

## SOCIAL STATUS AND LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN RURAL AREA: A CASE STUDY OF SINURJODA VDC, DHANUSHA

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### Abstract

*Sustainable livelihood is an integrated and holistic concept particularly for addressing poverty. This paper highlights the coping livelihood strategies in Sinurjoda Village Development Committee of Dhanusha district basing the social status of local people. The study is based on primary and secondary sources of data. Qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to analyze the information. The findings of the study apparently reveal that due to illiteracy, high family size, deep rooted blind belief on religion and local language, people in the study area do not hold good status in the VDC as compared to the national scenario. Agriculture and livestock farming have been paramount activities of the local people. About 62.30 percent people are involved in this profession. Remittance holds second position in this respect. People seem to be eager to fly abroad specially to gulf countries for employment including India. The study also depicts that this VDC has some (8.93%) squatters who are spending very miserable lives as compared to the people having own land.*

**Keywords:** Livelihood, resources, agriculture, farming, remittance, sustainability

### Introduction

Livelihood is a means of gaining a living. Capabilities, assets and activities are necessary for making a livelihood. According to Chambers and Conway (1991) a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (resources, stores, claims and access) and activities required for

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a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recovers from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in short and long term. Sustainability refers to self-sufficiency and self-reliance, which in the livelihood context, means “Ability to maintain and improve livelihoods while maintaining or enhancing the local and global assets and capabilities on which livelihoods depend”.

According to DFID’s sustainable livelihoods glossary the term livelihood strategies denotes: “the range and combination of activities and choices that people make in order to achieve their livelihood goals. Livelihood strategies include: how people combine their income generating activities; the way in which they use their assets; which assets they chose to invest in; and how they manage to preserve existing assets and income. Livelihoods are diverse at every level, for example, members of a household may live and work in different places engaging in various activities, either temporarily or permanently. Individuals themselves may rely on a range of different income-generating activities at the same time” (DFID 2001).

The sustainable livelihood concept was put forward by Brundtland Commission on Environment and development at first as a way of linking socio-economic and ecological consideration in cohesive policy-relevant structure (WCED, 1987). Later on, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 elaborated the concept by incorporating it in Agenda 21, and advocating for the achievement of sustainable livelihood as a broad goal of poverty eradication.

Many researches have been carried out on livelihood strategies in different rural areas of Nepal. These studies show that livelihood strategies are basically based on agriculture, livestock and forest related activities. Agriculture plays a vital role in rural livelihoods in generating income and providing fuel, construction materials, and animal feed. In general, livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for means of living and improvement of capacities and assets/resources required for sustainable living (Papola, 1999; Bhurtel, 2000; Dahal, 2001; Subedi & Pandey, 2002; Subedi, Subedi, Dawadi & Pandey, 2007; Paudyal, 2016). To sustain rural livelihoods, a range of activities are pursued including both the access to and the use to which they can be and are mediated by

social factors (social relations, institutions, organizations) and by exogenous trends (e.g. economic trends) and shocks (droughts, diseases, floods, pests) (Ellis, 1999).

The use of land provides a key link between human activity and the natural environment. Although land is a resource; it is different, it is peculiar, and it is not the same as other resources. Many rural dwellers in Nepal are dependent on land for subsistence agriculture and faced with a booming population and a rapidly deteriorating natural environment. The call for alternative and sustainable livelihood options has become the need of the day (Campbell, 2008). Basically the livelihoods adopted by the rural communities in Nepal are derived from the traditional economic activities based on locally available natural resources such as agriculture, livestock, forestry, etc. (Banskota and Pradhan, 2007). So, livelihood is an outcome of how and why people organize to transform the environment to meet their needs through technology, labour, power, knowledge and social relations. On the basis of these literature reviews, this paper tries to fulfill the research gap existed in social condition and livelihood strategies in Sinurjoda VDC of Dhanusha District.

## Study Area

Sinurjoda Village Development Committee has been sampled among rural areas from Dhanusha district for this research study. It is connected with Mahadaiyatapanpur of Mohattari District in the west, Laxmipurbagewa in the east, Sapai in the north and Janakpur municipality in the south. Specially the rectangular extent of the VDC is  $85^{\circ}91'25''$  to  $85^{\circ}79'45''$  East Longitude and  $26^{\circ}79'35''$  to  $26^{\circ}77'79''$  North Latitude. The total area of Sinurjoda VDC is 983.65 hectares. There are five small and large settlements in this

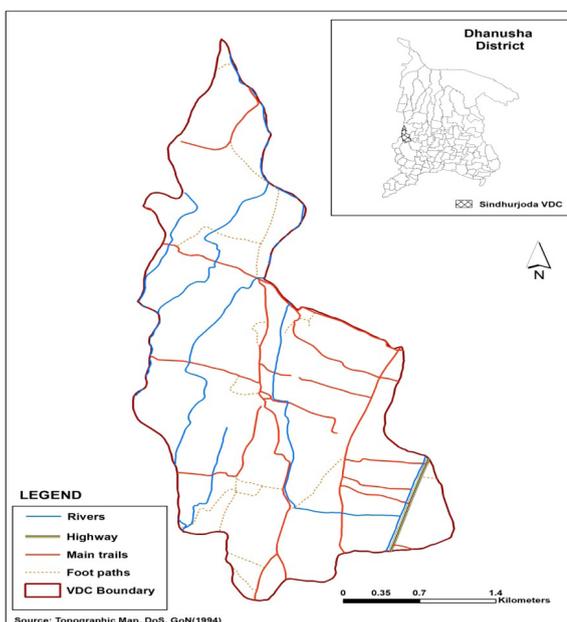


Figure 1: Location of study area

VDC. The study area falls within the Tarai physiographic region. The elevation of this area ranges from 63.9339 to 71.1929 meters (VDC. Profile, 2071)

The climatic condition of this VDC is as usual as of other Tarai districts, i.e. Sub-Tropical Monsoon type. The mean yearly minimum temperature is lowest (8.97°) in the month of January and it slowly rises from the month of February and attends highest (33.85°) in the month of April. The maximum recorded temperature is (42°) and minimum recorded temperature is (2.5°). The maximum rainfall recorded is 530.84mm (DHM, 2010). There are two rivers in this study area. The main river is Binhi and next is Dudhamati.

### **Land Use**

The information on the land use is based on recent topographical maps field survey. The area under different land use categories were calculated using Geographical Information System (GIS). The land use of study area i.e. Sinurjoda is classified into six different categories viz built-up land, cultivated land, orchard, nursery, lakes/ponds and water bodies (Fig 2). The land use area and percentage by different land use categories are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Land use Pattern**

Land cover class	Area in Sq.km	Percent
Built-up land	0.195	1.98
Cultivated land	9.319	94.72
Orchard	0.151	1.53
Nursery	0.027	0.27
Lakes/Ponds	0.042	0.43
Waterbodies	0.105	1.07
Total	9.838	100

*Source: Topographical Maps, 2017*

According to Table 1, cultivated land constitutes 94.72 Percent of the total area followed by built-up land (1.98 %), orchard (1.53 %), waterbodies (1.07 %), lakes/ponds (0.43 %) and nursery (0.27 %). It shows that the highest proportion of land is covered by cultivated land whereas nursery causes the lowest properties.

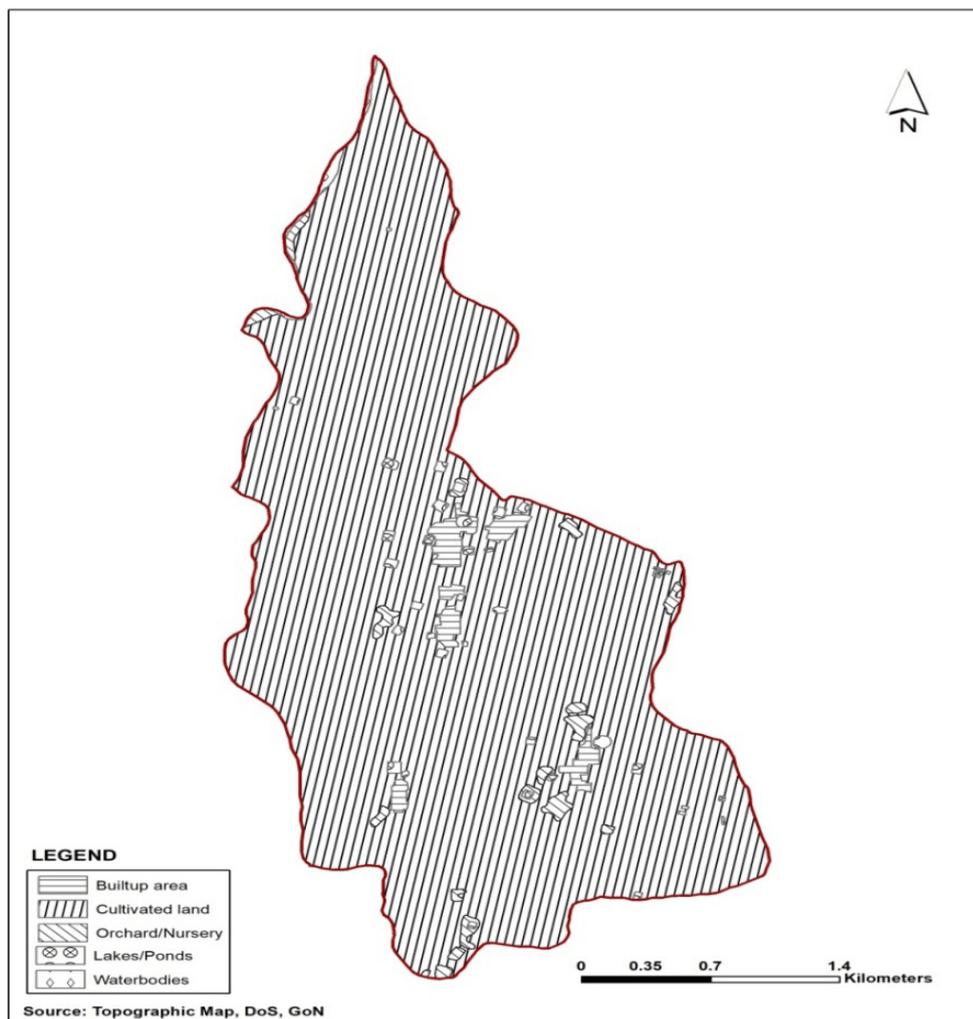


Figure 2: Land use of the study area

## Methods and Materials

This paper is guided by sustainable livelihood framework developed by Department for International Development (DFID) which analyzes the livelihood assets and strategies. The framework provides a checklist of important issues and sketches the link among each other; draws attention to the processes; and emphasizes the multiple interactions between the factors that affect livelihoods. The people centered analysis begins with simultaneous investigation of people's assets (human, natural, financial, social, physical capitals as well as influence and access), through the livelihood strategies to achieve the

objectives. On the basis of this framework, the researcher has studied the social status as livelihood assets of the people of Sinurjoda Village Development Committee and accordingly has studied livelihood strategies of those people.

The study is based on secondary and primary information. Primary data have been collected using checklist through key informant interview and group discussion. Key informant interview and focus group discussion have been carried out from different settlements to cross-check collected information which was gathered through other different sources. Local leaders, school teachers, VDC secretary, social workers and returnees have participated in key informant interview and focus group discussion. They have represented different wards, cast/ethnic groups, occupations and sex. For the secondary information, relevant data has been collected from VDC office of Sindurjoda, district office of Dhanusha and other published and unpublished reports. Population data of this VDC has been obtained from CBS 2011. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis is performed to analyze the information.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Social status**

Social Status indicates entire social condition of the people residing in the society; this includes population composition, education, literacy, health etc. which determine the social stratification of people on a vertical scale. Similarly, livelihood strategies are influenced by the social status of people. How social status has affected the livelihood strategies of people living in Sinurjoda Village Development Committee has been analyzed in this research study.

### **Population**

There is always an intimate relationship between population and resources. Because of rapid population growth in developing countries, a number of problems are emerging in the rural as well as urban areas (Paudyal, 2016). According to CBS (2011), the total population of this VDC is 8446 with 1557 households in which the proportion of male is 51.25 percent and the female proportion is 48.75 percent. The average family size is 5.40 persons in Sinurjoda VDC. The balance of sexes affects social and economic relationship within a country (CBS, 2003). It plays a significant role in the socio-cultural and economic field i.e. livelihoods of the people.

### **Ethnic composition**

The study area comprises mainly ten ethnic groups. In a broad sense of cast group, the dominant cast is Madhesi which is followed by Muslim and Dalit. More than 85.84

percent of the population is only from Madhesi community, 7.97 percent from Muslim and 1.33 percent from hill- Brahmin in this VDC.

### **Education**

The level of education is one of the proxy indicators of human capital (Pain &Lautze, 2002) which has a significant role in livelihood. About 47.78 percent people of this study area are illiterate. Out of the total illiterate population, the number of female (2009) is more than that of male (1410). On the other hand, the situation is right reverse in the case of other different level of education in the study area. The proportion of male, obtaining different levels of education is more than female. About 63.35 percent male and about 44.52 percent female are literate.

**Table 2: Literacy Status (6 years and above population)**

	Literate	Percent	Illiterate	Percent	Total
Male	2437	63.35	1410	36.65	3847
Female	1612	44.52	2009	55.48	3621
Total	4049	54.22	3419	45.78	7468

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

Higher education obtaining people are very low in this area. About 45.78 percent population is illiterate and 21.1 percent people have got primary level of education. In the same way, 15.18 and 12.28 percent of population has got lower secondary and secondary level of education respectively. Only, about 4.11 percent have got SLC and have left school thereafter. Similarly, about 3.07 percent people have completed intermediate and bachelor level of education (VDC profile, 2071).

### **Religions**

Religion is one of the major factors which influence the livelihood strategy in rural area. Religion has bounded people variously such as early marriage, ban in family planning, very less use of contraception, which have affected the life standard of people resulting in lower social status in rural area. In the study area, Hinduism is the dominant religion which covers 91.70 percent of the total population. Likewise, Islam is another religious group which is almost 7.97 percent. Christianity is recently emerged religious group in this area which occupies 0.15 (Table, 3) percent of the total population. Most of the disadvantaged groups and Dalits are changing their religion.

**Table 3: Population distribution by religion**

Religion	Population	Percent
Hinduism	7745	91.70
Islam	673	7.97
Christian	13	0.15
Others	15	0.18
Total	8446	100.00

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

### **Festivals**

Multi-ethnic and multi-culture is the main characteristic of this area. This village is rich in indigenous culture and custom. The major festivals of Nepal like Dashain and Tihar are celebrated in this area. Tarai is the place where Chhath is exclusively observed. FaguPurnima is also celebrated in this region. Id, Bakarid, Moharram and Shobarat are the major festivals of Muslim. These festivals are celebrated enthusiastically in this place. It is supposed very essential to promote and conserve local culture, and custom to develop tourism in the study area.

### **Mother Tongue**

There are more than 16 linguistic groups in this VDC. A large number of people (90.91 %) residing in this VDC speak Maithili language. Similarly, Magahi (7.20 %) and Nepali (1.08 %) are in second and third position in terms of language. Population of Tamang community is also in remarkable number and they have their own language to speak in their everyday life. Muslim is another religious group and speaks Urdu as its mother tongue. The following Table 4 shows the population by mother tongue in detail.

**Table 4: Population by Mother Tongue**

Mother Tongue	Population	Percent
Maithili	7678	90.91
Magahi	608	7.20
Nepali	91	1.08
Tamang/Yakkha	25	0.30
Others	44	0.52
Total	8,446	100.00

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

## **Health**

Health is wealth. It is known as fundamental thing for human life. But education and awareness are pre-requisites for this purpose. Of the total, about 84.20 percent households have got health post facility while about 14.52 percent households get facility of local clinic. But only about 0.58 percent household have an access of nursing home as the treatment in nursing home is very expensive. On the other hand, about 0.71 percent households have access of traditional local healer until today. *Lama, Dhami, Jhankri* and *Bijuwa* are recognized as traditional healers. Table 5 shows the health facility used by household in detail.

**Table 5: Health facility used by households**

Types of Facility	Household	Percent
Health Post	1,311	84.20
Nursing Home	9	0.58
Local Clinic	226	14.52
Local healer	11	0.71
Total	1,557	100.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2016 and VDC Profile, 2071*

## **Livelihood strategies**

Livelihood strategies denote the range and combination of activities and choice that people undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals (DFID, 1999). Livelihood strategy of the study area depends on the available natural resources and their extraction with their knowledge. Very few households of the study area are involved in the modern capital formation, and service related activities. The major livelihood options adopted by the people are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Occupational Structure of Household**

Occupation	Household	Percent
Agriculture and Livestock	970	62.30
Domestic Work	142	9.12
Foreign Labor	386	24.79
Study	16	1.03
Service	26	1.67
Trade/business	9	0.58
Cottage Industry	8	0.51
Other	0	0.00
Total	1557	100.00

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture is regarded the main occupation but the agriculture system is subsistence and traditional. According to field survey and FGD 2016, of the total 983.9 (Table, 1) hectares of land, the arable land is 716.69 hectares which is intensively used by 1402 households. So the man-land ratio is 1:05 hectare per farmer's family. Of the total 716.69 (Table, 7) hectares of arable land only 154.03 hectares (21.49 %) of land is irrigated and rest of the land is without irrigation. So the farmers depend on monsoon and very few farmers have used deep boring irrigation in their farmland.

Irrigation is considered as determining factor to yield good production in agriculture. The major source of irrigation is shallow tube wells in this VDC. About hundred and eight government donated and other 85 personal shallow tube wells are found there. The shortage of energy such as load-shedding and petroleum materials has created serious problem for running irrigation in the farming. There is no big irrigation project in this VDC. Most of the farmers depend upon rain water in the summer season. Small canals and *Kulos* are constructed through *Dhudhmati and BigahiKhol*a to irrigate the field during monsoon.

On irrigated fields, paddy is major crop. Besides it, people practice growing maize, wheat and millet as winter crop. Instead of wheat, some farmers prefer to grow green vegetables which have a good market value such as cauliflower, cabbage, potato, radish and tomato. The cropping patterns generally found on irrigated land in VDC are paddy and wheat. The production of paddy, wheat and lentils is 1789282 quintals, 25020 and 63967 quintals respectively. Fish farming has also played a great role to raise the living standard of the local people as it has become an important source of income of the area which is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Status of Arable Land**

Total Arable land	716.69 hectare
No. of Farmers' family	1402
Ratio	110.51
Crop intensity	2496.59 quintal
Irrigated land	154.03 hectare

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

According to the village record, 139 households (Table 8) are squatters- landless people- in this VDC. The number of landless people is high in 5, 7 and 8 wards. The highest number of landless people is in ward number eight which holds 302 households followed by ward number seven which comprises 250 households. On the other hand, only 66 households are in ward number nine, the lesser in number in comparison to other wards.

Squatters are dwellers who occupy an abandoned or unoccupied area of land that they do not own or have legal permission to use. However, according to the local social activists, genuine landless squatters do not own land anywhere in the VDC neither they have occupied anyone's land.

**Table 8: Landless households in study area**

Ward	Total households	Landless households	Percent
1	203	13	6.40
2	119	11	9.24
3	122	12	9.84
4	109	9	8.26
5	230	15	6.52
6	156	18	11.54
7	250	26	10.40
8	302	31	10.26
9	66	4	6.06
Total	1557	139	8.93

*Source: Field Survey, 2016 and VDC Profile, 2071*

### **Livestock raising**

Livestock farming is done for the subsidiary part of agriculture. Without livestock, agriculture is not possible. Cows farming have a great value in livestock farming. It is raised for milk, manure and ploughing field. Cows are popular in all wards of this VDC than buffaloes which is reflected in the number of its total population. Similarly, goat is also more common in this VDC. It is raised especially for the purpose of cash earning. Pig is reared especially by *Pahadi Janajati* and Dalit like Tamang, Magar, Limbu, Kami, and Damai etc. Table 9 shows the trend of livestock raising in the study area.

**Table 9: Distribution of livestock by wards**

Ward	Cow	Buffalo	Goat	Pig	Poultry	Total
1	300	150	30	2	2000	2482
2	400	200	50	0	750	1400
3	350	200	40	0	800	1390
4	350	200	60	3	800	1413
5	500	75	50	6	850	1481
6	600	150	30	4	650	1434
7	600	150	30	2	500	1282
8	800	100	30	0	650	1580
9	560	100	50	0	300	1010
Total	4460	1325	370	17	7300	13472

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

### **Poultry and fish farming**

Fish farming is another important source of income of the local people in this area. According to field survey and VDC profile, there are 28 fish ponds which are distributed in all wards of the VDC. In ward two and nine, there are five fish ponds which produce lots of fish in a year. Poultry farming is also popular among local people in this village. They are rearing broiler as well as local poultry for commercial purpose. The highest number of poultry is found in ward number one which consists 1200 in number and the lowest number of poultry is recorded in ward number nine where are only 180 chickens. It is becoming popular now a days and demand is also very high in the local as well as main market hubs. Details are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Poultry and fish farming in the study area**

Ward	Poultry Farming		Fish Farming
	Hen/Cock	Ducks/Pigeon	Fish Pond
1	1200	800	3
2	450	300	5
3	480	320	3
4	480	320	3
5	510	340	3
6	390	260	2
7	300	200	0
8	390	260	4
9	180	120	5
Total	4380	2920	28

*Source: Field Survey, 2016 and VDC Profile, 2071*

### **Business and industries**

There are no more shops in this area. According to field survey, only 0.58 percent people are engaged in this sector. There are twelve small scale industries related with agriculture and brick factory. Three rice mills and nine brick factories are established in this area.

### **Wage labor and remittance**

Unemployment is a great burning problem in Nepal. Due to lack of employment opportunities in the country, many people especially young are moving to foreign countries for employment as labour migration. Foreign employment has become major source of income in the country. So, it has become an important component of Nepalese economy. Most of the people of this area also go to foreign countries for employment. The Gulf countries are major destination for them More than 40 percent of the migrants are now in Gulf countries, such as Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arab and Qatar. But, major portion (37.82%) is still in India. Another important country is Malaysia for foreign employment which covers 6.99 percent of the total employees which is shown in Table 11.

**Table 11: Number of population by temporary foreign migration**

Destination countries	Male	Female	Total	Percent
Kuwait	46	0	46	11.92
Saudi Arab	58	2	60	15.54
Quatar	63	1	64	16.58
UAE	35	0	35	9.07
Malaysia	26	1	27	6.99
India	146	0	146	37.82
Others	8	0	8	2.07
Total	382	4	386	100.00
<b>98.96</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>100.00</b>		

*Source: Field Survey, 2071*

### **Income sources**

Diversification of income source indicates that the people of study area are engaged in different sectors for their livelihood. Agriculture is important source of income of the local people of this area which contributes about 50.68 percent of the total income. Similarly, 16.89 percent of their income is generated through remittance which is followed by livestock, business and services as shown in Table 12. Service and pension

does not pay much for the people because most of the dwellers of this VDC are not involved in government and non-government sectors of services.

**Table 12: Sources of Income**

Sources	Total Income (Approx.)	Percent
Agriculture	75,000,000	50.68
Livestock	20,000,000	13.51
Wage Labour	10,000,000	6.76
Remittances	25,000,000	16.89
Service/Pension	3,000,000	2.03
Business	15,000,000	10.14
Total	148,000,000	100.00

*Source: VDC Profile, 2071*

## **Findings and Conclusion**

As livelihood is a means of gaining a living, it is directly related to the availability of resources, services, facilities and institutions. Social status determines livelihood strategies. The social status of the study area reveals that more than 85 percent people are Madhesis in which 42.14 are Yadavs and 7.97 are Muslims whereas only 1.33 percent are Hill Bramins in the study area. One of the important indicators of development of the country is literacy. In this area, about 54.22 percent people are literate whereas the percentage of illiteracy is 45.78. In the same way, about 91.70 percent people are Hindus and others are Muslims. Maithili is the major local language of the people. More than 90 percent people speak this language while only 1.08 people speak Nepali.

People have adopted various livelihood strategies for their living in this area. Agriculture and livestock farming is the most dominant strategy in which 62.30 percent households are involved in it. .Of the total income, this profession occupies 64.19 percent. Although this occupation is regarded as the backbone of their living, about 8.93 percent people are still squatters. Of the total households, about 24.79 percent are remittance earners and this profession engrosses 16.89 percent of the total income of the people. Besides agriculture and foreign wage labour, People are engaged in other various activities like poultry farming, business, cottage industry, government and non-government services etc. to make their living easier. Very few people seem to be engaged in government and non-government services. The larger number of family size and the landless households

revel that the people of this area are relatively poorer. Therefore, to feed the larger population, agriculture has been the major occupation of the local people.

On the whole, it can be concluded that education one of the proxy indicators of development is not as good as expected in this area. Maithili, the local language has been an obstacle in receiving education, along with early marriage – a strong social norm and value. Similarly, being landless is also a plight to some people to be poor which has resulted to be involved in wage labour in foreign countries. Until people get higher level of education and be able to remove traditional belief of religion, possession of own land, get prerequisites of development, their living standard won't be as good as their expectation.

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