually started to separate. This very land --30 ropanis of irrigated and nonirrigated land--had been reduced to 24 ropanis, because of the fact that they had spent money to meet the marriage expenditure of eight offspring which was obtained by selling of six ropani of farmland. When we were separated each of us got only four ropani of land. And now I have six sons and one daughter. Since then we have been losing the battle against poverty. You can imagine what will be the situation of the next generation?

Some older respondents reported that they were rich farmers one generation ago but are now poor peasants. Employment outside agriculture is minimal. Within the sample only four households or ten percent have worked in low-level jobs at Tribhuvan University, banking, or government offices.

#### Income from Landholding

Farmland productivity is low and is declining, especially in the hill region. Eighty-seven percent of the people are so poor that they cannot invest capital to increase crop production. This is how a poor economic condition creates further poverty in the society.

In the sample, 17 households possess 0-5 to 4-6 ropani of farmland. Only four households possess above ten ropani of farmland. In this latter category, most of the farmers own a sizable amount of irrigated land, while the occupational castes own mostly nonirrigated land. In the local context these four households are considered rich, two households are extremely poor, while the rest of the households are considered poor. The four rich households produce more grains than needed for family consumption and sell the surplus in the market. From this sale they obtain an average of NRs.10,000 per household. The family size of these four households is also smaller than the rest of the sample.

Along with irrigated and nonirrigated land, farmers possess small kitchen gardens where radish, squash, pepper, garlic, tomato, cauliflower, and cabbage are produced. In the study area, cucumber is grown by villagers as a cash crop. For about two months of the year, from the end of August to mid-October, someone from the household rises early in the morning and travels to Kalimati or Puranabhaneshwar markets in Kathmandu to sell local cucumber. According to the sample a load of cucumber can be sold for NRs.30. On average, every household annually produces more than 15 loads of cucumber. Selling this "cash crop" helps them to meet many economic requirements during cucumber's peak season. The richer farmers do not produce or sell cucumber.

Villagers with only small fragmented landholdings usually porter bundles of collected firewood to earn cash, and then purchase grains either from Naya Bazaar or Kathmandu.

The staple diet of the sample households consists of maize, rice, millet, and pulse. Eighty-five percent of the sample are not self-sufficient in food consumption, the remainder of which are self-sufficient in a local context. Most of the households are self-sufficient

in vegetables during the winter season. However, if we compare this study area with Nepal as a whole, all except four households are suffering from poverty.

#### Animal Husbandry

Animal husbandry is an important economic activity in subsistence agriculture-based economies. In Nepal, maintenance of livestock depends heavily on forest resources. Although the study area has been deforested, people still raise animals. Animal husbandry is not only important from both an economic and cultural point of view, but also from a nutritional point of view.

All of the sample households possess domestic animals: 27 households have domesticated cows, two households raise oxen for breeding. Plowing oxen are not usually raised because it is expensive to feed them. This is shown by the fact that a pair of hired oxen costs NRs.40 a day, while wages for a male laborer are only NRs.25. The small fragmented landholdings do not encourage the raising of oxen to plow only a couple ropanis, when it is easier to for the farmer dig up the field by hand in two weeks time.

Of the sample households, seven have domesticated buffaloes for milk and small male buffaloes for sale to the Newar people in the vicinity. Four households have domesticated pigs, and ten have raised cattle, buffaloes, goats, and sheep. Domestication of animals in the village is small scale as landholdings are small, private pasture is scarce, and the community pasture is overgrazed. Hence, none of the sample households can gain much income from domesticating cattle. Table 4 shows the domesticated animals owned by different ethnic groups, while Table 5 shows the income which they obtain from selling animals and animal products. Traditionally, high castes do not raise chickens or pigs, however, in the study area, some Chhetris have raised chickens.

Table 4. Types of Domesticated Animals by Ethnic Group

Ethnic group	Cattle	Buffalo	Goat	Sheep	Chicken	Pigs
High caste	31	18	25	10	-	-
Matwali caste	8	4	5	5	19	3
Occupational	2	1	7	-	9	2
Total	41	23	37	15	28	5

Source: Field survey, 1984.

Table 5. Annual Household Income from Animal Husbandry (NRs.)

Ethnic group	Household	Cattle	Buffalo	Goat	Sheep	Chicken	Pig
High caste	5	1050	700	200	-	-	-
Matwali caste	1	-	-	200	250	125	-
Occupational	1	-	-	-	-	-	300

Source: Field survey, 1984.

As mentioned before, only a few households are relatively rich. Among the sampled households including all the ethnic groups, only seven households are able to obtain any income from animal husbandry.

### Social Aspects

Social and economic aspects are supplementary and complementary to each other. Sociocultural values are also shaped by economic development. Champa Devi villagers, as in all underdeveloped countries of the world, are mostly illiterate and believe in fate rather than in their own labor. In the rural agricultural society conservatism/fatalism is generally culturally sanctioned. Here, conservatism/fatalism means that people do not employ, apply, or use modern sciences and technologies in their lives, instead they follow traditional methods. In such societies, villagers have few if any other options (Foster, 1973). This situation is also true for Champa Devi village.

Medical and social services are also lacking. Although the Champa Devi villagers could utilize modern medical treatment available in nearby Kathmandu, they show no interest in going to the hospitals or doctors. Instead, they prefer to employ the local healer. They do not go to a hospital because they do not have money for even the least expensive methods of treatment. The local healers make offerings to appease the evil spirit or god. The patient is cured by the good will of Almighty God. Those who do not survive are not meant to live any longer in this world.

Villagers believe in the virtue of conspicuous consumption as a means of fulfilling different kinds of rites, rituals, feasts, and festivals. They do not think about the future. As a result, they have no capacity to have a meal regularly throughout the year, and suffer from malnutrition and undernutrition. Children of poor households are pot-bellied and have thin hands and legs. Such unhealthy people are not able to work which increases their poverty. Hence, it is not only poor socioeconomic conditions but also the fatalistic sociocultural conditions which are at the root of poverty.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

Most of the people in Champa Devi are poor and uneducated. A few are employed outside agriculture, but only in low level jobs. Subsistence agriculture is the main economic activity in the study area. It is characterized by small fragmented landholdings and declining productivity. An increasing population puts additional pressure on farmland, resulting in undernutrition and malnutrition.

Cultural factors play an important role in rural poverty. The villagers do not believe in their own labor as much as they believe in fate. Their economic condition is predetermined by god. These sociocultural and socioreligious value systems perpetuate economic stagnation.

Lastly, the urban bias investment of the government benefits only the elite class and neglects the rural people. Hence, the "rhetoric of

development," that benefits and fruits of development are shared by all is a myth.

### Recommendations

The efforts of development have an impact mainly on modernizing elites and western-oriented cities in underdeveloped countries. These efforts radically differ in concept and outlook from the common people. The widening gap between rich and poor is basically because of differences between the wants of elites and needs of the rural population.

The following suggestions will help reduce rural poverty:

1. We must know which of our conservative sociocultural and socio-religious value systems have caused the stagnation of socioeconomic conditions in Nepal.
2. Champa Devi village is inhabited mostly by poor people who are uneducated. Therefore, adult literacy classes should be conducted. Through literacy their conservative sociocultural and socioreligious value systems may change as well. Education makes people action-oriented.
3. Small scale cottage industries using bamboo, wood, cotton, wool, and leather should be established in Champa Devi village with financial help of the government as well as the banks.
4. The government must launch effective birth control programs in Champa Devi.
5. The local stone mine should be reopened to employ local people and raise their income level.
6. A tourist view-tower should be built on the top of Champa Devi hillock and tourist hotels and restaurant opened to boost employment opportunities.
7. Seasonal pickle packaging industries should be established for additional nonagricultural income.

### REFERENCES

- Adhikari, S. Rural Development in Nepal: Problems and Prospects. Lalitpur, Nepal: Sajha Prakashan. 1982.
- Blaike, Cameron, and Seddon. Peasants and Workers in Nepal: The Condition of the Lower Classes. London: Ains and Phillips Warminster. 1978.
- . Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press. 1982.
- Foster, M. George. Traditional Societies and Technological Changes. Bombay, India: Allied Publishers. 1973.

Haq, Mahbub. The Poverty Curtain: Choices for the Third World. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press. 1978.

National Planning Commission (NPC). A Survey of Employment, Income Distribution and Consumption Patterns in Nepal. Kathmandu, Nepal: NPC. 1978.

International Labor Organization (ILO). "Profiles of Rural Poverty." Geneva, Switzerland: ILO. 1979.

Jain, S. C. Poverty to Prosperity in Nepal. New Delhi, India: Development Publishers. 1981.

Papers in this Series:

1. Bholu N. Pokharel and Ganesh P. Shivakoti, "Impact of Development Efforts on Agricultural Wage Labor," December 1986.
2. Jagadish Timsina and Murari Suvedi, "Contribution of Cropping Systems Program Research and Extension to the Rural Poor: A Case Study of Ratnanagar Cropping Systems Site," December 1986.
3. Murari Suvedi, "Poorest of the Poor: A Comparative Study of Rural Poverty in Two Villages," December 1986.
4. Bishnu Bhandari, Narayan Kunwar, and Badri B.S. Dongol, "Rural Poverty and the Poor in Nepal," December 1986.
5. Shiva Prasad Sharma, "Rural Real Wage Rate in Nepal: A Time Series Analysis," March 1987.
6. Dilli R. Dahal, "Rural Poverty in Nepal: Issues, Problems, and Prospects," March 1987.
7. Ganesh Adhikary, "Institutional Practices and the Nepalese Poor," March 1987.
8. Krishna Bahadur Hamal, Ramchandra Bhattarai, Bhanu Niraula, "Rural Development Policy and Poverty in Nepal," March 1987.
9. Khem K. Dahal and Manoj K. Shrestha, "Rural Poverty in Nepal: A Case Study of Panchthar District," March 1987.
10. Kalpana Rai and Laxmi Sayenju, "A Micro Perspective on Poverty: A Case Study of Kubinde Village Panchayat, Sindhupalchowk District," March 1987.
11. Jiba Nath Prasain, "Rural Poverty: An Anthropological Case Study of Champa Devi Village," March 1987.
12. Tulsi Ram Pandey, "The Subsistence Farmers and Workers of Sunwal Village Panchayat, Nawal Parasi District," March 1987.