

# National and Ecological Security Contextualized in Nepal's “Development” Pathways

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## **Abstract**

*The study purports to analysis the environmental security issues in Nepal and its relation with the sustainable national planning. The concerns of ecological security need visible attention at all level from the policy to local. The paper is focused on the need of conceptualizing that there is need of resilience at the level of infrastructural development and maintenance and social capital enhancement and enrichment for a community to be able to withstand a particular event or disaster. Creating a resilient community helps to ensure the kind of development the world is looking for today.*

**Key Words:** Ecological security, socio-ecological resilience, environmental security

## **Introduction**

The general absence of basic security for survival and maintaining life such as food, water, place to live and natural resources needed to survive that can create instabilities. These issues are directly and indirectly connected to national security strategies globally as well as in Nepal. Although not understood from the point of view of ecological security, Nepal's security agencies are predominately involved in managing disasters that affect humanity historically. Hence, although such convergence in ecological and national security is not a new phenomenon, it requires new thinking and offer understanding of past role in new emerging context in a systemic ways for ecological safeguard and policy development so that roles of security agencies are maximized. The mind-set on national security is often related to conflict at human scale in a defense strategy level. Although, it is important context from geopolitical aspect, natural disaster and security agencies' pre-occupation often derails vigilance in more traditional level of national security at the outset.

The increasing number of countries is realizing delayed responses of change on the ecological front such as changes in water level, land degradation due to urbanization and even climate change. Such factor influence and trigger security concerns at multiple levels and can have domino effect. Nepal's position seismically is an example of such negative impacts in connection with level of governance (Transparency International Report 2017). Additionally, the strategic development context with potential of hydropower development can be impacted by climate change from sporadic flooding in the short term and increasing dry spells. One of the prime concerns could be infrastructural development leading to chaotic road building activities as an example in all ecological zones of Nepal.

The present paper highlights chaotic development practice can be a major source of ecological threat multiplier (Figure 1 and 2). Hence, the environmental disaster interacts not only in natural resources level but also from agricultural, social and political systems. It is therefore pertinent to appropriate planning and policy development to form national security context. Additionally, these practices can enhance our own boarder management and security effectively.

Because of receding water in our villages' dry out springs at the local level and growing demand for water in increasing urbanization and free market based society deplete and pollute groundwater. The receding Himalayas glaciers regionally and increasing population are quite a stress into natural resources system, hence these concern are important to the national security agencies which has cross boarder environmental ramification in terms of air, water and soil pollutions. All of these add to and affected by the kind of "development" country is undergoing contemporaneously.



**Figure 1. Sand-gravel mining as multiplier effect** (source: Author)



**Figure 2. Bad road-cut practice as a threat multiplier** (source: Author)

For security agencies all of the above issues have emerged with challenges. In context of absence of much relevant and needed data, meaningful interventions are very limited. And the resultant effect will put large population in an uneventful environment due to impacts such as flooding, road disaster where security agencies' role increases as in the time of "Gorkha" Earthquake of 2015 in Nepal. The earthquake killed more than 9000 people, displaced hundreds of thousands and devastated infrastructure and affected overall livelihood of people. It is therefore key to effective qualitative judgments to manage appropriate intervention taking into consideration of ecological factors that contribute to political, economic, and social forces to effective national security agencies' roles and

strategic goals of the country. In addition, diverse alternative energy sources that do not degrade national interest and resources are key elements of ecological security leading to effective national security. The security agencies' effectiveness through meta-disciplinary approaches can draw expertise from environmental, political and economic and behavioral sciences including traditional national security perspectives.

Although national security agencies are becoming aware of issues in crosscutting themes, the understanding and intervention should be empirical, heuristic and systemic. Heuristic approaches can be effective and speed up decision making. The systemic intervention is holistic which takes multiple issues in consideration and brings underlying factors of the events for effective intervention for lasting impact. And with the inclusion of human resources diversity culturally, security agencies have an increased multiple perspective to problem solving and intervention. Although, these efforts are encouraging it should truly benefit agencies' "modus operandi" not just through the lenses of "political correctness" but enhanced effective perspectives to be ingrained systemically. Like in more developed countries security agencies have been the fore-runner of innovation such as the Internet. Some of these issues enhance or support "deliberative democracy" not just the "traditional democracy". According to James Fishkin and Robert Luskin (2005), deliberative democracy have the characteristics of being "Informed (and thus informative)- arguments should be supported by appropriate and reasonably accurate factual claims, balanced-arguments should be met by contrary arguments, conscientious- participants should be willing to talk and listen, with civility and respect, substantive-arguments should be considered sincerely on their merits, not on how they are made or by who is making them, and comprehensive-a points of view held by significant portions of the population should receive attention." Hence, promoting the role of the security agencies does not only claim "political correctness" but also enhance societal value in recognition of communities' knowledge and resilience in the time of disaster during earthquake.

### **Socio-Ecological Resilience**

Besides many examples of socio-ecological resilience in Nepal, foundationally, the role played by the security agencies (Figure 3) in "Gorkha" Earthquake. In many ways, the whole of society illustrated the resilience inherent in social capital as rural and urban community networks coming together. As we are in the time of natural disaster events bringing wider range of human and natural resource consequences, as a human society preparing to protect future generation is evident. These evidences are testimonials of the APF engaged in protecting borders mandated with disaster management need to evolve because the natural disaster will be increased largely because of practices in use and abuse of natural resources and timidity to understand holistically on issues of "economic development" in context of socio-ecological slide. The above issues are not independent of it, but have to be contextualized with Nepal's development pathways.



**Figure 3: Security agencies involved in April 29, 2015 Earthquake in Nepal**

Source: [www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/04/rescue-and-recovery-in-nepal/391967](http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/04/rescue-and-recovery-in-nepal/391967)

### **Nepal's Development**

Similar to the disaster and the role of the APF, security agencies requires recognizing local and regional development issues as being important for local and regional governments since 1960 (Pike et al. 2006). Such contexts are influenced by global and international transformations which have multiple spatio-temporal and organisational dimensions (Held, 1999; Held and McGrew, 2007). Nepal's long bilateral relation with India and China are tied to culture, religion, trade and politics. It perhaps could be of importance to understand these development phenomena under the intellectual traditions of 'economistic fallacy' and 'self-regulating market' through Polanyi (1944) who called for 'significant interpretive' social science (Block & Somers, 2014 p. 7). Nepal's history of foreign assistance began in the 1950s and set of these assistance can be broadly categorised under bilateral, multilateral and NGOs. One of the earliest bilateral assistance from OECD countries included the United States Assistance to International Development (USAID) dating from the 1950s (Skerry et al. , 1991). Since 1950s there is increase in bilateral aid to Nepal The development planning phase in Nepal started in 1956 influenced by multilateral and bilateral agencies. Since the 1970s, multilateral assistance programs accounted for more than seventy per cent of funding for development planning in Nepal (DCD-DAC, 2010; MoF, 2014). After 1991, assistance was received in the form of program aid (services of experts to advise the government in training local personnel to perform research in technological fields, particularly the agricultural and health sectors), commodity aid (fertilizers, improved seeds, and construction materials), technical assistance and project aid (irrigation, hydroelectricity and roads projects)(Ministry of Finance (MoF) ; Bista, 2006). The OECD record shows after 1990 Nepal's receipt of aid increased markedly (DCD-DAC 2010). Also, International Development Association (IDA) of the WBG and the ADB has been involved in various developmental activities in Nepal. Besides multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, NGOs are also involved in developmental activities(SWC 1992) owing to the sorrow of Nepal by "unveiling" the image of civil society (Bhatta, 2012). Aid as resource dependency, can have a number of unintended consequences such as inability to implement productive reform, poor retention of skilled government officials (Dutch Disease), poor control of budgetary oversights and discouraged competition over patronage leading to severe conflict (Bräutigam & Knack, 2004).

The heart of development discourse lies in the international and regional development concept where the theory of development aid is situated. Such a framework of understanding has been expounded by Higgins et al. (2009) and Pike et al. (2006). Development is a highly contested concept (McMichael, 2008). Chambers (2004) expands on the meaning of this and the sense of what 'development' is linguistically and develops a meaning that is attached to the professionals who are committed to development. He laments upon the following with regards to the concept of development.

"Development has thus often been equated with economic development, and economic development in turn with economic growth, often abbreviated simply to grow. But the meanings given to development have also evolved, not least through the concept of human development in the Human Development Reports of UNDP (United Nations Development Program). So the underlying meaning of development has been good changes" (Chambers, 2004, p. 2).

The heart of "security" is also tied to development aid where a number of multilateral and bilateral development agencies have been involved for more than half a century. The different ideological premises of developmental aid systems also characterise the scene of development concept and practices (Durosomo 1994). Durosomo (1994) investigates and brings to the fore the inadequacies of a framework of dominant development theories guided either by orthodox capitalist or Marxist ideology. Assuring such as food security and addressing poverty increasingly is attained through economic policies. However, Schanbacher (2010) cites critics who identify that the above mechanisms inherent in neo-colonial power have failed to form a desirable system for overall quality of life. In a similar vein, (Scherr et al., 2011) also highlight that even though half of the total world's population depends on smallholder farmers for food, large international agribusiness dominate the food agenda. The causal relationship between food security for developing nations and the growing reliance on international aid thus forms the core concern of security. When mismatches, the whole development prospects lead to characteristically different outcome with less impactful results.

Criticism of aid dependencies framed as the 'curse of aid' have become more frequent within the economic development literature, in which, the 'resource curse' is transplanted by the phenomenon of aid (Harford and Klein, 2005). Research by Knack (2004) and Djankov et al. (2008) suggests a weakening of institutions within countries that receive a high proportion of aid and this may subsequently have ramifications for a nation's food security.

The modalities of aid have been critiqued by many for several years. Sanchez (2009) recommends that the traditional approaches of food aid are not a better or viable option; rather helping farmers by providing training, market and farm inputs are 'smarter ways to combat hunger' and are more cost effective. However, an empirical study done in Sub-Saharan Africa by Durosomo (Durosomo, 1994) shows that the Official Development Assistance (ODA) generally influences development through ideology and practices that lead to either sustainable or unsustainable development. These are driven by technical and economic ideals which ignore social, institutional and environmental values operationalised in their funded projects. Moyo (2009) details the story of why aid to Africa is not working and offers different pathways for development than are currently in operation. Such arguments are not new: a similar position has also been maintained by Bauer (1979) and also by Easterly and Easterly (2006). The CATO (2010) states that Bauer, in his publications from the 1970s to the 2000 refuted 'conventional wisdom' and indicated that interventionism, statism, and social engineering are part of the problem. Higgins et al. (1995) show the intricate relationship between foreign aid and regional development, where bilateral and multilateral donors are engaged in LDCs national development planning as well as providing the capital necessary to carry out the task and implement the changes. In addition to this, multilateral aid agencies like the World Bank are also

used as a tool to extend the foreign policy agenda by their major shareholders (Dreher et al., 2009). Thus the failures of a traditional approach have also led to a rethinking of the situation by practitioners and academics of local and regional development (Pike et al., 2006).

### **Economics, Development and Cultural Transformation**

Societies around the world have grappled with issues of economic, developmental and cultural change currently as well as historically. Ancient cultures especially those of China, India and Greece evolved within these contexts in their state affairs. Chinese philosophical roots had a complex formation of thousands of years of history which extends beyond the Confucius (551–479 BCE) and Dao (3rd or 4th Century BCE) eras. Similarly, in India, Kautilya was a thinker, an academic and the Royal advisor from 300 to 400 BCE and produced two major treatises: Arthashastra and Nitishastra (Ramaswamy 1962; Boesche 2003). These documents are written in a form of poetry similar to other Sanskrit literary works. These treatises cover areas of concerns in politics, military warfare, law, accounting systems, taxation, fiscal policies, civil rules, internal and external trade and agricultural management such as irrigation, protection of crops, harvesting and storing the produce (Boesche, 2002). This philosophical and natural treatise has subsequently been very influential and even today, these treatise are discussed in South Asia.

Greek civilisation succumbed with the succession of the Roman Empire during the 2nd Century BCE and Greek ideologies. Greek philosophy (4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) attributed to Plato also immersed in philosophy, economics, maths, science and culture. Appealing to this civilisation became part of Roman civilisation and this too eroded over time. Even though these civilisations were characteristically different based on their practices and thoughts, the cultivation of thought and practices were grounded in the needs and desires of the people and the environment they lived in. Well-developed systems of thought in many areas of human aspects and natural laws were evident. Although such societies had wide influence, smaller societies were also advanced with their unique worldview (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, Tinker, 1990). For example, Nepali civilization evolved its own characteristic roots where a greater Indic civilisation called Mahabharata owes its primal to abode of ice called the Himabatkhand of present day Nepal. Nepal civilization evolved through thousands of years before the time of Gautam Buddha (Shrestha and Singh, 1972). Similarly, after the persecution of the rulers of the principalities by the Mughal Emperor of India, many fled to Nepal in 900 CE and successively settled in different hill communities of Nepal (Shah 1989). Therefore, there has been a collective carving out by people of their living strategy in different historical, territorial and regional contexts. Thus prior to the modern evolution of economics taking place over the past two hundred years ago as introduced from Europe, stand some iconic figures who were able to relay seminal thoughts during their times on social scientific understanding. An example is that of Muqaddimah was written four hundred years prior to the birth of ‘modern economics’. This is a book written by Ibn Khaldun, a 14th century North African scholar of natural and social sciences (Gates, 1967; Khaldûn, 1969), which focused on human affairs. This exposition emphasises the importance of environment and humanity together when creating livelihood that inherently requires cooperation for continuity as Khaldûn (Khaldûn 1969) suggests:

[that] our mothers’ wombs and houses are our abode. Sustenance and food keep us alive. Time wears out. Our lives’ final terms, the dates of which have been fixed for us in the Book (Destiny), claim us. He lasts and endures us. He is the living one who does not die (Khaldûn, 1969, p. 3).

The progression of economic thoughts during the time of Francis Quesnay’s (1694-1774 AD) *Tableau économique* in 1758 of Physiocratic School and Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776 is now approximately two and a half of

centuries old. The Physiocratic School particularly upheld the notion that ‘the economic process could be understood by focusing on a single physical factor: the productivity of agriculture’ (Cleveland, 1999). This idea emanates at different scales and times of civilisation. Modern economic thought grounded in the Age of Enlightenment is thus only an extension of prior understandings of livelihood, as are commonly expressed when modern economic writing accredits it to the Greek οἰκονόμος. Theories proposed by Thomas Malthus (Malthus 1798) had a different stance towards the market and the economy during his time, opposed to the classical economists and saying

the principal cause of error, and of the differences which prevail at present among the scientific writers on political economy, appears to me to be a precipitate attempt to simplify and generalise (Hodgson, 2004).

The *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty published in 2014, is a book on wealth and income inequality that highlights fundamental drawbacks of capitalism. The centrality of concentration of wealth for the last 250 years is the feature of capitalism that helps to produce inequality and can be addressed by progressive global tax on wealth because concentration of wealth does not self-correct for the majority of society (Piketty 2014). Although Piketty’s critics can apply to invalidate the expansion of ‘neoliberalism’ in peripheral societies to reduce ‘poverty’, other richer definitions of capital by Costanza and Daly (1992), Hawken et al. (2013) and Porritt (2007) can offer alternative insights. Capital therefore, is complex and more detailed than an economic one which is defined as ‘a stock that yields a flow of useful goods or services into the future’ (Daly 1996 p. 80). This certainly leads to the idea of social and cultural capital as important to serve a sustainable future. There are alternative sustainability approaches such as ‘triple bottom lines’ (Elkington, 1997), and in *Natural Capitalism* (Hawken et al., 2013) they are seemingly simplistic. The triple bottom line primarily focuses on economy and environmental problems as the externalities (Milne, 2005), and a newer set of understanding for sustainable outcome is through focusing on ecology, economics, politics and culture (Magee et al., 2013)

Many bureaucrats of aid-receiving countries are trained under aid packages (Ramalingam, 2013). Policy makers are influenced by donors (Bourguignon and Sundberg 2007) and foreign advisors offer key capacity building trainings and education (Cohen, 1992). The areas where training was received related to development theories (Larrain 1989) such as economy, politics, ethnography, law and agricultural sciences. In a similar fashion, scholars are still supported to improve upon those ideas and practices and also in overall governance of society through new theories in market development, social sciences, and the latter includes gender and ethnic studies, human rights, conflict, and democracy. This is illustrated in the development paradigm of modernisation, liberalisation, marketisation and MDG focus starting from 1950’s to date. In this way, these societies are burdened with a prescribed learning. The classic example is why a nation as ancient and small as Nepal grapples with such tenuous ideologies as capitalism and Marxism, both of which are not the product of the country, nor of the continent as large as Asia (Heywood, 2012). The literature and narratives brought out by many social and natural scientist in Nepal and elsewhere is the product of the time. One example is given in a development book *Fatalism* (Bista, 1991) that is written about Nepal’s earlier development. It is the rejection of culture and comes as a replacement of Bista’s theory of ‘modernisation theories work’.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The Environmental Security issues need to fit into our national planning because it is the most important issues to Nepal and regionally within South Asia. It therefore needs attention at all levels of government to mainstream national security because of increasing disasters we face related to

environments detriment. As we accept climate change, energy, water and food security as quintessential to not only survival but prosperity of the future, we are also challenged with the developmental activities specially of infrastructure such as road buildings, hydropower and any other building project requires cumulative understanding of our economic, social and environmental wellbeing. These contexts are also relevant to resilience at different levels from policy to implementation of activities for creating resilient community. This requires resilience at the level of infrastructural development and maintenance and social capital enhancement and enrichment for a community to be able to withstand a particular event or disaster. Heuristically, advances in behavioral and social sciences that integrate with the physical sciences allow for a more sophisticated understanding of those dynamics to help solve our today's and tomorrow's problem.

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