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LITERACY WATCH COMMITTEE OF NEPAL
BULLETIN NO. 4
Special Issue on Poverty Alleviation
1997 February

Wailing of Mother Nepal

Nepal is one of the holiest of the holy lands where Lord Buddha and Mother Sita were born. Where lord Pasupatinath resides. At the same time Nepal is inhabited by majority of the poorest people. More than 70% of Nepalese earn less than 40 cents US Dollar a day. About 9 million Nepalese are illiterates.

Nepal has one of the best democratic systems of government in the world governed by some of the most inefficient and corrupt leaders and administrators. So they are unconcerned about the illiteracy of the people. So that they could rule over the people who live under the darkness of ignorance and culture of silence.

International donors are happy here organizing meetings and seminars and passing high sounding resolutions and slogans, which make no sense to 90% of the Nepalese people.

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Editorial

UNDP and the World Bank have defined that a person is poor who doesn't earn more than \$ 150 dollar a year, According to this definition 70 % of the people of Nepal come under poverty line. But the National Planning Commission (NPC) of Nepal has made separate definition about poverty for Nepal. The NPC defined that a person considered as poor who does not have annual income less than Rs. 2700 per year. According to this definition 45% of the Nepalese people remain below poverty line in 1995. The level of poverty in 1976-77 was only 36% which increased to 42% in 1984/85 and to 45% in 1994/ 95. According to the UNDP/ Word Bank Report (1997) Nepal's per capita income is the eight lowest in the world. Thus the people and the country are getting poorer every year, but on the other hand, political leaders, high government officials, businessmen and some other clever people are becoming more and more richer. Recently, the NPC has published Policy Paper of Ninth Five-Year Plan, which states that poverty alleviation will be the priority of the Govt. for coming five years. Similarly, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNDP and in other donor countries also are giving big slogans to mitigate poverty. But the sad fact is that the people are facing more harsh life day after day. People's poverty level is increasing year after year. Most of the rich persons and other high placed people have a tendency to consider the poor person as beggars, helpless and pitiful. Really, this is a very dangerous notion and it may turn the poor as beggars in the last run. To do away with such dangerous attitude we must first think that poor are human beings who could help themselves. What they need is favorable atmosphere and opportunities. We should equip the poor with life related education which empowers them to think and to act. If they are given this opportunity they will be free themselves from the poverty trap. True Literacy Program's aim is to empower people to help themselves. Thus, all of us who take pride being literacy educators must advocate to the Government and the donor agencies firstly taking literacy program seriously, because this is the most important program for poverty alleviation. It is already well known fact all over world that poor people are also illiterates. Illiteracy and poverty are the two sides of a same coin. Therefore, this Number 4 issue of the Literacy Watch Committee Bulletin is trying to present the real situation of poverty in Nepal and then suggesting ways of mitigating poverty. We hope that this bulletin will help the readers to think objectively and work for literacy and to alleviate poverty as soon as possible.

Definition of Poverty

Human Development Report 1997 published by UNDP has concentrated on the issues of Poverty Alleviation.

The Report says " Poverty has many faces". It is much more than low income. It also reflects poor health and education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human & political rights and the absence of dignity, confidence & self-respect. The Report also stated " Three Perspectives on Poverty " as below:

1. **Income Perspective:** A person is poor if and only if his/her income level is below the defined poverty line.
2. **Basic Needs Perspective:** Poverty is deprivation of materials requirement for minimally acceptable fulfillment of human needs, including food.
3. **Capacity Perspective:** Poverty represents some basic capabilities to function a person lacking the opportunity to achieve some minimally acceptable levels of these functions.

These are technocratic definition. The definitions of poverty done by actual people in the grass root area are more appealing such as;

"Poverty is criminal, because it does not allow people to be people, it is the cruelest denial of all human beings."

- **An educator from Colombia**

"Poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied"

- **An educator.**

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Poverty Burden

The World Bank mission in Nepal established in 1963 first lent \$ 1.76 million in 1969. At that time below 30 % of the population were under the poverty line. It rises to 36% in 1976/77, to 42% in 1984/85 and 45% in 1994/95. The World Bank (WB) has provided \$ 1.3 billion in about 70 credit schemes. (The Kathmandu Post February 6. 1998)

Alarming Poverty Situation in Nepal and Ninth Five Years Plan

According to the basic document prepared for the Ninth Five Year Plan (B.S. 2054-2059) people living below poverty line has increased from 42% in 1984 to 45% in 1995. The statistics of 1977 says that it was 36%. This shows that poverty is increasing rather than decreasing as envisaged by the Eighth Five-Year Plan.

The document has identified growing unemployment and under employment as main causes of poverty. The people who own less than one hector of land are about 70%.

The 9th Plan has set a target to reduce people living below poverty line to 32%. Agriculture based industry, tourism and construction sectors are given priority to reduce poverty. It is hoped that through those sectors national production would be increased consequently job opportunities would be created for more people. Other proposals are making basic education for all, adult literacy program, skilled training, public health, nutrition, and drinking water available for all.

Those target and program are good but can we trust what the National Planning Commission says, the records of performance of NPC since its founding in 1955 is not impressive. Between 1958 to 1990 GDP grew just 3.4 % every year and GNP by 0.8 %.

HMG has many programs for poverty alleviation such as small farmers program, credit for rural women, self-help health program, abolition of bonded labor, resettlement of displacement people women skills training programs, village development bank, cottage industries development etc. But those programs were not implemented successfully due to political interference and corruption. If the past record of any guide it is very difficult to believe that the achievement of 9th Plan will be any better than the past ones.

According to Mr. K.K. Guragharana, There are various estimates of poverty line, income and incidence of poverty in Nepal. The basic needs Program in Nepal in 1984/1985, made the first attempt in Nepalese development planning context to derive a poverty line. The minimum daily per capita calorie requirement was assumed to be 2340 calories and 2252 calories for the Hill/Mountain, Terai and all Nepal respectively. It was also assumed that 65% of total expenditure on average and that all calorie requirements were met from food intake of cereals, pulses and potato only. The poverty line incomes for the Hill/Mountain, Terai and all Nepal were estimated as NRs. 2,168, NRs. 1719 and NRs. 1971 respectively at 1985/86 prices. Since the estimated per capita national annual income for Nepal in 1985/86 was only NRs. 2,700. The estimated poverty line comes at 73% of the per capita income. This situation of poverty line near the average national income coupled with the existing inequality in income distribution indicates a situation of pervasive poverty in Nepal.

Yet the National Planning Commission estimate and the Nepal Rastra Bank Multi purpose Household Budget Survey of 1984/85 indicates only about 40% of the population below poverty line, While almost all micro and macro studies on poverty suggest that this is a gross under-estimate for two reasons. Firstly the poverty line income (about US\$99 for the hills and about US\$ 93 for the Terai) is unreasonably low and it would be much larger if actual market prices of essential consumer goods and services are used. Secondly the Nepal Rastra Bank survey fails to adequately sample the poorest and the richest household, perhaps because of inaccessibility and difficulty in collecting information. Therefore, the reported inequality in income distribution is biased downward. In addition, measurement error and problem of defining household income are also responsible for the under-estimation of income inequality in Nepal.

The poor in the hill areas of Nepal, who comprise about 60% of all poor in the country are located in region where arable land is scarce, agricultural productivity is low, and drought, flood and environmental degradation are common.

Women often constitute a relatively more deprived group even among the poor, because of inter-household discrimination as well as social and legal discriminations between the sexes. Most rural female of age 16 years and above are either lactating or pregnant and give birth to about six children during their reproductive age. A recent UNICEF report on the status of women and children in Nepal reports that gender disparity starts right from birth and continues through different stages of the girl child's life. But in fact women and girls on average have at least 25 percent more workload than boys and men.(Mr. K.K. Gurugharana's paper presented for National Seminal for poverty alleviation, 22-24 June 1992.)

Who is benefiting from poverty alleviation programs?

There were only 36% of the total population absolute poverty in 1976 and 1977, which increased 42% in 1994 and 1995. It is sad to admit that the number of the people who can not acquire enough resources to feed themselves subsistence amount of food, which is 2256 calories, is not decreasing, in recent years..

On contrary as an economist once said, the poverty of those who are involved in poverty alleviation projects have been able to fatten themselves consuming so much that they now need treatment over diet health diseases.

Similarly it would be very interesting to know how much money was begged from foreign donors by the government, and from the tax payers of various countries by the Government and INGOs, to implement different programs of Poverty Alleviation.

According to the World Bank report, to provide a Rs. 1 benefit to the poor in India, the Indian Govt. spends any thing between Rs. 2 and 7.

I believe the cost to provide one rupee benefit to the poor in Nepal is not less than that in

India. It is because our geographical terrain is much more difficult than of India and the government machinery is less effective than in India.

As all know, in other to fly with the poverty, the World Bank and other similar donors advice to go in for market oriented reforms, invest in infrastructure and human capital, no subsidies, and formulate sustainable anti poverty programs.

If we are really serious to provide maximum percentage of money spend in the name of poverty alleviation to the real poor, planning commission has to strengthen its monitoring and screening programs. There are many projects, which have least effect on the poverty alleviation, but are still continued just to continue the flow of fund to handful of powerful people managing the project.

(By: Mr. Prateek Pradhan
Summary of the write up in the
Kathamdu Post, 30 January 1998.)

Poverty Alleviation is Possible

Many countries have successfully reduced the number of people living below poverty line. The Human Development Report of UNDP 1997 has reported that if a country has right policy and sincere effort poverty alleviation is not an impossible task. The report has published data of some of the countries, which have been successful to reduce poverty incidence in their countries.

Figure 1:

Figure 2:

Lords of Poverty

Mr. Graham Hancock, a reputed journalist who had studied International AID Operations carefully writes "Despite the fads, fancies, new techniques 'new directions' and endless rethinks that have characterized the development business over half century, and despite the expenditure of hundred of millions of dollars, there is little evidence to prove that the poor of the third world have actually benefited Year in, Year out, however, there can be no doubt that aid pays the hefty salaries and underwrites the privileged lifestyles of the international civil servants, 'development exports' consultants and assorted free loaders who staff the aid agencies themselves.

He goes on saying " of course, the ugly reality is that most poor people in most poor countries most of the time never receive or even make contact with aid in any tangible shape or form; whether it is present or absent, increased or decreased, are thus issues that are simply irrelevant to the ways in which they conduct their daily lives. After the multi-billion -dollar ' financial flows' involved have been shaken though the sieve of over-priced and irrelevant goods that must be bought in the donor countries, filtered again in the deep pockets of hundreds of thousands of foreign experts and aid agency staff, skimmed off by dishonest commission agents, and stolen by corrupt Ministers and Presidents, there is really very little left to go around. This little, furthermore, is then used thoughtlessly, or maliciously, or irresponsibly by those in power - who have no mandate from the poor, who do not consult with them and who are utterly indifferent to their fate. Small wonders, then, that the effects of aid are so often vicious and destructive for the most vulnerable members of human society.

IMF and the World Bank have been imposing structural adjustment to the countries which get money from IMF or the World Bank Structural Adjustment is single measure of increasing a country's revenues and reducing expenditures and it involves all or most of the following austerity measures devaluation of local currency, draconian cut in government expenditures particularly on

education, and health care; radical reduction or complete elimination of food and other consumption subsidies; measures like reduction in wages and restrictions in the availability of credit, which are also designed to reduce the overall level of consumption within ' adjusting' societies; across-the-board abolition of price controls, coupled with privatization of public utilities and immediate price increase for the services they provide (like water, electricity, etc.); and, finally, higher taxes and higher interest rates.

With astonishingly few variations to allow for differing local circumstances, this package of measures is applied in every single country that takes the IMF's or the World Bank's shilling. It does not require uncanny prescience to predict to consequence for the worst of and most vulnerable groups in the Third World:. Of course cuts in budget for primary health care hurt the poor; of course cuts in wages hurt the poor; and of course higher prices for basic service hurt the poor.

The agencies know this and ignore it: the conditions that government must meet prior to receiving structural adjustment loans have, for example, never included improved human rights, increased freedom of speech, reduced military spending, controls on graft, or any other similar reforms.

The agencies are also well aware of the damage that adjustment can do, particularly amongst the poorest of the poor, but they ignore this, too. Token gestures of mitigation may be made from time to time in the interest of public relations but the truth is that the machine continues to roll remorselessly on. The Fund and the Bank, Britain's Overseas Development Administration with its promise to 'help aid recipients make the painful adjustments which are necessary', the US Agency for International Development with its commitment to policy dialogue, and just about every other Western aid agency and development finance institution of any significant size, are today all riding on the same band wagon.

The book is very clearly shows that the rich countries give aid to the poor countries basically to help themselves not to the poor countries.

The book says" During the period 1960-70, for example- John F. Kennedy's idealistic ' First Development Decade'- studies showed that 99 per cent of all the funds provided by AID for development in Latin America were in fact spent in the USA, and on production that were priced on average at 35 percent above their world market value. Even today 70 cent out of every dollar of American ' assistance to the Third World' never actually leave the United States. The Agency for International Development spends an awe-inspiring \$7 billion a year purchasing goods and services directly from domestic companies and contractors: New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Illinois and Texas get the lion's share of the patronage, but no state is ever entirely left out. In the process, as AID itself claims, ' thousands of jobs' are created 'here at home'.

The story is the same in virtually every aid-giving country. The UK allocates some \$850 million a year to its bilateral aid program. Out of this substantial sum, around 80 per cent are typically spent on the purchase of British goods and services - a share that approaches 100 per cent in the case of some recipients.

Here is a rule of thumb that you can safely apply wherever you may wander in the Third World: if a project is funded by foreigners it will typically also be designed by foreigners and implemented by foreigners using foreign equipment procured in foreign markets.

In Nepal, the extent of foreign involvement in the national development efforts is so great that, in some schemes, it is genuinely difficult to discern whether the real beneficiaries are even intended to be the Nepalese poor,, or whether, in fact, the whole exercise has been designed around the needs and interests of expatriate corporations.

"GOD HELPS THE POOR!"

Mr. Graham Hancock " Lords of Poverty"
A Mandarin Paper back, 1992.

Poverty and Illiteracy go Hand in Hand

Statistics all over the world show that poor are illiterates and illiterates are poor. Therefore, poverty and illiteracy are regarded as two sides of the same coin. Following statistics show that illiteracy and poverty are directly correlated.

1. Literate farmers in average could produce 10% more farm products than the illiterate farmers (FAO Report)
2. If a country could attend more than 80% percent literacy rate they could increase GNP by 6-8% (The World Bank Report)
3. The countries which have more than 60- 80% percent literacy rate birth rate could be significantly reduced (UNFPA Report)
4. If father and mother both are literate they invariably send their children to complete full cycle of primary education.
5. Literate voters cast their ballots on their own more than the illiterates.
6. Female literacy helps to reduce infant mortality rate.

Nepal is facing many problems due to vast illiteracy. The result of the illiteracy in Nepal is as shown below:

1. Nepal has population growth rate more than 2.66% .
2. More than 15,00,000 children have not attended the primary schools.
3. Only 30% of the children who got enrolled to the first grade survive until the end of fifth grade.
4. More than 70% of the Nepalese people earn less than US \$ 150 per years thus they fall below poverty line.
5. Agriculture employs more than 80% of the labor force but the agriculture production is decreasing in Nepal.
6. There are about 6.5 million unemployed and underemployed labor force in Nepal.
7. Productivity of the Nepali labors is extremely low due to illiteracy.

Nepal will not be able to escape from the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance and deprivation unless it provides literacy education to all its population.

How Literacy Education Helps to combat Poverty

Is Poverty Alleviation only Rhetoric?
(Government and donors attitude towards literacy)

The UNDP's Human Development Report (1997) has stated that poverty has four main dimensions:

- a) Short life
- b) Illiteracy
- c) Exclusion
- d) Lack of materials means

The report also says that these dimensions can overlap in different contributions.

Although UNDP recognizes the role of literacy for poverty alleviation, it does not provide single cent for literacy program in Nepal. It is true with the World Bank, the Asia Development Bank and other donor countries like Japan, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark etc.

It is ironical to hear that all those international donors saying that they give priority to poverty alleviation program in Nepal. At the sometime they could ignore to help literacy program, which is so vital for poverty alleviation. His Majesty's Government in its Ninth Five-Year Plan has also given priority to poverty alleviation. But its attitude and behavior towards literacy program is very negative. At present the HMG is spending about 1-2% of the education budget to literacy program where as it spends about 50% for formal primary education and 22% for higher education.

Those facts show that HMG and the donor agencies are using poverty alleviation only as rhetoric, they are not at the serious to address the program sincerely.

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košs cf0/l /xšf xG5g\ o; lsl; daf6 cf0/xšf košsx?af6 /fli60 cfDbfgldf labžl dbf] cjZo ; sng
xG5 . t/ kxf8}kxf8n]kl/k0f+of]bždf u]ld0f lf0s}a9l afxN0tf ePsf]/ oftfoft ; lawfsf] sldn]w}j
h; f]košsx? Toxf hfg g; lsg] tyf hfg ; lsg] lf0df klg jftfj /0f blift e}xšf]sf/0fn]ubf+košsx?
hfg]; Defj gf sd 5 . o; sf]; fy}sf7df08f]nufot cGo zx/x?df klg kxf} dñfsf]a4n]jftfj /0f blift
e}xšf]sf/0fn]košs hit dfqdf cfpg' kg}cfpg ?rPsf]b]vGb0 . o; af6 klg /fli60 cfDbfgl ; f]eGbf
sd ePsf]b]vG5 .

bf] f]sf/0f xdf]bžsf]dVo kfsłs >f] ag, hun / kfgl xf]. t/ ag hunsf]cgj Zos ?kn]kñ8fgl xg]
rf]l lgsf; f xg]xgfn]/ gbl gfnfsf hn zIQm klg xdf]bžn]eGbf c? bžn]a9l dfqdf kñf] u/šf]
b]vG5 . o; sf]cnfj f Ps t vlgh kbfi+sld, bf] f]7hf]pBf]sf]sldn]ubf+ždf ePsf]sRrf kbfi+vf;
u/l h8la6lx? labždf lg:sf; g xG5 . o; lsl; daf6 7hf pBf] tyf pTkfbgsf]sldn]ubf+žsf]Jofkf/
klg labždfg}e/ kg+k/šf]/ labžs}dv tfSg' k/šf]5 .

hxf; Dd sñfsf]; jfn 5, xdf]bžsf]; Dk0f+eYefu sf]!& klztz hdlgdfq v]l of]o 5 . To; dW0]w}
h; fšf]cfkngf]v]l hldg 50 . tl JolStx? Hofnbf/ldf sfd u/l hllasf]kfhg u/l hljg kfg kñf]0f
ul//xšf 5g\ v]xg}sf]klg czaGbsf]sf/0f v]x? 6sf] xg]u/šf]6sf] 6sf] v]af6 dfg; x?nf0+
vfg nfgp klj]u/l pJhgl, cfDbfgl xb0 . pk/fšt kfsłs, cflys >f] afxš ; f/df ; a}eGbf dxTj k0f+
hg zIQm g}xf]. hg bždf hgziQm alnof]xG5, Toj bždf kfsłs cflys >f] sd ePdf klg bž
pGgtsf]lzv/df kušf]xG5 . ; an hgziStsf]dtna zfl//ls zIQm dfq xf0g, o; sf]dtna lbdful zIQm
klg xf]. of]zIQm]cfhg ug+plrt lzlffsf]cfj Zostf kb5 . xg t xdf]bždf @))& ; fn kl5 bždf
lzlffsf]lasf; c? lf0df eGbf a9l ePsf]5 . tklg ; g\!((^ sf]ty0fs cg' f/ clw/fho el/ %*.\$
klt; t hg; vof cem]lg/lf/ g}5g\ ol lg/lf/ JolStx? dW0]w}h; f]kñ9 dlxf / k?if g}5g\ cem ufpdf
k?if eGbf dlxf lg/lf/tfsf]; vof a9l 5g\ sđ}klg bžsf]; dfllhs, cflys, /fhg]ts lasf; sf]hu tyf
cfwf/ ol kñ9?df g}e/ kb5 . olb ; dfhsf]oxl cu lg/lf/ tyf cr]g ePsf]v08df pglx?af6 bž
lasf; df hit ; xof] kfg' kg}xf]kfg ; lSg, g t pglx?nf0+bždf e0/xšf]ultlalw af/]yxf xG5 .
ctM pglx? unt JolStx?sf]unt Joj xf/af6 kēflat xG5 . pglx?df r]gfsf]cej xG5 , oxl sf/0fn]xf]
ls cfh pBf]klt, Jofkf/lx?af6 vfB kbfi+nufot cGo kbfi+efp hit abfPtf klg ; añ]rkrfk ; xl
/xšf 5g\ /fhg]ts tyf kžf; lso JolStx? vNnd vNnf e]6frf/df ; nlg 5g\ oxl sf/0fn]cfh u/la
360sf]; 60f a9l /xšf 5g\

o'Pg-8l-kl sf]/š8 cg' f/ sltko bžx?n]cfkngf bžaf6 u/lal ; vof 36fpg ; km ePsf 5g\ To; sf]
dVo sf/0f bždf ; xfpbf]lzlf g}xf]. xg t xdf]bždf klg lzlf lasf; gePsf]xf0g . cf]krfl/s
cg]krfl/s lzlf b0}rfn"5 tklg bž lasf; df To; af6 sxl kñ0bf kušf]50 . cf]krfl/s lzlfdf
Joj; fodvl dVo lafox? kñ0 zGo e0 ; sšf]5 . cg]krfl/s lzlfdf ; /sf/sf]k0f+b#6 kg+; sšf]50 .
ha ; Dd bžsf]; an cu alnof]xb0 ta ; Dd ; /sf/n]hg; s}of]hg rnfPtf klg ; km xb0 . ct: cfh
xdf] zx/, ufp, kxf8, t/f0+sGb/fx?df kñ9? 5g\ . tl ; añf0+cf]dlge4 xg]lzlf lbg' cfj Zos 5 .
o; sf]lgldQ ; /sf/n]laleGg u} ; /sf/l ; yfx? l; t sfwdf sfw ldnf0+sfd ug+zlffsf lglDQ lxt xG5
/ To; af6 u/lal lgj f/0fdf w}g}6]f kl0gš .

Disadvantaged Population are Severe Victims of Poverty

Mr. Girja Shankar Rajbansi has made a study of incidence of poverty among the disadvantaged population. He states " the so called upper castes such as Brahman, Chhetri, Thakuri and Newar are privileged and the occupational caste and low caste minorities such as:

- a. Dhobi, Dhimal, Dhusad, Chatwa, Kewal, Rajbhar and Karm (Tarai region) and
- b. Majhi, Gaine, Kumal, Kami, Sarki and Wadi (Hill region) are disadvantaged population are disadvantaged and deprived classes in Nepal.

In summary.

1. This paper discloses the fact that relative deprivation is the inverse function of education and employment opportunities, other than subsistence agriculture. As the opportunities for employment and access to education broader, the relative deprivation will be reduced.
2. The probability of an individual being poor varies according to their caste/ ethnicity and occupation. Low caste background constrains access to education and employment opportunities, not because this characteristic is the 'cause' of poverty, but because employers use this characteristic as 'cues' when they hire employees. This leads to low-income, ill health, low-efficiency, low-productivity and hence low-income. This is the poverty cycle of low-caste occupational groups.
3. Disadvantaged people have limited access to land, income and employment. Social deprivation exists in the case of occupational -low castes. The legal efforts made so far by the government to government to eliminate such social discrimination against occupational low-castes has proved ineffective to overcome economic deprivation. Apparently, education, employment and politics all are skewed against occupational low-castes. Thus, it is not the market but rational government efforts that should take care of disadvantage occupational castes in order to reduce their relative deprivation.

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