

A Critique on the Development Efforts in Nepal

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Introduction

In the early stage of economic development emphasis was laid on the following themes, namely, (1) industrialisation (2) rapid capital accumulation (3) mobilisation of under-employed manpower and (4) planning and economically active state. Following these strategies many countries have made much progress in raising levels of national income and industrialisation. But after examining the growth of income and industrialisation in many low-income and middle-income countries, it is found that some countries in the middle-income and also in low-income countries have been successful in giving a better conditions of life to the people leading to higher length of life, better nourishment and more education, compared to some other countries having the same or higher income. Let us consider the cases of the following countries with varying levels of income per capita:

Per Capita GNP and its Growth Rate and life expectancy at Birth in Selected Developing Countries

Country	G N P per head		life expectancy at birth 1980
	1980 value in U. S. dollars	1960-80 Growth (%)	
Brazil	2,050	5.1	63
China	290	3.7	64
Mexico	2,029	2.6	65
South Korea	1,520	7.0	65
Sri Lanka	270	2.4	66

Source: *World Development Report, 1983*

China and Sri Lanka, with less than a seventh of G.N.P. per head in Brazil or Mexico

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have similar life expectancy figures to the two richer countries. South Korea with a very high rate of growth, has not been able to overtake China or Sri Lanka in the field of longevity. These illustrations show that if a poor country follows a public policy of raising the levels of health and sanitary conditions, education and adopts suitable measures for social change, along with economic growth as China and Sri Lanka have done, it can give a better conditions of life to its people even with a low level of income.

After all, what is the main objective of economic development ? The process of economic development has to be concerned with increasing the capabilities of the people. For this, they are to be well nourished, capable of escaping avoidable illness, able to live long, able to read, write and communicate, equipped with the power to take part in literary and scientific pursuits and so forth. Economic growth takes into considerations only the supply side, namely, raising national product and aggregate income; but increase in the total supply of goods and services does not always ensure that people in general, have access to the essential requirements for leading a healthy and useful life capable of contributing its share to general upliftment of the society. *Sen (1)* and *Streeten (2)* have recently attempted to draw the attention of the economists and politicians to this essential aspect of economic development.

Nepal's Development Efforts

In this context, let us now examine the position of Nepal. No doubt, through plans specially after the third - much achievements are noticed in the forms of more irrigation facilities, use of modern technology in a modest form in a small part of agriculture, starting of new manufacturing firms, more and better roads connecting large part of the country, transport facilities connecting urban areas, communication facilities in urbanised sector, more financial institutions, more hospitals and medical service personnel, more educational institutions, better sanitation and other amenities in urban areas, more urbanised localities, higher national income per head etc. Economic growth has started and is continuing. But a question arises in the mind of an ordinary person, why a large section of the population, specially in rural part, are not getting even sufficient food for subsistence, why so many persons are suffering from various diseases and dying at lower ages, why so many infants die, and why people go abroad in search of menial type of jobs. Do the people in the rural part experience any sign of impact of development in their life, except seeing in their nearest town, a few fashionable dresses and other articles imported from abroad ? When the rural folk come to a town or to the capital city, they see big fashionable buildings, large number of new modern cars, and people with latest fashionable dresses. They possibly heave a sigh and think that all talks about development are for the god-sent lucky people, not for them.

Could the situation be moulded in a different way so as to benefit all people, including the poorer ones ? Could the planners and administrators in the high echelon, change the

situation by looking at the picture in their own clear eyes, rather than with imported coloured glasses ? Much could be done for the poorer people, by giving a slight switch and making the development plan people-oriented. Of course, the plans - specially the recent ones - mentions several times about people's participation, about health, drinking water, sanitation, education, cottage industries, and what not. But how much of these projects for the benefit of the poorer section is executed seriously and results checked ? In terms of money, large amounts were planned to be spent for the benefit of the poor, but a substantial part of the proposed fund - some guess it to be at least three-fourths has entered into the purses of bulky administration and commercial lot and a very small part only that reached the projects for which it was meant. This is no doubt a way of keeping the urban elite and the business group silent and happy and giving a security for an outward stability to the government. But production has not grown to keep pace with the population growth. Neither has there been any change in the attitude and enthusiasm of the people to do better in future.

Foreign assistance, including the funds from international agencies is substantial but the foreign donors are possibly satisfied when the fund is spent and they can send a favourable report. Large number of activities known as seminars and research projects have been completed. But how many of these projects have given the planners materials for proper thinking ? If these projects could not bring out any new information and could not suggest a new direction, can we not classify the expenditure as wasteful ? Simple programmes, like supply of drinking water to villages, mostly financed by foreign agencies, have not been completed in volume as could be expected from the amount of money spent. No doubt, some results in the form of malaria eradication, prevention of cholera, small-pox etc. have been achieved with huge expenditure.

Selective Approaches to Development

Some may argue that poorer countries should give attention to economic growth first, and when money income rises, people will be able to get all the facilities they require. But the myth can be exploded if we see how many centuries had passed before the developed countries could raise their income levels, to have a higher standard of living for all persons. Will it not be more prudent to follow a process where income growth and an all round improvement in the living conditions of all people proceed simultaneously ? This process, will give a big jolt to the entire production mechanism, bring out enthusiasm in all people and accelerate the economic growth also. In this process of economic development, peoples' participation will reach the peak and everywhere there will be noticed a tempo of development.

Without raising the level of spending very much on development, but having a re-oriented plan of action, this can be achieved. To mobilise the entire nation on the job, a feeling has to be created in the minds of the people, that they themselves will be benefi-

ted if they undertake hard work. So far, people have no faith in talks and propoganda as they have been exploited through generations. Health, education and simple amenities like drinking water have to be provided first, using their labour as far as possible. New avenues of earning by people have to be created, giving help to learn new ways of doing things and new ways of living. In the beginning, governmental assistance of a large measure is necessary in the form of educating them how to enjoy a healthy and active life, what to produce things which have a good market, and so forth, and supplying the inputs necessary for their production and providing marketing facilities, so that they may not be exploited by the traders.

Community development programmes which were started in the first two plans, were abandoned without examining and correcting the defects in the working of the programme. Similar programmes, with the certification of international agencies in the form of Food for Work, Integrated Rural Development Programmes, Cottage Industries Development etc. are now talked of. These programmes have big chance of success provided that they are followed seriously with appropriate planning. By the food for work programme, essential infrastructure of the rural economy can be realised. In agriculture and animal husbandry, knowledge of production and necessary materials at cheaper prices, are the first requirements. Similar is the case for cottage industries. People are to be trained to produce things which have markets in urban areas and abroad, and marketing facilities at semi-urban areas near the villages are to be created where the village folk can get their necessary new materials at cheaper prices and sell their products at a profitable price. In order that these commodities are accepted as substitutes, imports have to be restricted, and government as well as corporations and other government aided bodies are to purchase these commodities according to their requirement.

Conclusion

There is no novelty in these ideas. Working out these programmes properly and seriously is essential. It requires an energetic and humane administrative machinery, and a benevolent, eager, and social upliftment oriented organisation. So far, people are accustomed to think that administrators speak about all these, for having a higher position in the heirarchy. Politicians talk big simply to exploite more. This feeling of pessimism has to be removed by the administrators and politicians through their method of work. Possibly much can be achieved by having a Voluntary Service Force in each village, throughout the country. These voluntary workers have a better knowledge about the villages and can guide the people properly. They need not be entirely unpaid; and they also need some training before they can start mobilising the villagers for various works.

From administration and even from educational institutions (including the higher ones), at least one-third of the persons can be released, after a re-organisation, without any harm to the work done. In these organisations, in order to provide jobs for the elite

classes surplus manpower has been created and a sort of situation of disguised employment exists. These huge number of persons can be forced, if necessary, to do the real work for development. China did it by sending even the professors of universities to rural areas for a year. Much can be done if the politicians in power have zeal for development and possess sufficient strength to accomplish it. Planning commission is a technical body. It can indicate the types of work to be undertaken, suggest methods of working out the programmes, give a general guidance at each stage, give an account of resources, check the results at times, and try to co-ordinate the works of various executive bodies. But the actual work has to be handled by the administration in collaboration with the politicians of all ranks. So the main responsibility for success or failure lies with these bodies.

Non-monetary incentives in the form of prestige, respect, and fame in the society and also national honours for sincere work done by voluntary service force workers, administrative personnel, and politicians (including the Panchayat members) can go a long way in creating a band of selfless workers for the society. With spending a huge amount, a big portion of the development work can be done this way not only for a short period but for generations to come. The news media can play a big role in this respect.

Selected Readings

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