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New Challenges Facing Asian Agriculture under Globalisation

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Different Household Strategies for Improving Livelihood in the Mountain Region of Nepal: Comparative Study of Tourist Village and Subsistence Agriculture Village

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Introduction

Nepal is a mountainous country with farming as its economic mainstay. The population pressures on the land and stagnation in the agriculture sector have caused the problem of food shortages. The insecurity in Nepal has been growing because of the decline in per capita food production. Rural households (HHs) have faced greater hardships in earning their livelihoods from their own production due to rapid population and degradation of the resources, mainly land and forest. As a result, they are shifting their emphasis from subsistence farming to other sources of income to maintain their livelihood. Almost every household needs some non-farm income to purchase foods such as clothing and salt that cannot be produced locally. Depending upon the geographical location, access to resources and infrastructure facilities, the sources of income or survival strategies have also been changing. In the mountain region especially, there are very few economic activities for rural people to engage in order to maintain their livelihood. The household strategy for livelihood is influenced by the regional situation. There are various approaches of undertaking rural development in different regions. Sustainable rural development is needed to adapt to regional situation. The relation between the regional situation and household strategies should be cleared in different regions.

The objective of this study is to grasp the different trends of the household strategy especially focusing on the food self-sufficiency in the mountain region, and comparing the tourist village and the subsistence agriculture village. Tourism has been playing a significant role in the mountain region because of the employment opportunities and building up of infrastructure, which leads to the improvement of the economic status. The data was collected by completing the sample and general survey through a structured questionnaire in the study villages.

Issue of Food Security in Mountain Region

Food occupies a very significant role in the process of economic development in Nepal where a vast majority of people depend on agriculture, largely food grain production as a source of livelihood. Agriculture is the mainstay of the Nepalese economy, contributing about 42 per cent of the GDP and employing over 80 per cent of the people. In spite of more

Table 45.1: Population below Poverty Line and Food Balance

Geographical Region	Population Below Poverty Line in 1996 (%)			Food Balance in 1997 (Mt.)			Distribution in 1985 (No. of Districts)		Distribution in 1995 (No. of Districts)		Total District	
	Poor	Very Poor	Total	Total Prod.	Requirement	Surplus/Deficit	Deficit	Surplus	Deficit	Surplus		
Mountain	23.3	26.7	56	198,337	316,305	-117,967	13	3	16	0	16	
Hill	21.3	19.7	41	1,634,546	1,977,176	-342,630	34	4	33	6	39	
Terai	28.7	13.3	42	2,194,466	1,884,596	309,870	6	14	6	14	20	
Nepal	24.9	17.1	42	4,027,349	4,178,077	-150,728	53	22	55	20	75	

Source: Informal Sector Research Study Centre, 2001, Nepal Development Profile of Nepal, Kathmandu.

than four decades of planned economic development endeavour with heavy emphasis and priority on agriculture development, Nepal's food grains production is falling short to feed her ever-growing population. Food outputs or food grain growth rate in Nepal has not been keeping up with the population growth rate. The production growth rate of food grain over the period of 1980/81 to 1990/91 was 2.3 per cent per year, but the population growth rate for the same period accounted for 2.5 per cent per year resulting in per capita food grain availability falling short by 0.2 per cent (Informal Sector Research and Study Centre, 2001).

Nepal is divided into three geographical regions: mountain, hill and terai (plain). The terai region is the most effective to implement the development programmes because of a fertile plain, high population density, good accessibility to various facilities and so on. Within Nepal, the mountain is the least developed region. As shown in Table 45.1, the share of the population of poverty line in the mountain region is the highest. With regard to the production and requirement of food, there is a wide disparity among the ecological regions. The total production in the mountain region is 63 per cent of the requirement, while 110 per cent in terai and 82 per cent in hill. With regard to the number of food deficit districts in Nepal, there were 55 food deficit districts out of a total of 75 districts in 1994. The food balance of 1985 and 1995 by districts shows that within a period of ten years the mountain district lost its food surplus position and one hill district gained as shown in Table 45.1 (Informal Sector Research and Study Centre, 2001). The issue is serious, especially in the mountain region.

Socio-economic Characteristics in the Study Villages

Geographical Situation and Infrastructure

Field research was undertaken in the two villages of Syabru Village Development Committee (VDC) and Chilime VDC in Rasuwa District. Rasuwa District is a remote district in the Central Region. It is also a Himalayan district and the whole district is very rugged. The Langtang National Park with a beautiful valley makes it a superb destination for the Himalayan tourists. It is also a bordering district to Tibet and the Kathmandu-Tibet trade from mediaeval times passes through the district. Syabru VDC is spread at an altitude ranging from 2000m to 6000m above sea level. The VDC which is a part of the National Park lies on the trekking route to Langtang valley and an old trade route passes through the village. Tourism is a driving factor in its rural and farming transition. The Langtang National Park is only 120 Km away from Kathmandu (Nepal's capital city), and at a distance of seven to ten hours from the city, is directly accessible by car or bus. The bazaar in Syabru VDC is the last bus stop. There is a telephone facility for international as well as for local calls. Syabru VDC is situated northeast, about 3 km from Dhunche VDC, which is the present District Headquarters. The biggest bazaar in Rasuwa District, local government offices, NGO offices and financial institutions are located in this VDC. It is easily accessible from Syabru VDC to Dhunche by bus. This village has electricity and transportation facilities. The main highway runs through it. On the other hand, it takes about two hours on foot from Syabru bazaar to Chilime VDC. Chilime VDC, an ordinary subsistence village in the district, has yet to show a significant sign of transition. Electricity is available only in wards 1, 2 and 3 and there are also few shops.

Social Situation

Caste/Ethnic Group and Language Ability

Both villages are the homeland of the Tamang caste. As shown in Table 45.2, it is the biggest ethnic group constituting more than 90 per cent of the total population in both villages, and Buddhism is their main religion.

Table 45.2: Population by Caste/Ethnic Group in the Study Villages

Caste	Syabru VDC		Chilime VDC	
	Population	%	Population	%
Tamang	1,579	94.9	1,289	97.9
Sherpa	67	4	0	0
Magar	12	0.7	0	0
Newar	1	0.1	20	1.5
Chhetri	5	0.3	0	0
Occupational Caste	0	0	8	0.6
Total	1,664	100	1,317	100

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001

Usually, they speak the Tamang dialect and can understand Sherpa and Tibetan dialects. When they communicate with the other castes, the Nepali language (national language) is necessary for them. But, it is not easy to learn the national language as shown in Table 45.3. In both villages, the percentage of the people who can read and write in Nepali language is low.

Table 45.3: Language Ability in the Study Villages

Language Ability	Nepali Language Ability				Mother Tongue Ability			
	Syabru VDC		Chilime VDC		Syabru VDC		Chilime VDC	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fluent	105	7.1	50	4.4	379	23	24	2.1
Can Read and Write	226	15.2	44	3.9	369	22.4	9	0.8
Can Read	66	4.4	37	3.3	7	0.4	3	0.3
Can Speak Only	854	57.4	543	48.3	723	44	1,075	95.6
Don't Understand	236	15.9	450	40.0	9	0.5	13	1.2
Total	1,487	100	1,124	100	1,487	90	1,124	100

Note: Above 5 years old

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

The percentage of people who cannot understand Nepali language is 15.9 per cent in Syabru VDC whereas it is 40 per cent in Chilime VDC. The reason why most people in Chilime VDC cannot speak Nepali language is that they need not speak it very often within the community. Very few people visit Chilime VDC. There are more opportunities in Syabru VDC to meet other people than in Chilime VDC. Some people come to Syabru VDC for sightseeing and to implement development projects. In Syabru VDC, a national non-governmental organisation (NGO)¹ helps the local people in agriculture development and also a local NGO² and a UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) project on quality tourism have helped the women to improve their financial status. In Chilime VDC, only a women's literacy programme was implemented in 1999 by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Nepal.

Educational Level

Table 45.4 shows the level of education in the study villages. In Syabru VDC there are five primary schools and one proposed high school. Twenty students have passed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) Examination.

Table 45.4: Educational Level in the Study Villages

Educational Level	Syabru VDC		Chilime VDC	
	No.	%	No.	%
No Schooling				
Illiterate	926	62.3	936	83.3
Literate	223	15	7	0.6
Primary School (Class 1-5)	250	16.8	135	12.0
Secondary School (Class 6-10)	66	4.4	35	3.1
SLC (School Leaving Certificate)	20	1.3	4	0.4
High School (Class 11-12:I.A)	0	0	7	0.6
Graduate (B.A., M.A)	2	0.1	0	0
Total	1,487	100	1,124	100

Note: Data shown are from 6 years old and above.

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

On the other hand, in Chilime VDC there are five primary schools, but no secondary school. That is why, after finishing class 5, the students need to go to school located in the other villages. Up to now, only four people have passed the SLC examination. The first time was in 1999/2000. These differences on the language ability and the educational level between two villages affect the economic situation.

¹ DEPROSC-NEPAL (Development Project Service Centre) implemented development projects in Syabru VDC from 1997 and started the community based income generating project from 2000 in Chilime VDC.

² WEAN (Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal) has been providing financial services to women from 1994/95.

Table 45.5: Occupational Structure and Average Cash Income in the Study Villages

Occupational Structure	Syabru VDC						Chilime VDC					
	Main Job			Side Job			Main Job			Side Job		
	No.	%	Av.Income/ Year	No.	%	Av.Income/ Year	No.	%	Av.Income/ Year	No.	%	Av.Income/ Year
Farming	638	78	12,763	60	18	13,152	795	91	8,200	6	5	4,783
Business	115	14	27,254	46	14	17,329	16	2	18,460	5	4	4,500
Professional	7	1	24,620	13	4	9,218	0	0	-	5	4	2,667
Salaried	34	4	16,603	18	6	15,647	15	2	6,082	5	4	11,875
Skilled Labour	9	1	11,000	113	35	8,775	14	2	9,750	16	13	5,733
Manual Labour	17	2	35,300	75	23	8,732	31	4	7,750	84	69	5,917
Total	820	100	19,618	325	100	10,716	871	100	10,124	121	100	5,633

Notes: Farming: Crop (rice, maize, wheat etc), bee, vegetable, livestock.

Business: Shops, tea hotels, wine business, tourist shops, restaurants, house rent, ghatta.

Professional: Teachers, lamas job, politicians, jhakris.

Salaried: Office workers, Milk Dev. Corporation employees, hotel or shop employees, postmen.

Skilled labour: Knitting industry (belts, carpets, sweaters), sewing, woodwork, trekking guides, carpenters, Iron/Blacksmiths.

Manual labour: Labourers, porters, medical herbs gatherers, herdsman etc.

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

Economic Situation

In terms of occupational structure, both villages are agrarian in nature, especially Chilime VDC. Most of the people are engaged in farming, 78 per cent in Syabru VDC and 91 per cent in Chilime VDC. The average income from farming in Syabru VDC is higher than that in Chilime VDC. In Syabru VDC, the sources of cash income are not only from crop farming but also from livestock which supply meat, milk, and eggs for the army, the staff in some projects and tourists. Some livestock play the role of carrying luggage.

There are more people engaged in side jobs in Syabru VDC such as in business, as skilled labour and manual labour. Since Syabru VDC is a tourist area and a trade route, there are more opportunities to engage in tourism and business. The category of skilled labour includes those in the knitting and sewing industries, where women are involved. They produce goods for tourists. Near these study villages, the hydropower project is on-going and there are chances to work as manual labour. But, lack of Nepali language ability is one of the obstacles to work in the project. Some people in Syabru VDC and few people from Chilime VDC are engaged there. The category of manual labour of Chilime VDC is seasonal labour such as collection of medicinal herbs. Since professional jobs need high education, the professional people of Syabru VDC are engaged in teaching and trekking (as guides). The only category of professionals under the occupational structure in Chilime VDC is lama. Lama is a Buddhist monk. Even though a lama is a professional, the income is low. They are also family men and farmers who have usually inherited their religious role from their forefathers. The big difference in the average income between the two villages is noticeable (Table 45.5). The income is influenced by the type of occupation and the period of work. On the job selection, educational level and language ability are significant factors. The difference in the average annual income per capita between both villages is also noticeable. In Syabru VDC it is NRs. 6164, while in Chilime VDC it is NRs. 2,084. This gap is reflected by the difference in cash income of the occupational structure.

Food Self-sufficiency and Household Economy

Food Self-sufficiency

Table 45.6 shows the food self-sufficiency situation in the study villages. Food self-sufficiency data is collected by means of asking villagers "How many months can your family adjust your food from the production on your land in a year?" Although cash income in Chilime VDC is lower than in Syabru VDC, the percentage of households that are food self-sufficient between seven to twelve months is 49 per cent in Chilime VDC, whereas in Syabru VDC it is 14 per cent. In Syabru VDC, 86 per cent are food self-sufficient between one to six months. These households have high average cash income. This reveals that most people depend on buying their foods in the market for procuring foods. For households under the least food self-sufficient category, to earn cash income is more important and 70 per cent of them have side jobs.

Table 45.6: Food Self-sufficiency, Land Holding and Cash Income in the Study Villages

Village name	Syabru VDC				Chilime VDC				
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	
Food Self-sufficient in Months									
Average Number in Household	4.3	4.6	4.8	3.9	4.4	4.5	5.1	5.4	
Food Sufficient									
Number of Households	168	92	12	30	24	61	40	41	
Per cent	56	30	4	10	14	37	24	25	
Average Self-sufficient		3.4 months					4.8 months		
Avg- cash income per capita/HH (NTs)	5,334	6,599	2,620	6,168	2,538	1,618	1,471	1,658	
Average land holding (Ha)	0.53	1.01	0.84	0.85	0.48	0.71	0.65	1.31	

Note: No answer (Syabru VDC 72 HHs, Chilime VDC 98 HHs).

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

Assuming the productivity is similar, the production on land will be influenced by land holding size. In the case of Chilime VDC, it is evident that those who are able to secure their food needs for 10 to 12 months have the highest in the category of land holding size. Their average land holding size is 1.6 ha. On the other hand, in Syabru VDC the difference of the average land holding size is not big. But the average family number of those who are food self-sufficient between seven to twelve months is 3.9 ha. The duration of self-sufficiency depends on how many people can share the production on their land. The average land holding size in the category that is food self-sufficient between 4 to 6 months is 1.01 ha. This is the highest in the other categories. Why, food self-sufficiency is short although the land size of the households is big? The reason is that even if the self-production is sufficient for a household, the people prefer to eat rice that need to be purchased in the market.

Food Self-sufficiency and Purpose of Loan

To get a loan is one of the households' strategies to improve the livelihood as well as an assurance to purchase the needs of the family members such as buying medicines and food.

Tables 45.7 and 45.8 show the food self-sufficiency according to purpose of loan. The purposes of loans in Syarbu VDC tend to be to invest in economic activities and improve their daily life. The percentages of investing in farming and business in the total borrowers are 71 in Syabru VDC and 37.5 in Chilime VDC. On the other hand, in Chilime VDC, most of the people borrow money for consumption purposes.

Table 45.7: Food Self-sufficiency According to Purpose of Loans in Syabru VDC

Loan Purpose	Food Self-sufficient in Months				Total
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	
Farming	20	20	1	0	41
Business	11	3	0	0	14
Farming/Business	0	2	0	0	2
Farming/Building or maintaining house	1	0	0	0	1
Building or maintaining house	10	6	0	2	18
Manual Labour	2	2	0	0	4
Total	44	33	1	2	80

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

Table 45.8: Food Self-sufficiency According to Purpose of Loans in Chilime VDC

Loan Purpose	Food Self-sufficient in Month				Total
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	
Farming	1	6	2	4	13
Business	0	0	1	0	1
Farming/Business	0	0	0	1	1
Farming/Building or maintaining house	0	5	0	0	5
Building or maintaining house	0	2	0	0	2
Manual Labour	4	11	2	1	18
Total	5	24	5	6	40

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

About 45 per cent of the total borrowers used the loans to buy food, 83 per cent are those who cannot be self-sufficient in less than sixth months, and 61 per cent four to six months.

As shown in Table 45.6, the average annual cash income of the households in this category is low. This reveals that when the households cannot afford to ease the food shortages, getting loans from the moneylender is one choice for them to meet their basic food requirements. In this area, the interests are around 36 to 60 per cent per year. If they cannot return the loans, they often lose their own land and are caught in the vicious circle of poverty. In Syabru VDC, the share of the category of consumption purpose is low. Although most households do not have self-sufficient food per year, most of them have enough cash income to buy food and other goods. Moreover, they can afford to invest in farming, business and building houses to improve their livelihood.

Food Self-sufficiency and Household Expenses

What Kinds of Goods do the People Purchase?

The study villages lie at an altitude of 2000m to 3000m above sea level. There is little production of paddy. Maize, wheat, buckwheat, millet, barley, and potatoes are the main agriculture products. Usually, most people eat the paste of flour of these cereal foods (Diru: traditional Tamang's foods). Rice is regarded as one of the rich foods. If they want to eat rice, they have to buy it. In both study villages, the main purchased items are rice, beaten rice, meat, salt, sugar, spices, oil, tea and tobacco that cannot be self-sufficient within these areas. In addition to the cereal foods mentioned above, the self-sufficient items are potatoes, vegetables, ginger, garlic, red chillies, eggs, milk, ghee (butter) and alcohol. Comparing the patterns of household expenses in the two villages, Syabru VDC tends to buy even some items regarded as self-production. As for non-food items, firewood is one case. Although most of the people collect firewood in the forest, some households in Syabru VDC buy firewood. Under the household expenses, other items such as "biscuits", "entertainment", "water bill" and "telephone bill" can be found in Syabru VDC. Most households in Syabru VDC spend their money on electricity, while in Chilime VDC this case is very rare. Though electricity is available in wards 1, 2 and 3 in Chilime VDC, they are not using it completely because it is costly. These items have changed the life style of the people in Syabru VDC.

Food Self-sufficiency According to Cash Expenses

Table 45.9 shows the average annual cash expenses per household in the study villages. The total average cash expenses in Syabru VDC are NRs. 57,602, and NRs. 36,608 in Chilime VDC. The big difference in the two villages is similar with the gaps on the occupational structure and household income. On the food expenses, there is only a slight difference regardless of food self-sufficiency in months. This means that even though the food self-sufficiency is high, they need the other food and non-food.

Table 45.9: Food Self-sufficiency According to Average Cash Expenses in the Study Villages(NRs)

Village Name	Syabru VDC					Chilime VDC				
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Total	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Total
Food Self-sufficiency in Months										
Food	17,396	16,240	-	15,948	16,456	13,719	17,131	26,715	17,042	17,912
Cereal Food	11,349	11,280	-	7,850	10,392	6,340	5,570	8,625	6,024	6,275
Rice	7,000	10,864	-	6,830	8,989	6,090	5,310	7,000	5,743	5,841
Non-food	33,759	49,714	-	32,974	41,929	16,556	11,677	28,935	13,535	15,495
Total	51,155	64,478	-	48,922	57,602	54,275	28,808	55,650	30,576	36,608

Note: Data shown are from Sample Survey, size of samples: Syabru 36HHs, Chilime 16HHs.

* One household is a special case of high expenses on education.

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

Table 45.10 shows that the share on food expenses in Syabru VDC is 27 per cent, while the share in Chilime VDC is 53 per cent. The share of cereal food within food items in Syabru VDC is higher than that in Chilime VDC. The share of rice expenses within the food items is 52 per cent in Syabru VDC, and 30 per cent in Chilime VDC. It is clear that the demand for rice in Syabru VDC is higher than in Chilime VDC, especially in the households under the food self-sufficient between four to sixth months. As shown in Table 45.6, the average land holding size of the households is high, but food self-sufficiency is low. This is explained by the fact that they prefer to eat rice.

In the non-food category, the average expenses in Syabru VDC are higher than in Chilime VDC. The gap is very big. The households in Syabru VDC tend to spend more money on festivals, marriage and funeral purposes. The non-food expenses measure how wealthy the people are.

Table 45.10: Food Self-sufficiency According to Average Cash Expenses in the Study Villages (%)

Village Name	Syabru VDC					Chilime VDC				
	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Total	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	Total
Food Self-sufficiency in Months										
Food	34	23	-	33	27	47	59	48	54	53
Cereal Food	52	69	-	49	60	43	33	32	34	34
Rice	32	67	-	43	52	41	31	26	29	30
Non Food	66	77	-	67	73	53	41	52	46	47

Note: Data shown are from Sample Survey, size of samples: Syabru 36HHs, Chilime 16HHs.

Source: Field Survey, 2000, 2001.

Conclusion

The mountain region has obstacles to development. There are very few economic activities for rural people to engage in to maintain their livelihood. Syabru VDC is located in a tourist area and is a more developed village. This type is very rare in the mountain region. Syabru VDC has many opportunities in various sectors such as crop farming, livestock development, tourism, and business. The type of development approach is regarded as integrated approach. The income sources are not only non-farming activities but also farming activities as well. Due to this, the Nepali language ability in Syabru VDC is higher than that in Chilime VDC. The language ability is a very important tool to communicate with other people and to be able to engage in the salaried job and manual labour in some projects. The trend in Syabru VDC is that even if food self-sufficiency is low, the people can afford to buy the food from their own cash income. In the financial aspect, the main purpose of the disbursed loans is for investment or improving the livelihood. In Syabru VDC, the household strategy does not only involve meeting their food requirements but also improving their daily life. The people achieve first the food requirements and have a stable household economy, and then they

tend to spend on non-food items and invest in building a house or in economic activities. They save money for future use as well. This strategy leads to a better society.

The strategy in Chilime VDC is mainly oriented to meet their basic food requirements. This village has no choice but to sustain the subsistence agriculture because there are few non-agricultural activities. Although the food-sufficiency in Chilime VDC is higher than Syabru VDC, the needs for cash income are necessary to buy goods and to maintain the stability of the household economy. The instability of household economy is like standing in front of the door of the vicious circle of poverty. Chilime VDC has some constraining factors such as lack of Nepali language ability and education, lack of infrastructure and high transaction cost and so on. But they can access to natural resources easily and have knowledge of nature. One way to improve Chilime VDC is through the implementation of agriculture development. Without mentioning the increasing production, the important thing is to explore the potentials on agriculture development. Although there is little potential for agriculture development like medicinal herbs business, the marketing channel has not been established yet. The business is on individual basis. Provided the business is organised considering the eco conservation and the profitable business, a better Chilime VDC is foreseen. In this case, since Chilime VDC has no other choice, it can be said as a sectoral approach.

The adaptive approaches in each village are different. That is why the constraining factors in each village are different on technical and managerial capabilities of the household like language ability, educational level and accessibility to economic, social, natural, and institutional resources. Everyone is longing for a better life style. They can measure the possibility of the realisation considering those constraining factors. In each village, the idea of achieving a better society has a big difference in the study villages.

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