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**THE SUBSISTENCE FARMERS AND WORKERS OF
SUNWAL VILLAGE PANCHAYAT, NAVAL PARASI DISTRICT**

Tulsi Ram Pandey

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

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY IN THE

FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN NEPAL

FOREWORD

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THE SUBSISTENCE FARMERS AND WORKERS OF SUNWAL VILLAGE PANCHAYAT,
NAWAL PARASI DISTRICT

Tulsi Ram Pandey*

INTRODUCTION

Population growth, heavy consumption of natural resources, and increasingly marginal landholdings characterize Nepal's present agricultural sector. From the 1950s, Nepal's development objectives stressed increasing production, employment, and raising the standard of living of the poor (Ligle, 1979). Today Nepal must accept the "problems relating to poverty, backwardness, unemployment, and low productivity" as challenges to development (NPC, 1981).

In fact, 40 percent of the households in Nepal (42 percent in rural areas) fall below the poverty line, earning less than two rupees per day (NPC, 1977). With the current agriculture-based employment structure, an absolute increase in population places heavy pressure on existing resources. At the very least, it will force an extension of agricultural resources, such as cultivated land.

In the face of limited resources, traditional subsistence mechanisms persist. As official programs of resettlement fail to satisfy rural needs it becomes essential to study the means subsistence workers adopt to survive (Pandey, 1984).

Statement of the Problem

Although a few anthropological studies explore the general economic condition of communities such as the Sherpas and Limbus, these studies do not examine subsistence workers as a distinct economic group or adequately portray the economic conditions of subsistence workers.

Subsistence farmers and workers control few, if any, of the means of production, and have developed various ways of earning a livelihood with their limited resources. A study of traditional means of subsistence will assist efforts to raise the standard of living and working conditions of this group.

*Tulsi Ram Pandey is a member of the Sociology and Anthropology Instruction Committee, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur Multiple Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Objectives

This study explores the different ways that subsistence farmers and workers earn their livelihood, concentrating on involvement in the following fields:

- farming and other agricultural labor,
- animal husbandry,
- service provision,
- business,
- skilled and unskilled labor (including ethnic occupations), and
- miscellaneous wage labor.

Methodology

This case study of rural poverty uses a stratified, community-based approach, profiling a certain low-income section of Sunwal village panchayat.

The study group includes workers from both Vishasaya and Khakaribari villages, in Sunwal Village Panchayat. Vishasaya village was selected for two reasons: first, almost all its inhabitants are subsistence farmers or workers. Second, the village is near a forest, making it possible to identify the level of dependence on forest products. Finally, village inhabitants include both indigenous Tharus and in-migrants from the hills. Khakaribari village shares the same environmental conditions, but its inhabitants include repatriated Nepalese from Assam. Their responses augment the information collected from Vishasaya village inhabitants. Thus, for the analysis, subsistence farmers and workers of both villages are treated as a single community.

Qualitative data were obtained through observation and in-depth interviews. To gather general qualitative data about conditions in the two villages, households were interviewed disregarding sample size.

Some cases, however, were explored in depth to provide details necessary for interpretation. In addition, examination of the marginalization of landholdings required information on land fragmentation through family division or sale. For this purpose, a detailed study of all the concerned households of the community was impossible. Therefore, 25 households, five from each subcategory of landowning and landless households, were selected as a representative sample.

In this study, those households currently owning land are referred to as "farmers," while those households without land are called "workers."

Limitations

A study of a single community of one particular area cannot portray subsistence workers of the country as a whole. Therefore, this study reflects only the situation of those workers who inhabit the northern fringe of the Tarai of western Nepal.

THE SETTING

Sunwal Village Panchayat is located in the northwestern corner of Nawal Parasi District. As an extension of the Gangatic Plain, most of the village panchayat area is flat farmland. However, like other villages of the northern Tarai, this panchayat also has a large forest.

The flat farmland of the panchayat is divided into various clusters of settlements. The village of Vishasaya is located at a distance of 35 minutes' walk north from the east-west highway. Vishasaya is surrounded by forest. Varlabas stream serves as a source of irrigation for summer paddy cultivation.

Vishasaya village has a total of 127.5 bighas (one bigha equals 1.67 acres) of cultivated land, with rice as the main crop followed by wheat or mustard.

The ratio of population to land is extremely high in the village. The village has a total of 875 members (Table 1) living within 145 households. Thus if land were distributed equally, no household would own more than 17.6 katha of land (one katha equals 3645 sq. ft.).

Table 1. Population Age/Sex Structure of Vishasaya Village

Age group	Male	Female	Total
Below 15	223	209	432
15 to 65	225	210	435
Over 65	3	5	8
Total	451	424	875

Source: Field survey.

Table 2. Landholding Pattern in Vishasaya Village

Land-holding (bigha)	Indigenous households	Land-holding (bigha)	% of total land	In-migrant households	Land-holding (bigha)	% of total land	Total land
no land	13	-	-	14	-	-	-
.0 - .5	4	.8	.6	20	6.5	5.1	7.3
.55 - 1.0	8	7.7	6.1	49	45.4	35.6	53.2
1.05 - 1.5	3	3.2	2.5	14	15.2	12.0	18.4
1.55 - 2.0	8	12.3	9.7	-	-	-	12.9
2.05 - 2.5	3	7.5	5.9	3	6.7	5.3	14.9
2.55 - 3.0	2	6.0	4.7	1	3.0	2.4	9.0
3.05 and above	2	9.0	7.1	1	4.0	3.1	13.0
Total	43	46.6	36.5	102	81.0	63.5	127.6

Source: Field survey.

However, 27 households are landless and 24 households possess less than ten kathas of land. Of those households with land, 98 are considered as landowning farmers for this study. There are only 20 house-

holds owning more than 1.5 bighas of land. None of the households own more than five bighas of land (Table 2). A few of the households have reclaimed a total of almost six bighas of forest land.

On the basis of the place of origin, Vishasaya village inhabitants can be categorized as in-migrant and indigenous. The in-migrants came to the village from hill areas of Nepal. The indigenous people, or Tharus, own the majority of the land. Of the total cultivated land (127.6 bighas) 30 households of indigenous people own more than 46.5 bighas. Of the 27 landless households, 13 are indigenous and 14 are in-migrant.

In-migrant households include a number of different caste and ethnic groups, such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Magar, and untouchable (particularly Kami and Damai). Almost all the landholding households of in-migrants own marginalized landholdings. Of the landless in-migrants, 12 households are untouchable and two are Magar. These in-migrants originate from the the hill districts of western Nepal, especially Palpa, Gulmi, Syanja, Arghakhanchi, and Parbat (Table 3).

Table 3. In-migrants by District of Origin

Districts	Household through direct importation	Household through family separation
Palpa	29	7
Gulmi	21	2
Syanja	37	1
Arghakhanchi	2	-
Parbat	3	-
Total	92	10

Source: Field survey.

Subsistence farmers view animal husbandry as either a part of their agricultural work, or as subsidiary income to meet food shortages. Such households keep at least a pair of male buffalo or bullocks, and some also keep cattle, goats, and female buffalo. However, most of the landless households do not keep any livestock and only a few keep some goats, cows, or bullocks.

With one exception, all the houses in the village have a single story wooden framework. Cattle and buffalo are kept in separate sheds. Indigenous landowning households cultivate getables for home consumption, unlike in-migrants. Landless households of both categories have thatched huts, with the indigenous andless owning slightly better quality huts than those of the in-migrant landless. Vishasaya village has one primary school, and several shrines where both the indigenous and in-migrant workers worship.

Sunkumbasi tola, Khakaribari village, shares a similar environment. Repatriated Nepalese from Assam inhabit this settlement, located one kilometer south of the east-west highway. Sixty-one landless households compose this settlement. Originally inhabitants of Nepal's hill areas,

these workers migrated to Assam to escape economic hardship. When expelled in 1979 as non-Indian nationals, they returned to Nepal. In response to their demand for land or employment, the government ordered that they settle on fallow land in Khakaribari village until the government could provide them with land.

DIFFERENTIATION AMONG SUBSISTENCE FARMERS AND WORKERS

The categories defined here should not be regarded as universal. Rather, they are area-specific, applicable only to subsistence farmers and workers in the northern fringe of the Tarai. As the amount of cultivated land fails to sustain the increasing population, hill inhabitants have begun migrating to either India (Kansakar, 1982) or other regions of Nepal to improve their economic condition. Of these migrants, one category consists of those who break all economic relations with their area of origin. The Tarai has served as the destination for the majority of farmers and workers from the hills of Nepal (Ojha, 1982). Whether or not the migrants buy land where they settle, they have a different economic history than those indigenous to the area. Faced with the same environmental conditions, their economic history may direct them to different occupations than indigenous workers. On this assumption, subsistence workers are identified by landowning categorized according to their indigenous or in-migrant status.

In-migrant Landowning Households

Farmers described as landowning in-migrants own less than 1.5 bighas of land. Since they purchased the land themselves, they must have had a resource base before their migration. As they bring their hill experience to the Tarai, they may evaluate the resource endowments of their new settlement differently than indigenous households. Unlike the in-migrant landless, these landowning in-migrants cannot be further categorized on a caste basis, because there are no untouchable in-migrant landowners in the sample.

Indigenous Landowning Households

These farmers also own less than 1.5 bighas of land, but their economic history is slightly different. Prior to 1969, when land registration in their own names began, the farmers did not consider land as personal property with monetary value. Therefore, even after its registration, the indigenous farmers may evaluate land resources differently than do the in-migrants. In-migration to Vishasaya village began after 1971. Before the in-migration, indigenous workers controlled the land and developed particular ways of using this resource.

In-migrant Landless Households

Landless in-migrant workers can be further classified according to caste: as high caste and ethnic people, or as untouchables (Kamis in this study). There are two reasons for this distinction. First, untouchables have some traditional occupations which are not performed by high caste people. A separate discussion of untouchables would measure the effect of external forces on their traditional occupations. Further, since their untouchability prohibits them from engaging in some

activities, such as the sale of milk, some general inferences about the source of income of landless workers may not apply to untouchables. The second reason, which may not apply to other studies, is that the study area includes no repatriated untouchables. Therefore, the landless untouchables and landless of other castes have been placed in two different categories.

Indigenous Landless Households

Landlessness in the hill areas may be caused by high man/land ratios and lack of economic resources; in the Tarai, it may result from in-migration or from an unequal distribution of resources. Landless workers of indigenous households have been categorized separately to evaluate the cause of their landlessness. Any difference in the livelihood of the landless of different origins can be more thoroughly explored in a separate discussion.

THE LIVELIHOOD OF SUBSISTENCE FARMERS

In-migrant Landowning Farmers

Dahal, Rai, and Manzadro (1977) assume that "migration is a step taken only reluctantly. The social and economic hardship caused by leaving the village, which is of course the basic social world of the villager, is undertaken only as the last resort." Certainly migration to a different social surrounding is an emotional shock to the in-migrant. A worker migrates for compelling economic reasons; either he is forced to leave his village, or he willingly leaves seeking better employment. The marginalized landholdings of the study area suggest that the in-migrants may not have improved their economic conditions even in their new environment. This suggests that migration may have been a final economic strategy to maintain subsistence.

Livelihood in the Place of Origin (the Hills). Most Nepalese work in the agricultural sector. The type and pattern of landholding determine the other economic strategies adopted by subsistence workers. Only Brahmins, whose traditional social values forbid them to plough the field, hired ploughmen. Both sexes worked on the farm; children looked after the livestock while senior family members worked in the fields.

Low productivity of small landholdings supplied insufficient agricultural revenues to meet subsistence needs. In addition to food, workers had to buy clothes, tobacco, kerosene, and spices. To meet these and other expenses (such as marriage and burial ceremonies), the workers developed other employment to supplement farm income.

Animal husbandry (of milk cows, buffalo, or goats) provided one alternative source of income. Raising milk animals in the hills of Nepal requires hayfields near the home. Each of the sample households had at least one milk buffalo but not more than two. All the households but one owned insufficient hayfields to supply fodder for large animals. The one owning enough hayfields also sold grass from the field. While children generally consumed the buffalo milk, each household sold 10 to 20 liters of ghee in markets such as Tansen or Butwal in order to buy kerosene or cloth. When they migrated, none of the households owned any goats because they lacked sufficient pasturage. Bullocks

were used to plough farms and only occasionally hired out for cash.

For the farmers in the western hills, animal husbandry brought only limited income. The sample households looked to other activities as well to supplement their agricultural income. Limited education (below higher secondary) prevented their family members from seeking income from technical, administrative, or clerical work. They also lacked investment capital and transportation necessary to engage in business. Industrial employment was not available; therefore, workers hired themselves out as wage laborers or entered the military service in India. In addition, agricultural wage labor is seen as a loss of social prestige.

Rising debt and population growth appear to be the major causes of the households' migration to the Tarai. Thus, permanent migration to the Tarai is in itself a subsistence strategy. It is a step taken to escape from the deteriorating economic conditions of the hills. Once the in-migrants reached the Tarai, their livelihood has assumed various forms which are described below.

Livelihood in the Place of Destination (the Tarai). Migration to Tarai, a region which contains 64.7 percent Nepal's cultivated land, should carry a greater potential for land accumulation than exists in the hills (Dhital, 1974). But as two percent of the households own over 27.5 percent of the cultivated land, and 63.5 percent of the households own only 10.5 percent of the country's cultivated land (Zaman, 1973), an increase in accumulation is actually very unlikely. Thirty-one percent of the households (83 households) surveyed own less than 1.5 bighas of land (NPC, 1977). Thus even in the Tarai, these workers must engage in other activities to supplement their income.

Household Expenditure. Before examining subsistence activities, basic, year-long household expenditures were estimated. Assuming that a family consists of 4.5 adult members, each consuming two manas (one mana equals one handful) of rice for meals, the yearly household requirement of rice (for 360 days) will be 20.25 muris (160 manas equals 1 muri). Meals are composed of rice with pulses, vegetables, or at least salt and chili. Foodgrain for breakfast requires additional expenditure. Milk is essential for infants whose mothers must work outside the home during the day. Festival meals require meat, ghee, and other foods not used in daily meals. The households also incur expenses for clothing, purchase and repair of agricultural tools, medicine, and education.

In addition to meeting basic needs, households must send gifts to their married daughters once or twice a year. They must pay rent to the government, as well as a specified amount for school construction. The households also require kerosene, oil, sugar, and tobacco, and give money or gifts for religious ceremonies.

Apart from these anticipated expenses, a household may face an unexpected expense such as a marriage, the performance of a death ceremony, or the purchase of bullocks. On the basis of the information from sample households, workers meet their myriad expenses through the following activities.

Farming. The in-migrants derive most of their income from farming. However, with the proceeds from sale of their land in the hills, they cannot accumulate much land in the Tarai. Taken together, the 88 in-migrant households own only 81 bighas of land.

As noted earlier, paddy is the major crop grown, followed by wheat. Paddy cultivation starts from the last of May or early June when farmers begin to prepare the seed bed. Most of the farmers cultivate two different varieties of paddy, which mature at different times. Different maturation periods ensures the availability of paddy during the lean months of October and November.

Farmers estimate that one bigha of farmland can produce a maximum of 32 muris of unhusked rice (or 14 muris of husked rice). Immediately after harvesting fast maturing varieties of paddy, some farmers begin mustard cultivation. Mustard seeds provide edible oil for a few months for some of the subsistence households.

After all the paddy has been harvested, farmers begin wheat cultivation. However, almost one-fourth of the land in the community remains too wet for anything but rice cultivation. In addition, the nutrient content of the soil has been largely depleted. The villagers estimate that one bigha of land can produce, at most, six muris of wheat.

In February, local streams begin to dry and maize farming becomes impossible. Insufficient land prevents cultivation of lentils, peas, and other pulses. For home consumption, some households raise some vegetables such as gourds, yams, and cabbages in the corners of their fields. Most in-migrant landowners do not buy any vegetables from the market. When green vegetables are scarce, households substitute water, boiled and seasoned with spices.

With 1.5 bighas of land, a farmer can produce, at most, 48 muris of unhusked rice and nine muris of wheat. Given a family size of 6.13 members (or 4.5 adult members), the farmer can provide only enough food for household consumption. Bad weather may lower production; and net production can be reduced through in-kind wages to agricultural laborers. Since the farmer cannot use all his crops for household consumption, he must supplement his agricultural income to buy enough food.

Agricultural Labor. Agricultural labor as an income source can be measured in two ways:

- through income derived from wage labor on neighboring farms; and
- through savings generated from not using wage labor on one's own farm.

Few landowning farmers derive any income from agricultural wage labor. All farm households must work their land at the same time, and during the off-season, there is no agricultural employment. Of the five households sampled, only two noted any income from agricultural wage labor. Their activities include threshing paddy, digging manure from pits, and digging farm fields. However, both of these households earn less than NRs.50 per year from this labor.

All the in-migrant, landowning households use very little wage labor in their own fields. The Brahmin households hire a ploughman; otherwise, farmers rely on family labor, or help from their neighbors, which they return as needed.

The in-migrants came to the Tarai with very limited resources; perhaps this explains why they selected an area with a nearby forest. Even without clearing forest for cultivation, farmers derive economic benefits from the public land. They raise livestock which graze in the forest, and gather materials (such as wood or herbs) from the forest.

Animal Husbandry. Most of in-migrant landowning households raise goats, buffalo, and bullocks. Male buffalo and bullocks are used for agricultural work; female buffalo give milk for the children. Goats bring considerable income; the five sample households own a total of 133 goats. Since one goat breeds twice a year (and produces two offspring), workers can sell several goats without disturbing those that are breeding. Farmers spend the additional income on salt, kerosene, oil, and foodgrain.

Many households in Vishasaya village sell milk or milk products. The five sample households own a total of five milk buffaloes. One of them earns NRs.60 per month through the sale of half a liter of milk per day to the local tea stall. A milk buffalo yielding up to three liters of milk per day costs between NRs.3000 and 5000. A high-grade variety, which yields up to five liters of milk per day, costs more than NRs.8000. Thus the greatest barrier to animal husbandry is the cost of the animal itself.

Extraction from the Forest. Farmers in this area have no hayfields. Therefore, they gather both fuel and fodder from the forest. Every two days, a household consumes at least one bhari (a load that can be carried by a person in one trip). During the winter season, they may require one bhari per day. The forest provides wood for construction, as well as tubers and fruits.

Income from Employment in India. In Vishasaya village, 12 in-migrant households have 13 members working in India and contributing to household income. Four are in the military; most of the remaining nine are chowkidars for companies. Other sources of income include Indian military pensions and teaching positions. Only one household has a member with carpentry or construction skills. Yet his skills do not bring him much income, because he cannot devote all his time to carpentry or compete with the Indian carpenters.

Child Labor, Underemployment, and Indebtedness. Child labor is used primarily for animal husbandry and household work. The five in-migrant sample households have a total of 19 children below 15 years of age. For these children, work at home takes precedence over school. Before and after school, the children usually bring fodder from the forest or tend the livestock. They also help their parents transplant, reap, and thresh foodgrain.

The rate of in-migrant underemployment appears high. With the present cropping patterns, the annual labor demand for the cultivation of one bigha of farm land is 113 man days: 75 for rice and 37 for

wheat. Since women and children tend the livestock, the men remain underemployed for most of the year.

Unanticipated expenditures are the primary cause of rural indebtedness. With their household income, the in-migrants can just meet basic needs; an unexpected large-scale expenditure, such as a death ceremony, marriage, or purchase of buffalo, forces them into debt.

Indigenous Landowning Farmers

Other subsistence farmers in the northern Tarai follow a pattern of activities similar to those of the landowning in-migrants, however, with different economic histories. For the indigenous farmers the in-migration has changed and limited the scope of their traditional subsistence activities.

Livelihood Before the In-migration. Before 1971 Vishasaya village was a forest-locked community of Tharus. The Tharus farmed the land now shared by 118 households earning a generous income.

Before the 1968/69 survey and land registration in their names, the farmers worked land owned by a landlord and paid tax to the government on his behalf. With their long history of land tenure, the farmers ran little risk of eviction by the landlord.

The low man/land ratio meant that a farmer could cultivate as much land as desired. Farmers grew rice in the summer and pulses in the winter. Since the land belonged to the landlord, farmers did not worry about damage.

Indigenous farmers raised bullocks for farm work, and buffalo for milk production. All the households with cattle employed several individuals at the community level to take care of all the cattle in the community. In return, each household with cattle provided about eight pounds of rice for each head of cattle for one particular year. Family members could easily collect cattle fodder in the forest; thus, most of the hay from the paddy was left in the farm fields, eliminating the need for animal manure as fertilizer.

The village produced most of the necessary materials. Farmers sold their rice to buy cloth, kerosene, salt, and sugar at a weekly market. The indigenous farmers had few necessary expenditures and no savings. They sold or consumed surplus products during marriages or other festivals, by arranging large feasts for their neighbors. Except for rent payments to the government and some unpaid labor for local landlords, they had no obligations outside their community.

The Effect of In-migration on Landholdings. In the 1960s, two developments affected the lives of the indigenous farmers: the construction of the east-west highway and the registration of land in their own names. Construction of the highway made their village more accessible, while land registration weakened traditional ties to the land.

Land registration created disparity in land distribution. Some of the indigenous households registered larger tracks of land than others. As no farmers had records of purchase or sale until the registration,

most households were unaware of the monetary value of their land. The farmers thought that land registration would increase their land tax; therefore, some households did not register any land and others registered only a few bighas. During the first few years after registration, the disparity in land registration had little effect on their traditional livelihood. Those with large holdings allowed the landless to cultivate their fields, as long as they paid rent to the government. But when migrants came to the Tarai, farmers began to understand the value of their land. Those without land were evicted and those with small landholdings could not buy additional land

The most lasting effect of the in-migration has been the alienation of the indigenous farmers from their land. The indigenous households who registered land had not paid for it, and had little idea of its value. They thus began to sell their land without hesitation. As a result, indigenous households controlled 116 bighas of land in 1973 but today control only 46 bighas.

In-migration caused not only a reduction in the size of indigenous landholdings, but also an increase in the number of landless households. In 1973, the study area included only 23 indigenous households, of which only four were landless. Now there are 43 indigenous households, of which 30 own any land.

Present Livelihood. The farms of indigenous and in-migrant farmers share the same cropping patterns, production potential, and annual labor demand. However, indigenous workers prefer to use wage labor rather than a labor exchange system. Except for reaping and transplanting, the women work only in the household. The indigenous workers also derive subsistence income from very different sources.

None of the indigenous households have members employed in India or Nepal. They do not raise livestock for additional income, nor do they supply specialized skills. Instead, they engage in agricultural wage labor, such as ploughing or digging in the fields. The women make small baskets from rush plants to earn a few rupees from the in-migrant households. In addition, indigenous workers bring logs from the forest, or collect flowers for sale to the wine-making industries. These are their only nonagricultural sources of income.

The crops and additional income cannot fulfill the annual needs of these households. In order to survive, they have adjusted their consumption pattern. First, they consume fruit from the Aegle marmelos correa tree during the spring. Second, their children wear few clothes during the summer season. Third, they do not send their children to school above primary level because of the expense. If these measures are not enough to support their families, they sell some land.

THE LIVELIHOOD OF SUBSISTENCE WORKERS

Indigenous Landless Workers

Indigenous households lost their land either by failing to register it, or by selling land they had registered. Of the 13 landless households of indigenous workers, seven sold their land and six failed to

register the land. As they now own no land, their primary source of income is agricultural wage labor.

Agricultural Labor. Information gathered from the sample households suggests that the availability of agricultural wage labor is greater for men than for women. The only crop that requires the work of women is transplanting paddy. Women also work with the men to weed paddy and reap paddy and wheat. The men plough, dig, weed, reap, and thresh the grain.

Cropping season for paddy begins in mid-June when monsoon starts and farmers begin to prepare seed beds. At that time, farmers begin to hire workers to plough their fields. Farm fields left fallow after the wheat harvest must then be reploughed, and the field margins prepared. When the seedlings have grown, farmers must transplant them. For about two months, the indigenous landless men find employment at these activities. Most farm households use family members to weed their fields, so wage laborers must wait until harvest time to obtain additional work. Farmers then need additional laborers to help reap and thresh the harvest, and prepare the fields for wheat, mustard, and potato cultivation. Laborers receive about one month's work during this season. Some farmers hire laborers during January and February to prepare fallow fields.

Thus in one agricultural year, a man can receive about 100 days agricultural employment. From agricultural labor, he can earn five muris of paddy and full meals for a hundred days. Household members can save their wage earnings for those days when they have no employment. However, in families where the number of nonworkers exceeds the number of wage laborers, the income from wage labor hardly provides enough for the family's meals.

Extraction from the Forest. Agricultural wage labor does not provide sufficient income for landless workers for the entire year. To earn additional subsistence income, the workers gather forest products.

Landless workers often collect, prepare, and sell wood to other workers for the construction of huts. Most of the landless workers earn income from this activity. Information from the sample households suggests that workers earn between NRs.1500 and 3000 from the construction of one house.

Landless workers also collect tubers in the forest, and the shoots of various trees to consume as vegetables. Generally women and children collect tubers and faggots for fuel, although the men may also do so if they are unemployed. The household members also collect flowers which they sell for a few rupees.

Other Sources of Income. None of the households raise livestock, nor do they receive income from employment in India, business activities, or skilled work such as carpentry. In the off-season, some landless seek work enlarging the terraces of landowning farmers. Last year, one of the sample households earned NRs.300 through this work. They also perform construction work, collect faggots for brick baking, or load and unload wood onto carts. On days that they are unemployed, they fish in local streams or catch mice and crabs in the fields of

landholders.

The landless are well aware of their tenuous economic position, and embrace any chance to live as a servant in a prosperous household, exchanging their labor for food or other goods. They adapt their standard of living to their level of income and their limited resources.

In-migrant Landless of High Caste and Ethnic Groups

These workers are Nepalese, who were repatriated from Assam in 1979. As they did not migrate directly to the study area, they have an economic history somewhat different from the others.

Economic History in the Place of Origin. The five sample households cite Syanja, Baglung, and Gulmi districts as their place of origin. They belong to Brahmin, Chhetri, and Magar caste and ethnic groups.

All five sample households owned some land in the hills; two had three halls and the other three owned a little over one hall of unirrigated land through their extended families. (One hall refers to the amount of land that can be ploughed by a team of oxen in one day). According to the household heads with three halls of land, their farm income and wage income from their parents could support their families during their early childhood. But when their parents had more than seven children, crops and wages could not cover family needs. When this occurred, the children became cowherds for more prosperous families. Their fathers were forced to go into debt to purchase foodgrain and clothes. When the children grew up, they decided to go to India to earn money for their families.

For those with less than 1.5 halls of land, the farm never provided enough for the family's needs. Therefore, the heads of two of the sample households had for a generation been the debtors of prosperous households. Under this debtor system, they could get a loan of a few hundred rupees; to repay it, they had to work in the creditors' houses in any required activities. These debtors were allowed a few days to plough their fields and their wives performed other work on the family land, and also engaged in agricultural wage labor.

Through debtor service, workers could only manage to pay the interest on their loans. Since they always had to work for their creditors, they could not earn extra money to pay the principal. In addition, the workers could not incur further debts without paying the outstanding one. When their family size increased, two of the households left their place of origin. One family migrated directly to India, and the other went to the Tarai, leaving their property to their creditors.

The final member of the sample also performed wage labor, but had to go into debt to meet some large scale expenditures. He subsequently lost all his money and went to the Tarai. Thus, of the five households in the sample, three migrated directly to India, and two migrated first to the Tarai. In the Tarai, they began clearing the forest for cultivation, but left when some of their children died from disease.

Economic Life in India. The farmers adopted migration to India as a subsistence strategy. At the time of migration, two of the heads of

sample households had not yet married; one joined the military and the other became a chowkidar. The other three migrated with all their family members. They went directly to Assam and found employment as servants in Nepalese households, raising buffalo for milk production.

Service in Nepalese households supplied a few hundred rupees, enough to support a family. The in-migrants gradually began to clear the forest for cultivation. The household heads saved cash to purchase milk buffalo or cows. They then began to farm and sell milk.

Repatriated Nepalese From Assam

In 1979 the Indian government began to expel non-Indian nationals from Assam. The government compelled thousands of Nepalese nationals to leave the area where they settled many years ago.

Like other Nepalese in Assam, the five sample households had cultivated unregistered plots of land. Therefore, they could not sell their land. In addition, most of the households either could not sell their livestock or had to sell them at unreasonable prices.

The in-migrants were familiar with the western region of Nepal, but migrated to the Tarai because of economic opportunities. All the repatriates appealed to the office of the Commissioner of Lumbini Zone for land for resettlement. In response, the commissioner ordered them to live in Sunwal and other nearby areas. The repatriates were temporarily provided with about half a katha of land (one katha equals 3645 sq. ft.), but the government has provided no further assistance.

Present Livelihood. Like their indigenous counterparts, these landless in-migrants perform agricultural labor and collect forest products. One difference between the repatriates and the indigenous landless workers is the extensive involvement of the repatriated women in wage labor. These women more frequently transplant and paddy weed to supplement household income. Unlike the indigenous landless workers, the male repatriates earn little income from the sale of wood, and they do not seek employment as servants. Instead, they engage in business activities and provide services not offered by other subsistence workers, such as driving rickshaws.

Business. In off-season some repatriates sell baked maize, tangerines, bananas, and cucumbers near the roadside or in Parasi Bazar, the district headquarters. Three of the five sample households engage in these activities. They buy maize from farmers for three to four maize per rupee, and then bake and sell it for one to two maize per rupee. They purchase other fruits and vegetables wholesale and retail them to roadside passengers. According to the sample households, this business provides them with a profit of about 39 percent of their investment.

Other Services. Driving rickshaws also supplies significant income to some of the repatriated households. Of the five sample households, two earn income from this source. On the road linking Parasi Bazar to the Mahendra highway, there is no regular bus service, so rickshaw drivers provide the transportation.

Most of the rickshaw drivers do not own their rickshaws. They hire them for seven rupees per day. In one trip, a man can pull up to three persons, at three rupees per person. In one day a driver can make four to eight trips, depending on the season. About 25 rickshaws serve the feeder road and almost half of them are pulled by repatriates. Occasionally, more than one household member drives a rickshaw. Other members of the family usually labor for a wage, or sells agricultural produce, or faggots.

In-migrant Landless of Untouchable Castes

Twelve landless in-migrant households of untouchable caste live in Vishasaya village. Eleven of the 12 households are Kamis (blacksmiths) and one is a Damai (tailor). With a few exceptions, these landless in-migrants earn their living through the same activities as the other landless workers. As untouchables, these workers have fewer opportunities to work as servants in prosperous households. Unlike the indigenous landless, however, the in-migrant landless of untouchable castes earn a significant income from the sale of faggots.

The untouchable in-migrants have a different economic history than the other workers. Some of the untouchable sample households had owned land in their place of origin. In addition, none of the sample households currently receive any income from India. Their caste status limits their economic choices; they cannot serve as servants and they can earn income only through occupations that are not a source of income for higher castes. Since the landless untouchables can only earn money from wage labor or their ethnic occupation, they depend heavily on wage labor for income. These workers gave information to estimate their wage labor in the hills.

Livelihood in Place of Origin. The five sample households migrated from Synaja and Gulmi Districts, where 69.2 percent of the households own either no land or less than 0.5 ha (calculated from NPC, 1977). Thus two-thirds of the households own land insufficient to employ even their family members. The five untouchable households in the sample had a total of 24 family members before migration; 13 of whom were of working at a minimum wage.

The untouchables established a patron-client relation with households of other caste and ethnic groups; they supplied their services in return for a stipulated amount of foodgrain per year. Each untouchable household had between five to 12 patrons, and from each patron they received five to ten handfulls of foodgrain, depending on the services they rendered. During festivals, the patrons gave them food, rice, vegetables, salt, kerosene, oil, and even clothes.

Initially, iron-working provided the households with a significant income. However, as factory-produced metalware became available in the hills, their income declined. Simultaneously, their patrons lost land through division amongst sons, which reduced demand for their blacksmith skills. They then were forced to work for patrons on a piece basis.

Given the limited job availability and the changing attitudes of their patron households, these households could not earn sufficient income for their needs. They survived by eating gruel from maize and

millet for most of the year. During the months before the harvest of maize, they ate gruel only once a day, and ate nettles and pumpkin shoots. These households had no money for education or clothing. To improve their economic situation, they gradually migrated to the Tarai.

Livelihood in Place of Destination. Soon after their migration, the untouchables tried to cultivate the forest but were prevented by forest officials. They have now settled on a small, barren corner of the forest. During the agricultural seasons, the untouchables perform agricultural wage labor; in the off-season, they sell wood or sell faggots in the local market. One bhari of faggots costs five rupees in the local market, and a couple can hew and transport up to four or five bhari of faggots for sale. Tubers from the forest cover their remaining food needs. Only one household head still practices his ethnic occupation by repairing agricultural tools. Since there is no demand for their metal work in the village, the other households no longer practice this skill.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agricultural income and animal husbandry provide the primary income for farmers in the hill areas of Nepal. However, these households earn additional income by finding employment in India or by working as a debtor servant in a prosperous household. Most of the untouchables earn their living through agricultural wage labor, carrying loads, or their caste occupation. In the Tarai, especially in the northern Tarai, subsistence farmers also earn money by farming and animal husbandry.

The indigenous subsistence farmers labor for a wage and use forest resources in different ways. Both hill and Tarai farmers use wage labor and forest products as sources of income. Repatriates also run small businesses. Most in-migrant untouchables are not working in their traditional caste occupation.

In the hills, farm income cannot cover family needs. Lack of pasture land limits the opportunities for animal husbandry, and nonagricultural employment is unavailable. The increase in population and decrease in size of landholdings compels subsistence farmers to go into debt, serve as debtor servants, work in India, or migrate to India or the Tarai.

Population growth and the reduction of landholding size in the hills also affects untouchable subsistence workers. Reduction in landholding size also reduces the generosity of patrons, as well as their need for traditional caste work. In addition, smaller landholdings require less agricultural wage labor. As landholdings become more fragmented, the untouchables are forced to migrate to find employment. The prospects for accommodating the increasing population of the Tarai appear dim.

Redistribution of large landholdings in the Tarai might absorb the subsistence in-migrants for awhile, but such a move would not necessarily be equitable. As even large landholdings are under tenancy, redistribution might not result in any surplus of land for the in-migrants.

Nor can emigration solve the problem of the poverty of these immigrants. Effective implementation of the policy of "controlling the flow of immigration into the country" (UN, 1980) reduces the prospect of emigration to India. The policy of forbidding Indians to come to Nepal may motivate India to adopt the same policy. Even if India does not forbid emigration, the repatriation of Nepalese in Assam suggests that we should be able to solve our problems without any dependence on sources beyond our control.

Nepal now faces two problems: accelerated population growth and lack of new employment fields. These have resulted in accelerated consumption of natural resources with little development of economic alternatives. Information provided by the subsistence workers suggests that "the middle peasant today is the poor peasant of next generation and the laborer in the generation after" (Seddon, 1979).

Nepal does not lack resources, only effective utilization of those resources. Foreign aid, which bears "the story of a trickle turning into a torrent," has supplied a staggering amount of rupees during the last three decades (Misra and Sharma, 1982). But the basic question for Nepal is how available resources have been utilized. No one has analyzed whether the roads, airports, hospitals, and colleges have raised the standard of living of the general population. Furthermore, development programs have not allowed farmers to mobilize rural resources to create jobs in their areas.

Often the beneficiaries of development programs are not those most in need. Several evaluation reports of Integrated Rural Development Projects note that the beneficiaries of programs to increase agriculture, improve tap water, or provide irrigation facilities are more prosperous households. The majority of those producing only one crop and those who have to migrate from the area because of economic hardship are the subsistence farmers and workers (Acharya, 1982).

Recommendations

Whatever may be the extent, causes and direction of rural poverty, there are some alternatives.

1. Population growth should be strictly controlled.
 - a. Since every resource has its upper limit, we must balance population and resources. Incentives, either monetary or social service, should be given to those who adopt permanent means of family planning after a limited number of children. For better population control, the abortion law should be relaxed.
 - b. Other socioeconomic factors, such as economic security, may induce the parents to produce more children. A system of economic security should be developed for the rural aged to reduce their dependence on large families.
2. Development policies and programs should improve the traditional techniques and occupation of rural farmers, and motivate them to open up some cottage and small scale industries that are based on

and supported by rural resources. In areas with an adequate supply of forest resources, farmers can raise livestock and produce milk.

3. The poor can utilize extension services, such as institutional credit and technical assistance, only if they are encouraged through public policies. This is possible only if a workable definition of the poor is constructed, they are identified, and allowed to participate through their own organizations. To do so requires research at the national level about the income sources and consumption patterns of the poor. Finally, the poor should have separate organizations from more prosperous farmers, which represent their own interests.

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