

The role of NGOs on the livelihood of farmers of Nepal

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Abstract

The project is an attempt to make a study about the role of NGOs on changing the livelihood of farmers of Nepal. Ratu village of Surkhet district from Province 06 (the then Mid-Western Region) is selected for the research area. The thesis focuses towards the NGOs and its roles, livelihood pattern before and after the intervention of NGO in the selected area. The farmers' livelihood and their sources of income are described in the thesis. The research is based on qualitative and descriptive research design, where in-depth interviews of 15 respondents (12 beneficiary farmers, 2 NGOs personal and 1 DDC staff) were taken through purposive sampling and case study to draw descriptive interpretation. It was concluded from the study that the farmers living in Ratu village were benefitted by the roles of NGO i.e., EDS. EDS helps the farming community through different aid program in agriculture and husbandry. The NGO encourage people to move from subsistence farming to cash crops, such as offseason vegetables, ginger, turmeric, goat farming etc. they also assist technically to the farmers for high production. The role of EDS is found very much supportive in the life of the people of Ratu village. Traditional agricultural pattern is dominant by modern technology in farming. Different training, knowledge, information are shared for quality products. Market accessibility to the production is made possible through NGO. The result found, that the living standard is upgraded rural people have access to mass media. The income level is increased through cash crops and the women are also engaged in income generating activities. They are empowered through different trainings, leadership programs, literacy classes etc. People have stopped to migrate for seasonal labor in India and other countries.

Keywords: Farmers, Livelihood, NGO, Intervention

Introduction

Agriculture in Nepal has long been based on subsistence farming, particularly in the hilly regions where peasants derive their living from fragmented plots of land cultivated in difficult conditions. Government programs to introduce irrigation facilities and fertilizers have proved inadequate, their delivery hampered by the mountainous terrain. Population increases and environmental degradation have ensured that the minimal gains in agricultural production, owing more to the extension of arable land than to improvements in farming practices, have been cancelled out. Once an exporter of rice, Nepal now has a food deficit.

Majority of Nepalese farmers are subsistence farmers and do not export surplus; this does not prevent a minority in the fertile southern Tarai region from being able to do so. Most of the country is mountainous, and there are pockets of food-deficit areas. The difficulties of transportation make it far easier to export across the border to India than to transport surplus to remote mountain regions within Nepal. A considerable livestock population of cattle, goats, and poultry exists, but the quality is poor and produces insufficient food for local needs.

Till now, majority of the farmers still practice traditional ways of farming. So farming is seasonal and weather dependent in Nepal. According to 'Agriculture Information and Communication Center' during 2069-70 B.S,

about 30,91,000 hectares of land has been cultivated and 10,30,000 hectares has remained uncultivated due to the lack of modern farming equipment.

This study provide the background information regarding the role of NGOs on uplifting the livelihood of farmers of Nepal as well as to understand the current existing situation of knowledge, skill and attitudes regarding livelihood of farming communities of Nepal.

Methodology Sample

This study is intended to measure the changes on livelihood of farmers by the intervention of NGOs. The sample was collected from the Ratu Village, Surkhet. The study is done through purposive sampling. The universe comprises of 85 households. The sample size is 12 households of Ratu Village, one DDC staff, and two EDS staff.

Sample size (N) = 12+1+2= 15

Method

Case Study is used for this project. Two cases were considered for this study, first case study was done on the livelihood status of farmers before the intervention of the NGO and the second case study was done after the intervention of the NGO.

Tools

- a) Questionnaire

For the study, structured questionnaire was used to collect

data. Questions were divided into four parts; part 'A' contained questionnaire for beneficiaries (farmers), part 'B' contained questionnaire for NGOs personnel, while part 'C' contains questionnaire for government personnel and at the end, and part 'D' is concerned with the social mobiliser.

b) In-depth Interview

Among the participant beneficiaries, active and good communicating person is selected for in-depth interview. It is held about 30 minutes to one hour. The conversation occurred in very simple and friendly way. Several queries and information was gathered from this interview

c) Key Informant Information (KII)

KII is taken with social mobilizers, DDC staffs, NGO personnel who are experienced person in related field.

Case Study

CASE 1: Livelihood Strategies in Ratu before the Involvement of NGOs Traditional Agriculture Pattern

On the basis of elevation, the agricultural patterns have been classified into lowland and highland

agricultural areas. Highland agricultural area is generally called Bari (non-irrigated land) and mainly used for cultivating cereals including maize, millet, barley, and wheat. On the other hand, lowland agricultural area is called Khet or Beshi (irrigated land) and mainly rice is harvested. Villagers heavily relied on rain-fed agriculture and hence, all cereals were cultivated only one time per year. Paddy, maize, and millet were cultivated during summer whereas barley and wheat were cultivated in winter seasons. These crops were supplemented with pulses including various kinds of lentils and small beans.

Usually, these supplementary crops were sown along the raised banks between the fields. Additionally, they grew potatoes, taro, and vegetables to fulfill their basic diet. The farming was at or below the subsistence level and most of the crops were consumed at the household level. Memorizing the past source of living Kamala Rana Magar, one of the respondents says;

“Agriculture and animal husbandry were the primary sources of living in our village. We used to sow the traditionally practiced grains.

It was just for household use. We used to graze cow and one or two buffalo/s and few numbers of goats. We didn't realize to modernize our traditional living standards and the economic sources.”

Kamala's response also supports the point clear that almost all the people of Ratu are primarily based on agriculture, and practiced in the traditional pattern and structure.

Animal Husbandry

In past days animal husbandry mainly includes cow, ox, buffaloes, bees, somehow goats in very small scale. They mainly put animals for farming and cultivation. They generate income in small size. They have no importance of animals for cash and good income. One of the respondents Manmaya Dhakal says,

“We have one pair of ox for digging the land, one buffalo which is used to drink milk and milk related products like ghee, curd etc. and one/ two goats.”

They put animals only for subsistence farming not for income generation.

Living Standard/ Market Access

When the researcher conducted interview with other respondents of this village selected for the present research project, almost all the interviewees explained the current situation of people living in Ratu. When they remember their previous position and living standard they become sad and feel stopped at least once since their past was more problematic and pathetic. They didn't have the multiple opportunities to carry out the deeds from where they could earn their living easily. The market was far and they had to carry loads on their back and transport it. In this context the respondent Shakti Thapa says,

“We had to go to Birendranagar for shopping and buying everything. There was no road. We had to walk on foot for almost 8 hours to go to the market and return carrying load on our back. We were just familiar to the traditional agricultural pattern and raising cow and buffalo. So, we used to sell ghee and such other things in Birendranagar and buy necessary things. We didn't have the modern concept to modernize our agricultural product or the entire system.”

His argument gives the picture of the village before different NGOs, other private institutions and governmental agencies came up with the seriousness in their activities and programs for addressing the actual reality of village and contributing to uplift the life standards of the people when the misery in life was becoming almost an inseparable part. To be away from the market where people should go constantly for selling and buying things is itself a problem. But more than this not to have

different sectors for investing their labor and the capital that they have even in a limited scale was the challenging problem with which people were living their lives. To depend upon the agriculture and agricultural product is not a matter to be worry but not to modernize this field is really a matter to think seriously.

Seasonal Labor in India

Mr. Shakti's realization surfaces the situation that the people were living with. Discussing the role of NGOs and INGOs, he adds:

"Our village would be in the same pathetic condition, if we were not supported by the NGOs. We would be thinking agriculture only as a source of earning and not realizing the limitless possibilities that we have. We would be going to different parts of India for seasonal labor and returning sometimes with little money and sometimes with nothing in the hand. We would be cursing our luck of being serious. But EDS and other different NGOs came to our village and helped for the transformation of our livelihood from the previous misery to the present hopeful stage."

He means to say that the role of NGOs in the village became dominant. But before their programs, people were living miserable life. Among different NGOs, EDS played the most crucial role to transfer the traditional life of the people to the present position.

Patriarchal Society and Caste wise work Performance

Ratu is influenced by the patriarchal society of Nepal and thus, males and females hold different social and economic roles. Women were responsible for most of the household activities including cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood and fodder, and grinding grains. Similarly, men were responsible for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, pastoralism and farming to secure their livelihood. In addition, men were involved in seasonal out-migration, especially as a military in India and United Kingdom (UK). Women were not allowed to plough the field even though they are capable of doing so. Kuljit Sarki narrate that Bhraman have traditionally not worked as blacksmiths or goldsmiths, all agricultural tools including hoe, spade, sickle, and plough were locally made by blacksmith (Kami). Clothes and shoes were sewed by Damai and Sarki, respectively in the village. In return the occupational groups were offered grain or sometimes cash as labor wage.

Historically, Bhraman and Kshetri of Ratu were animal herders, and depended on large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats. Usually, a Bhraman and Kshetri household were considered wealthy depending on the

number of livestock they have. Two dominant forms of pastoralism were observed in Ratu: transhumance and village based pastoralism. Transhumance, characterized by the long seasonal movement of livestock between different but complementary ecological zones was a key grazing pattern in Ratu. Types of livestock kept in mobile pastoral systems included buffaloes, sheep, goats, and cows/ox. On the other hand, village based pastoralism was usually practiced by owners of small to medium sized livestock mainly goats, buffaloes and cows. In the village, goats were bred for meat and milk, and sheep were mainly kept for their wool and meat. Traditionally sheep has important value in Buffalo was mainly kept for milk and meat whereas cow was mainly herded for milk and has religious value as cows hold religious values and is worshipped as mother in Ratu.

Responding the question "What is the actual condition of the household before the intervention of NGO?" another respondent Bal Kumari Saru says:

"We were dependent upon our husband totally for every commercial activity. We had to wait our husbands' decision even to sell a hen or buy salt and oil. We had no decision power because we had not formulated different women organizations as they are today. In women organization, we can save money little and little and increase it. We can take or give loan. Even husbands ask us for loan. But in the past nobody gave us the idea of such organization. We had no such idea".

She means to say that before the invention of NGOs in the village the condition of women was more pathetic than that of men. Women had to see into the mouth of their husbands for every activity that needs money. NGOs oriented them to form their organizations and make their economic activities convenient at present days. Notwithstanding their position was pathetic. It is sure that women's position was feeble and that pathetic which had direct effect on the entire household setting.

Education, Environment and Social Network

Traditionally, education has not been a part of the culture of people in Ratu even though the availability of a quality education plays a pivotal role in influencing the economic well-being of rural areas. According to interviews with the key informants, 20 years ago, the literacy rate in Ratu was approximately 12%. Since agriculture was the main source of subsistence in the village, people spent most of their time in their fields. There was one primary school in the village with poor quality of education. The infrastructure of the school building was very poor and class rooms were

not sufficient to accommodate more than 40 students. Thus, in the past, classes used to run outside in the open fields during the sunny days whereas, school had to be shut down throughout the rainy season.

Due to such miserable conditions, students were reluctant to attend the school. Moreover, villagers had a concept that attaining 5\6 grade education is enough for their livelihood. Hardly few household could support their child to continue higher education in other places outside Ratu. Concerning the peoples' thinking on education in the past, *Khadka Bhadur Rana*, a primary teacher in the village, says:

"In the past, people were not conscious about the importance of education. They didn't realize the significance of getting higher studies. They prioritized farming and animal husbandry but not education. Almost a couple of year earlier people used to compete in terms of the number of cows and buffaloes. The strength of a man was measured in terms of his capacity of carrying the heavy load of grass or like that."

Mr. *Khakda's* narration clarifies the point that people didn't prioritize education in the past. So, the level of education was very poor at that time. The educated people were few able to be counted in the finger of a single hand.

Houses in Ratu were originally built with a wood and stone framework, covered with mud and dung and thatched with grass or corrugated iron. Thus, timbers from the nearby forests were always harvested beyond their regeneration capacity in Ratu. Traditionally, kerosene and firewood were used for cooking, heating, and lighting in the households, often supplemented by agricultural residues and animal dung. In this context, *Bhim Bahadur Pokhrel*, one of the local leaders at present, says:

"Our people used firewood to cook their food and to get warmth. They still rely on this resource also because to import gas stove is not convenient on the one hand while firewood is free of cost on the other. For lighting they used to buy kerosene oil from Birendranagar and make lamp. The use of traditional kerosene devices such as Tuki, Panas, and Lantern was there in the village. This is changed at present as most of our people use solar energy. The bright light has a positive impact, mainly for the students as they were, in the past, deprived of those facilities which hampered their study hours during the night."

It shows that due to lack of other commercial energy sources, villagers heavily relied on firewood, which is a free resource, as the only cost of firewood collection is physical effort and time. In Ratu, the over exploitation of

firewood for household purposes (cooking, heating, and lighting) resulted to the degradation of natural forests that ultimately results in scarcity of local resources. Another disadvantage of the use of traditional biomass in Ratu was that people were susceptible to the impacts of indoor air pollution (mainly vision and respiratory illnesses) due to poorly ventilated kitchens.

In the past, villagers had limited network to the outer world. There were no mediums for communication including telephone and TV. Thus, the network used to be limited among the neighboring villages. Overall, villagers were deprived from social, cultural, political and economic opportunities prior to the involvement of the NGOs in Ratu.

CASE 2: Changes after the Involvement of EDS in Ratu New technology adopted for agriculture Due to traditional agriculture pattern the produce food is not sufficient for the households themselves. They have no ideas of modern agriculture and curse on their luck. One of the KII, *Nirak Bista*, social mobiliser of EDS also an agricultural technician define the pattern of agriculture the households adopted and the awareness they generate after the help of NGO. He says;

"Previously they have no idea of soil test, now all farmers test their soil with the help of technician before cultivating the crops. Now they cure the insects, pests, diseases which are shown in the crops. They immediately report to the agriculture technician about their crops if some problems arise. They are now very conscious towards the agriculture because they know the value of agriculture. As a result productivity is increased and the income level is increased. The people/ households are satisfied with the new technology adopted."

Subsistence farming to Cash Crops

Previously people depend on subsistence farming but now they got ideas and information about cash crops. With the subsistence farming they never uplift their life and family. By involving and regular contact with NGO personnel they involved in cash crops. The land is suitable for the cash crops such as off seasonal vegetables, goat farming, turmeric, timur, ginger production. With the coordination of NGO they got irrigation schemes for cultivation in all seasons.

They got different services like standardized seeds, regular monitoring on their land by technicians, awareness programs and aid for doing such cash crops. From cash crops the living standard is dramatically changed. The people are busy on their farm all season and they do not have to move for seasonal labor. They earn more on their own land says one of

the respondent *Phulmati B.K.* She added that before the involvement of EDS the production was only limited for six months but from cash crops the production from same land it is sufficient for whole year and also income is increased. They are really happy with the NGO because they facilitate them in right way and make their life better. They used to send their children in schools, give nutritious food for growth and sharp mind. Because of cash crops they generate regular income and happy in their life.

Modernization of traditional husbandry through training

Within a short period, EDS succeeded to bring some positive changes within this society. Women living in developing countries like Nepal have to struggle a lot to prove their competency. It is also true for *Karishma*, a well-known livestock activist in Ratu.

She has received trainings regarding goat farming with the help of EDS. After the training she began it as her profession. Within the short period of time her profession began to return benefit. Now, she has more than 350 goats. She has become successful to be the owner of almost of 35 lakhs, though she began this profession with 2 lakh rupees. She claimed;

“At this moment, I feel that if I was not exposed to the modernization of our traditional husbandry system then our livestock practice would be same. Even my life would be of no difference than ordinary rural women in Nepal.” She has received tremendous support from her family as her family members also received awareness and new ways of earning a living. She proudly shared “My economic and social transformation has been possible only because of the livelihood program supported by EDS”.

Her professional attire of dealing with these services together with additional motivation of women in her society helped her prosperous life a lot in this profession. She has also encouraged other women to begin such beneficial programs and business systems. The change was not limited on the livestock promotion.

She expressed *“Social harmony in our village has also increased due to periodic interactions and mutual trust in the society”.* She claimed that, *“It is really a great change in my village.”* EDS has focused on promoting women’s confidence in changing power relation through increased access to resources and community level discourses that affected their lives.

Karisma is just an example that showcased potentiality of women and their inner strength

in bringing impactful changes in society. Empowered and confident women can also do miracles in strengthening peace process by bringing community member of diverse background together in a common platform through livestock management. These role models like *Karishma* had also contributed in changing mind set of the people on looking at women as power of change agents in promoting peace.

In past days Dalit have their own traditional work but now days they are also involved in farming and husbandry. One of the beneficiaries *Surbir Nepali* says that;

“We dalit people only do the work which our forefather has done but now days due to awareness programme and trainings we are encourage doing similar work as others. Now I have also five goats and I am satisfied with my earning.”

Easily market access

The productions have easily access to the market. With the help of EDS farmers and traders have cooperation for trading the product. Local traders come to the fields and receive the product and give payment to the farmers with reasonable price. The traditional process of selling products by walking hours of distance is not necessary. The agreement between farmers and traders is made on the behalf of project. It is very useful for further future in long run too.

Evening informal education and formation of mother groups

“Due to evening informal education, most of the illiterate women could write their names in Nepali. Gradually EDS formed mothers’ groups who were responsible for controlling illegal gambling and drinking, and involved in social activities. From such literacy class women can do small amounts calculation of their production. Nobody can misbehave for small things. In total there are five mother groups among the beneficiaries”, says *Ratna Pulami*.

Education System and Sanitation Program

“People have realized the significance of schooling along with the development of the mass media that has made aware; the Maoist revolution that has made people to talk more and more in the political issues and somehow gave much instruction; governmental effort to remove illiteracy; and the invention of NGOs. NGOs launched different awareness programs in each and every cones and corners of the VDC. They convinced people to send their children to school. NGO also provided scholarship to the children belonging to the marginalized groups. Now days all children goes to school while in past days only child of

rich people have access to school”, says one of the respondent *Suja Gurung*.

“Twenty five common toilets were built by EDS within the village and provided about 75% of the total cost if a villager was willing to construct toilet in the residence””, says *Rudra Acharya*, program coordinator of EDS.

Women Empowerment Program

As per *Netra Regmi*, the present leading person of EDS, *‘different leadership programs are conducted in Ratu so as to bring women in the front stage to lead in their village’*. Commenting on such training programs the respondent of the research project, *Khagendra Khatri* says:

“EDS has provided different training programs in this VDC as in others. Women, poor, ethnic groups, and other marginalized people are given priority in the training. The training has brought out the inner talent and skill of our people. We have got ideas regarding goat farming, seasonal and non-seasonal vegetable growing.”

Khagendra’s response has clarified the positive role of EDS to uplift the position of the people of this village by supporting them with different trainings and skills.

Introduction of Solar energy in the village

The incidence of health complications among the villagers due to indoor air pollution also declined after the introduction of the improved modernized energy in the village. The usage of firewood also reduced significantly. In addition, the villagers had access to modern mass communicating systems like TV, internet, and telephone and mobile phone services.

Among eighty five households fifty households are Brahmins and Chhettris and remaining are Magar, Dalit and Others. From the respondents it is concluded that all beneficiaries are satisfied from the livelihood program of EDS. The living standard and livelihood pattern are changed after the intervention of EDS. The income level of farmers increased and they do not have to go for seasonal labor.

Discussion

NGOs have evolved in the natural course of time and space to meet the needs of the livelihood of society and country. People found NGOs as new institutions to voice and address their needs. Therefore, government has come to accept NGOs as their helping support, to many of their developmental projects. NGOs' presence is felt to be inevitable and licensed to function according to their selective merits and self-credibility. Being non-profitteering voluntary NGOs their undoubted credibility depends on their stable

self-supporting ability to maintain themselves to the required span of time till they achieve their targets. NGOs' presence is volatile as they indefinitely depend on uncertain donors.

The role of EDS is found very much supportive in the life of the farmers of Ratu Village. Before the involvement of EDS people were living with traditional life style. Their life was pathetic. They have had socio-economic problems. They were doing traditional farming and doing husbandry without modernizing it. EDS has brought them into the front line of conducting their household works along with providing new and skills so that people can modernize their living standard. It has strengthened the role of the NGOs to uplift the position of the people. It shows that a stable self-supporting NGO could be a part of a widely reputed large private enterprise with an interest to launch NGOs to promote selfless voluntary services. Thus, if NGOs could accomplish their formidable self-support for their own credibility, NGOs would be a perennial contribution, to the well-being of the people, society and nation as a whole and never be a substitution.

In the Nepalese context, NGOs can have better institutional option for the improvement of livelihood only in certain conditions. They must be selective only those activities, which are feasible to intervene at the grassroots level, and can be managed easily. Such activities could be creation of awareness and development of human resources rather than distribution oriented activities. Similarly, it also requires smooth collaboration and co-ordination among intervening organizations that are working for the same purpose to create synergy of efforts for implementing different activities successfully. NGOs should also develop their own capability for utilizing local resources and implementing their programs more effectively.

Limitations

Every study has its own limitations. This study has been conducted by student for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the master's degree of Humanities in Social Work. The study has been concentrated to explain the changes on livelihood by intervention of NGOs in farmer community who are living in Ratu Village of Surkhet.

The major limitations of the study can be pointed out as follows:

1. Time constraint stands as a limitation to go into the depth of the subject matter because qualitative analysis requires lots

- of data transcribing and its interpretation.
2. There are many NGOs working in different sectors in Surkhet district but only one NGO work with farmer livelihood program is mentioned.
 3. Fifteen people from different sectors have been interviewed with the semi-structured questionnaires to make the responses inclusive. Calling responses from more than fifteen people would cost more time.
 4. This study was mostly confined on assessing the role of NGOs for addressing the livelihood issues of farming community, however, other areas of functions and the programs of the NGOs were lacking in this study. Though they are also equally important in the development discourse.

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