



### Article information

Received:	3 March 2026
Review:	5 March to 18 March 2026
Revision:	25 March to 29 March 2026
Accept:	1 April 2026
Published:	15 April, 2026
DOI:	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3126/ps.v24i1.92752">https://doi.org/10.3126/ps.v24i1.92752</a>
Available:	<a href="http://www.nepjol.info/index.php/ps">www.nepjol.info/index.php/ps</a>

## Livelihood Transformation and Adaptation among Tharu Communities in Sahuraha, Chitwan, Nepal

Chandra Prasad Dhakal<sup>1\*</sup> 

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Email: cpddhakal@gmail.com

\*Corresponding Author

Rishiram Adhikari<sup>2</sup> 

Nepal Sanskrit University, Nepal

Email: adhikaririshiram45@gmail.com

### Abstract

This study examines the livelihood transformation and adaptation among the Tharu living in the surrounding area of Chitwan National Park. The objective of this study is to analyze the perception of the Tharu people living in Sahuraha related to the transformation and adoption of their livelihood due to the tourism business. The primary focus of this study is to highlight the impact of Chitwan National Park and the tourism business of Sahuraha on economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects, as well as the livelihoods of the people. Face-to-face interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were used to gather data. The data were collected from the two traditional Tharu villages, Sahuraha and Malpur of Ratnanagar Municipality. A qualitative research design was used to analyze the data collected from the field. In total, 20 individuals participated in this study, including 10 who participated in face-to-face interviews, 3 key informant interviews, and 7 individuals in focus group discussions. Based on the analysis of the data, it was found that Chitwan National Park and the conservation policy led to changes in the traditional livelihood patterns of the Tharu people living in the study area. There was a transformation in socioeconomic and cultural situations as well as livelihood patterns. Environmental factors and social factors are directly affected in the sustainable livelihood of the people because, in the current situation, they cannot continue the traditional agriculture-based livelihood. Benefit sharing is the main obstacle to bringing about positive changes in the livelihood pattern. A benefit-sharing policy is necessary to preserve the traditional identities of the Tharu people, which are in the process of shifting due to the pressure of Chitwan National Park and the tourism business of Sahuraha.

**Keywords:** Chitwan, environment, Sahuraha, Tharu, tourism

## **Introduction**

Chitwan is the homeland of the Tharu people, and their traditional livelihood is based on farming. However, after establishing Chitwan National Park in 1973, certain changes and adaptations occurred in the livelihood of the Tharu people living in the surrounding area of Chitwan National Park. After establishing the national park, the tourism business began in the surrounding area, especially in Sauraha and Bagmara. Sauraha is located in ward no. 6, and Bagmara is ward no 7 of Ratananager Municipality. In these settlements, the population of the Tharu is higher than that of the other communities. According to the national population report 2021, the total population of Tharu in Ratanagar municipality is 13683, which covers 15.2% of the total population of the municipality.

The area is one of the major tourism hubs of Nepal, where 306,837 tourists have visited in FY 2023/24 (Kantipur, 2025). There are 120 + hotels and 8 restaurants currently running in Sauraha (Tourism Info Nepal, 2025, September 3). Due to pressure from the tourism business, the Tharu living in the study area are compelled to follow the tourism business as a new source of livelihood. Environmental degradation, changing patterns of socioeconomic demands play a role in transforming the traditional livelihood pattern and adopting a new one. Tourism-based economic activities are a highly studied area; however, only a few Tharus have succeeded in getting benefits from the tourism business because only a few have their own business, and others work as seasonal workers. Although they have been changing their livelihood and adopting a new one for a long time. In the past, they were involved in farming and fishing, but now they are employed in the tourism sector. Now they gain opportunities to join jobs that help to change the traditional livelihood of the Tharu (Paudel, 2022). Both negative and positive changes occurred while shifting the livelihood pattern of the Tharu from Traditional to new one. In this context, the study focused on these research questions: how tourism-based livelihood plays a role in the change and adoption of the livelihood of the Tharu living in the surrounding area of the Chitwan National Park. The main objective of this study is to analyze the role of the tourism business in the Change and adoption of the livelihood of the Tharu living in the study area.

## **Literature Review**

Socio-economic changes, modernization, globalization, and environmental factors contribute to the shifting livelihood patterns of the indigenous people (Adhikari et al., 2024; Khatri & Pasa, 2023). The livelihood pattern of the Tharu people living in the Chitwan surrounding area of the Chitwan National Park is traditionally based on farming, hunting, and fishing (Paudel, 2020). After establishing Chitwan National Park in 1973, it brought drastic changes in the livelihood strategies of the Tharu living in the study area. In the context of the study area, tourism plays an important role in changing the livelihood of Tharu through creating new employment opportunities and diversified income sources. In Bachhauli, people are involved in service work related to tourism sectors like tourist guides, hotel workers, and transport, which is different from the traditional livelihood (Berozzi et al., 2020). In the study area, the tourism business extended the sources of

livelihood of the Tharu people through enhancing economic sources by various activities like hotel business, village tourism, and jungle trips.

Acharya (2020) analyzed the role of ecotourism for the economic status of the people living near the Sahuraha. The buffer zone of Chitwan National Park runs an income generation program in the study area. The programs help to shift the traditional livelihood of the Tharu people of the study area. With Chitwan National Park and the local government, non-government organizations also bring various livelihood-related programs to modernize the Tharu people. These programs controlled their traditional livelihood, such as cutting trees, collecting firewood, and fishing in the river. They are involved in wage labor and hotel work, like washing dishes, cleaning the grounds, and carrying the baggage of the tourists. Like occupation and income source, their social status is also in the process of shifting. In this regard, Paudel (2025) noted that due to the influence of modernity, the traditional cultural practices and rituals and ceremonies are reformed and appear in a new form. Due to legal provisions, they could not continue their traditional profession, such as fishing in rivers and collecting wild products. They only concentrate on the desire of visitors and perform their arts and culture activities to the desire of the tourists. Paudel (2025) further highlighted that the traditional culture of Tharu appears as the modern form, with a mix of Nepali and Western culture. They negotiate with modern heritage and are compelled to shift the traditional livelihood, such as fishing, killing animals, and cutting trees. The economic force plays an important role in accepting the new concept of preserving culture and nature for the purpose of maintaining tourism.

Traditional identities of the Tharu living in the Terai region are being transformed with climate change, environmental degradation, and the provision of a national park. In this regard, Gautam (2022) highlighted the issue that the Tharu people share both traditional knowledge systems and modern technology used in farming. These are the positive aspects of the transformation from old to new. Certain Changes are found in the traditional farming system of the Tharu people because they use modern technology, seed, and modern pesticides in farming. The use of modern technology enhances agricultural production and crop management. In this context, there is found integration between indigenous and scientific agricultural practice among Tharu people living in Chitwan (Gautam et al., 2022). The practice plays an important role in shifting the livelihood pattern of the Tharu in Chitwan.

Climate change and environmental pollution also forced the Tharu people to adopt new livelihood strategies because the traditional pattern of livelihood could not maintain the day-to-day necessities of the people. Khatri and Pasa (2023) analyze the effects of climate change on the Tharu people living in Sahuraha. The effects of climate change bring various problems in agriculture system. Local resources and local knowledge also diversified due to climate change. The cropping calendar also changes, which forces people to change their livelihood patterns. Climate change not only affects the farming system and crop production but also causes natural disasters like floods and droughts. The Tharu people of Chitwan are highly affected by the flood. To save from the flood and to strengthen the structure of the house, the Tharu also made changes and built the house to mitigate the risks of climate change. (Household Vulnerability Study, 2021).

Livelihood diversification also occurred among the Tharu people of Chitwan, which plays a role in shifting the socioeconomic status of the people. Dhakal (2021) analyzes the situation of Tharu people living in Kalika Municipality of Chitwan, whose occupational status has rapidly changed due to urbanization and the livelihood pattern has also changed due to globalization and modernization, with the enhancement of the market economy. Traditional agriculture-based livelihood shifts into a market-based modern economy. However, only some educated Tharu people are succeed to the shift their traditional livelihood, and the rest of the people fall into the crisis of resource deprivation. After the establishment of the national park in Chitwan, the Tharu people have not used the forest resources. Without using forest resources, farming activities do not become productive, so they do not get enough return from farming, which is one of the main causes of poverty. A large number of Tharu people who do not have access to education cannot shift their livelihood and still depend on farming.

The reviews of the literature mentioned above only discussed different aspects of the livelihood pattern, but these studies did not mention the opinions of the stakeholders about the causes of the shifting traditional livelihood and adopting new strategies of livelihood. More than that, the study fills the gap of previous studies and analyzes the issue of change and resilience of the livelihood of Tharu people in the context of the developing tourism in the study area.

### **Theoretical Review**

The study is based on the theory of the sustainable livelihood framework and resilience. In the context of Nepal, the livelihood transformation of indigenous people is developing in a complex way. The livelihood strategies of the Tharu community of Sahuraha are influenced by socioeconomic changes, cultural assimilation, and policy regimes. The sustainable livelihood framework and resilience talk about the dynamics of livelihood changes and adaptation. The sustainable livelihood framework is widely used in development studies and analyzes the human, social, physical, financial, and natural capital that play a role in measuring the livelihood strategies of people. The concept was developed by the Department for International Development (DFID), an organization of the United Kingdom in the 1990s. After that, the ideas used in the development sector and analyzes how households pursue and sustain livelihoods under changing conditions (Scoones, 1998). There are five types of assets: human, social, physical, financial, and natural capital, included in the sustainable livelihood (Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000). The assets are related to the context created by vulnerabilities, transforming structures (e.g., markets, institutions), and policies, which play a role in determining livelihoods and their outcomes, such as income, food security, and well-being. being (DFID, 1999; Carney, 2003).

In the context of the changes and adaptations of the livelihood of the Tharu people of Sahuraha, tourism and conservation policy play a significant role. The traditional livelihood of the Tharu people is based on natural capital like forest resources, fertile flood plain soils, and social capital (Pandey, 2012). For a long time, the Tharu people have not used natural resources due to Chitwan National Park, and they are compelled to change their traditional livelihood patterns and adopt new

livelihood strategies. Livelihood change establishes new strategies based on the sustainable livelihood of Sahuraha (Berozzi et al., 2020).

The tourism sector created a new dimension of livelihood, which is based on human capital, such as literacy, language skills, and occupational skills, which are necessary to enter the emerging job markets. (Scoones, 1998). There is a need for financial and physical infrastructure, like access to credit, roads, and industries, for jobs and investment to enhance the livelihood of people living in the study area. Infrastructure development policy and institutional factors play a role in shaping livelihood. Policy related to Chitwan National Park controls the natural capital of the Tharu people so that their farm-based livelihood transforms into off-farm because forest resources play an important role in agriculture (Gurung & Bhandari, 2015). The sustainable livelihood framework focuses on the factors that affect the continuation or change of the livelihood strategies of the people, and resilience theory focuses on the adaptation of the new form of livelihood due to the pressure of changes. Holling (1973) and Folke (2006) talked about the changes in livelihood. Resilience theory talks about the loss of core identity that helps to learn the shifting patterns of livelihood. Resilience theory emphasizes the diversity of strategies that play a strength under stress (Berkes & Ross, 2013).

In the context of Sahuraha, climate change and its effect fall on land use and agricultural work; however, the development of tourism encourages Tharu people to be involved in the hotel business (Adhikari et al., 2024). The adaptive capacity of the Tharu people is influenced by various factors like service-related activities and craft production, and seasonal tourism, which are main aspects of adaptive capacity (Folke et al., 2010). In the process of adaptation, the tourism network plays a significant role in Sahuraha because it plays a role in the process of transformation of the socioeconomic and cultural status of the people. The condition creates a problem in saving the traditional livelihood and identities of the Tharu people of Sahuraha (Paudel, 2025). The theory of resilience concentrates on the diversities of social networks, or cultural practices, as a buffer against system shocks (Walker et al., 2004). The livelihood of the Tharu people is in a phase of transition because both traditional and modern factors of livelihood are guided by sustainable livelihood and resilience. Understanding how the Tharu community in Sauraha maintains and develops their livelihoods in a changing socio-ecological environment, assisted by understanding the principles of integrated livelihood approaches and theories of resilience. The livelihood strategies of Tharu people living in Sahuraha are based on both the theory of sustainable livelihood strategies and resilience theory.

## **Research Method**

### **Study Area**

Ratanagar municipality wards 6 and 7, Sahuraha, were the study area of this study. The geographical location of Sahuraha is Latitude 27.57°N and Longitude 84.49, which falls in the inner terai region of Nepal. It is an adjoining area of the Rapti River and Chitwan National Park. The study area is traditional famous for paddy and mustard farming but now it is one of the main tourism hubs of Nepal.

### Data Collection Tools and Technique

The study followed an interpretive paradigm of the qualitative research design, and both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study; however, the findings and conclusions of this study were based on primary data. The face-to-face interview, key informant interview, and focused group discussion were used to collect primary data. Participants of this study were selected by using a purposive sampling method. 20 individuals participated in this study, including 10 face-to-face interviews, 3 key informant interviews, and 7 in focus group discussions.

The open-ended questions related to objectives were used in face-to-face interviews and collected data. The 10 individuals who have been living in a study area for ten years participated in the face-to-face interview. Like that 3 individuals were involved in key informant interviews. They are directly aimed at improving the livelihood of the Tharu people living in the study area. A political leader and two activists were chosen for a key informant interview. In the focus Group Discussion (FGD), 7 individuals participated and expressed their opinions about the livelihood of the Tharu people living in the study area. In FGD, the change and resilience of the livelihood strategies of the Tharu people living in the study area were discussed. After completing the data collection process, the collected data were thematically categorized and interpreted on the basis of the objectives.

### Result and Discussion

#### Socioeconomic Status of the Participants

The 20 Tharu people from different socioeconomic background were participated in this study.

**Table 1**

*Socioeconomic Status of the Respondents*

Participants	Age	Sex	Education	Occupation	Annual family Income
P1	25	Male	SEE	Farming	3-4 lakhs
P2	30	male	+2	Hotel Business	4 to 6 lakhs
P3	50	Male	Only literate	Farming	3-4 lakhs
P4	60	Male	SEE	Farming	3-4 lakhs
P5	65	Male	SEE	Tourism Business	6-8 lakhs
P6	55	Female	Only literate	Farming / labour	Up to 3 lakhs
P7	35	Female	SEE	Hotel business	4 to 5 lakhs
P8	45	Female	Bachelor	Government job	Up to 3 lakhs
P9	50	Female	Master	Activists	4 to 6 lakhs
P10	42	Female	Only literate	Farming	Up to 3 lakhs
KI1	50	Male	Master	Tourism business	5 to 10 lakhs
KI2	75	Male	Only literate	Farming	Up to 4 lakhs
KI3	30	Female	Master	Activists	5 to 7 lakhs
FGD1	40	Female	Only literate	Farming	Up to 3 lakhs
FGD2	45	Female	Master	Service	4 to 6 lakhs
FGD3	60	Female	SEE	Hotel	5 to 6 lakhs
FGD4	35	Male	Bachelor	Tourism	6 to 8 lakhs
FGD5	70	Male	Only literate	Farming	3 to 4 lakhs
FGD6	55	Male	Bachelor	Teaching	4 to 6 lakhs
FGD7	45	Male	+2	Farming	3to Lakha

**Source:** Field Survey

A pseudonym, p1 to p10, was used for the participants of the face-to-face interview. Like that, for the participants involved as key informant interview of this study, addressed by use of Ki 1, Ki 2, and Ki 3. In the same way, the people involved in the focus group discussions were referred to as FGD1, FGD2, FGD3, FGD4, FGD5, FGD6, and FGD7. The pseudonym was used to maintain the ethical issue of the research. The following table shows the socioeconomic status of the participants in face-to-face interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

In the above table, the socioeconomic status of the participants has been shown. In this study, participants from different socioeconomic status are participated. In this study, participants aged 25 to 75 years were grouped; however, most were aged 25 to 50 years. The majority of the participants are involved in farming, and they do not have such high incomes. The study area is one of the famous tourist spots of Nepal; however, only a few Tharu people use the tourism business as the main source of their livelihood.

### **Livelihood Transformation and Adaptation among Tharu**

The establishment of Chitwan National Park and associated tourism in Sahuraha brought several changes and challenges in the economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of the Tharu people living in Sahuraha. Both positive and negative impacts were faced by participants after the establishment of Chitwan National Park and the tourism business in Sahuraha. The tourism business and the establishment of Chitwan National Park compel the Tharu people to change their traditional livelihood patterns. After changes in the traditional pattern of livelihood participant perceive certain changes in social status, economic status, culture, and environment.

### **Economic Factors**

Chitwan National Park directly affected the lives of the Tharu people after its establishment because traditional forest-based economic activities were halted by legal restrictions. In this regard, KI12 notes “After establishing the Chitwan national park and community forest as well as buffer zone in the Tharu settlement area, they are restricted from grazing cattle into the jungle and collecting grass from the jungle. The Tharu people stopped to cattle grazing in the jungle, and the number of cattle is described so that some of the Tharu people migrated from the land, and others reduced the number of cattle. After reducing the cattle, it directly affected the overall livelihood. After decreasing the number of cattle crops production also decreased. The traditional pattern of economic life was changed at that time, so the Tharu people have not had opportunities in the tourism sector. A large number of hotel owners and businessmen are from outside or other communities (Personal Interview, 2026). It shows that tourism development of Sahuraha and the establishment of Chitwan National Park forced Tharu people to adopt new business; however, from the new business, they have not got sufficient opportunities to enhance their economic status. Participants of the focus group discussion also insisted that“ Tharu people are compelled to shift their traditional economic pattern, but government policy and program still neglect to share the benefit of tourism to the poor and marginalized Tharu people; however, the economic landscape of the

study area is transformed with modernization and globalization” (FGD, 2026). In face-to-face interviews, the majority of the respondents described the horrible situation of COVID-19 and noted that if the tourism business stops in Sahurha, Tharu people will face economic problems because they have already changed the traditional economic pattern. Most of the poor people involved in the hotel as low-level workers, their income is not sufficient to save for the future and establish a new business. There is no option to involve fishing, collecting wild substances, and cattle grazing in the forest, so the Tharu people are economically insecure in the study area. The Change could not have established a strong economic foundation for the Tharu people (Face-to-face Interview, 2026). Most of the Tharu people are involved in labor and physical activities and work as low-paid workers. They are involved in hotel work in season; they became jobless; however, some of them are involved in farming. The majority of the participants noted that the tourism sector in Sahuraha could not promote the Tharu culture and art and craft, or village safaris. In the off-season, they have no alternative ways to engage in economic activities.

During this long time of establishment of Chitwan National Park, the economic situation of the Tharu people could not improve; however, they were compelled to change their livelihood strategies.

All participants in this study demand a policy on benefit sharing in the tourism industry that only enhances the economic status of the Tharu. Annually, the government of Nepal and Chitwan National Park collect a large amount of tax; however, only a small portion of it is used for the economic uplift of the Tharu people.

### **Social Effect**

Social factors play an important role in the changes and resilience of the livelihood strategies of the Tharu people living in the study area. Social capital, engaging with different social groups like mother groups, water user groups, community forest user groups, and resource management and skill development, all force people to change their livelihood patterns. In this regard, KI1 notes, “Tourism business brings various changes in the social status of Tharu people. Before the establishment of Chitwan National Park and the tourism business, the educational status of the Tharu people was very low because they were only involved in farming, so they did not see the use of education. After the establishment of hotels in Sahuraha, the Tharu people enhanced their education, skills, and institutional development, which also occurred in the study area. The programs run by the buffer zone and the national park play a significant role in enhancing the social status of the Tharu people. After changes in social status, they also shift their livelihood patterns”. (Personal interview KI1, 2026). In that regard, participants in the focus group noted that Chitwan National Park has been running a skill development program; however, the program has not yielded effective results among the Tharu people. Only a few Tharu people have succeeded to enhance the skill and education from the tourism business. (GDP participant 1, 2026). In the same way, the participants involved in face-to-face interview are not fully satisfied with the program of Chitwan national park and the tourism business run in Sahuraha. P4 notes “The programs run by the Chitwan National Park do not defectively changes the social status of Tharu people.

However, in some cases, Tharu people enhance their livelihood through increasing their network with various social organizations like women empowerment group, water users' group, hotel association Sahuraha chapter, and trekking agency of Sahuraha" (Personal Interview with p. 4).

All the participants of this study partly accepted the claims of Chitwan National Park and tourism-related organizations in terms of the development of social status of the local people regarding enhancing the social status of the local people, however, the respondents cannot fully support changing the livelihood of the participants.

After brings certain changes in the social status of the Tharu people like education, health status, social network force to changes the livelihood pattern and after changes the livelihood pattern automatically changes the social strategies of the Tharu people living in the study area. Tourism business of Sahuraha brings positive impacts on the social life of the Tharu, especially in network development and skill development. In some cases, modernization and globalization also affected the social life and social capital of the sustainable livelihood of the Tharu people.

### **Cultural Implications**

The tourism business of Sahuraha and Chitwan National Park has been running programs related to preserving and promoting Tharu culture in the study area. Tourists visit the sites and share the cultural values of the Tharu people. In this regard, KI3 notes, "People who visit Sahuraha from home and abroad neglect the cultural values of the Tharu people and impose their culture, which creates problems in saving the cultural identities of the Tharu. In some cases, cultural and ritual activities are performed for the tourists for the sake of entertainment. Such practice attacks the aesthetic values of the Tharu culture". (Personal Interview KI3). In the same line, participants of the focus group discussion also feel certain changes in the cultural values of the Tharu living in the study area. In this regard, FGD3 notes, "In some cases, traditional Tharu culture is replaced by the modern culture like Oso and other Christian-based charity. The Tharu people are also involved in these activities; however, cultural groups and activists are working for the safeguarding of cultural identity". (Interview with FDG3, 2026).

Participants of face-to-face interviews noted that traditional Tharu culture is associated with the forest, the river, and the land. After the establishment of Chitwan National Park, the park controls people from entering the forest and collecting the wild substances that are necessary for cultural performances. Their river and land were also captured by the administration so that they could not have a chance to perform cultural activities. In this regard, p7 notes "Each of the Tharu people worshiped in a certain open place, which is located in the forest and on the bank of the river. The place is captured by a national park and community forest, and a jungle safari route is made from the place. The Tharu people silently transform the place near their home and field, where it is difficult to perform the Puja of ancestors and gods. After facing difficulties, they were compelled to change and adopt the new way of worshipping" (Personal Interview with p7, 2026).

Certain types of handicraft and art craft, food, an beverage has direct connection with cultural performance, so that after changing the pattern of

celebration of cultural festivities and ritual ceremonies, the art crafts and handicrafts are going to vanish from the community. It directly affected on the livelihood pattern of the Tharu people living in the study area. After adopting new cultures like celebrating birthday ceremonies, Christmas celebrations, and the celebration of the English New Year, they use modern products like cakes, modern ornaments, and dresses. The tourism business of Sahuraha plays a significant role in bringing such changes in the lives of Tharu people living in the study area.

### **Environmental Factors**

Environmental factors also play a significant role in continuing, shifting, and adapting the livelihood pattern of the Tharu people living in the study area. In this regard, KI2 notes, “After the establishment of Chitwan National Park, environmental issues became crucial in the study area that directly affected the livelihood pattern of Tharu people. They do not get access on forest products like firewood, fodder, timber, and medicinal plants, as well as hunting and fishing opportunities. (Interview with KI2, 2026). The tourism business of Sahuraha provides opportunities to Tharu people to be involved in wage labor, hotel work, and other activities. In some cases, climate change also affected the lives of the Tharu people. Participants of the focus group discussion also claimed that the lowland of the Tharu people is covered by water during the rainy season due to the dam of the marketplace. FGD5 notes, “After the establishment of a hotel in the study area, the water channel became blocked, and the fertile land of the Tharu people was flooded, and rice production decreased. After that, they sold their land to the businessmen. Hotels were built in the land, and a clean and fresh environment of the study area changed into the crowded city that compelled the change in the livelihood pattern of the Tharu people” (Interview with FGD5, 2026)

Floods create problems for the livelihoods of the Tharu people, and they are compelled to adopt new occupations. The participants in the face-to-face interview also explained the effects of the environment on the livelihoods of the Tharu people living in the study area. In this regard, p4 notes, “After the establishment of the tourism business in Sahuraha, various problems in the lives of the Tharu people. Pollution increased in the study area. A flood occurred in the area due to urbanization and the construction of concrete buildings. More than that, people forcefully adopted the new business and occupation because the traditional livelihood pattern had changed (Personal Interview with p4, 2026).

The environment is a key factor in the Tharu people's determined livelihood pattern because their traditional livelihood is deeply connected to the environment and ecology. After changing the environment, they are compelled to shift to a new form of livelihood pattern based on hotel business and wage labor rather than farming.

### **Perceptions of ‘Resilient Livelihood’**

Participants expressed largely aligned perspectives on the concept of a "resilient livelihood" within the context of the Tharu peoples of study area. In this study, most of the participants agree that being resilient means being able to effectively maintain one's livelihood under a variety of situations, both now and in the future. In this regard, p7 notes, "After the establishment of the tourism sector in Sahuraha, the Tharu people adopted a new business. They have opportunists to get income from the hotel business and tourist guide occupation. More than that, Chitwan National Park provides skill and financial support to the poor, which helps them adopt new livelihoods" (Interview with p7, 2026).

Financial assets, especially household cash, are seen as the most important type of capital because they can be used to access and enhance other types of livelihood assets (especially material) through the use of financial resource leveraging. Likewise, the sociocultural aspects of households were considered a key component of their collective sociocultural assets in supporting household livelihood resilience. One of the participants of FDG (FDG4) notes, "The resilience of the Tharu people's livelihoods in the Sauraha area, adjacent to Chitwan National Park, demonstrates their historical adaptability to shifts in their environmentally, economically, and socially based circumstances. Historically, the Tharu relied on agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, and the harvesting of forest products to sustain their existence. Their extensive environmental knowledge helped them respond effectively to floods, wild animal threats, and uncertainties related to the seasonality of local environmental conditions. With the establishment of the national park and the rapid expansion of tourism in Sahuraha, there has been a transformation in both economic status and livelihood patterns of the Tharu. New adaptive mechanisms are now required for the Tharu community to survive within their new economic environment. (Interview with FGD 4, 2026)

Livelihood diversification is an important strategy for building resilience in the Tharu community. As access to forest areas and traditional resources has been curtailed due to the establishment of the national park and the growth of tourism, many households have transitioned from agricultural-based livelihoods to activity in the tourism sector. Examples of new sources of livelihood include hotel employment, tour guiding, performance of traditional cultural dances, handicraft production, and small business ownership. By diversifying their income sources, Tharu households have reduced their dependence on a single income stream and minimized the risks of crop loss due to floods and incursions by wild animals or other agents.

A key element of sustaining livelihoods for the Tharu people in Sauraha is the strong social capital they possess through their family units, communal resources (i.e., neighbors, friends), and organized community groups such as mothers' groups and cooperatives (i.e., forest user groups). This bond of community members provides mutual emotional support, labor share, and financial aid during times of crisis. Community cooperation and action also allow the Tharu people to advocate collectively/negotiation with local governments and travel companies for employment opportunities and access to resources. Cultural resilience is another essential component of sustaining livelihoods. The Tharu continue to practice their language, rituals, and traditions from the past despite the economic changes they

have faced. Additionally, the incorporation of some of these rituals into the tourism sector (i.e., cultural performances, homestays) provides income to the Tharu and increases their identity and pride. The merging of traditional cultural practices with new ways to earn a living in today's economy shows that the Tharu are demonstrating adaptive resilience. Although they have preserved remnants of past cultures, they continue to face significant environmental challenges that threaten the sustainability of their livelihoods. Some of the most pressing issues include flooding along the Rapti River, climate variability, and human-to-wildlife conflict. The Tharu household, in response, has implemented numerous coping strategies, including seasonal migration for work, construction of more robust housing, crop diversification, and active participation in disaster-preparedness programs supported by NGOs and local government. The Tharu's adaptive capacity has been greatly enhanced through education and exposure to new skills, particularly among younger generations. Sustaining a resilient livelihood for the Tharu people in Sahuraha is based on their ability to use traditional knowledge as a foundation to build adaptive capacity to new economic opportunities.

### **Conclusions**

The Tharu views of tourism in the Chitwan National Park both benefits and challenges that significantly influence their livelihood capitals and thus their resilience-building capability. Participants perceive both negative and positive impacts of the infrastructural development and tourism development in Sahuraha.

The Tharu people living in the study area have access to basic facilities, but their economic situation is not good because there are problems on benefit sharing. In some cases, the tourism business helps to improve the living standard and income sources of the Tharu people; however, they face problems in their lives if certain difficulties occur in the tourism sector. Most of the participants need to improve the living standard of the Tharu people because Chitwan National Park and the community forest neglect the cultural and social identities of the Tharu people living in the study area.

The Traditional livelihood pattern of the Tharu people is based on the forest, river, and open land. The forest, the river, and open land are captured by the government and declared as Chitwan National Park. Hotels, restaurants, elephant safari, and jungle safari are also run in the study area, which play a role in changing the traditional livelihood to adopt a new livelihood based on the modern economic system and supported by the hotel and tourism business. In the study area, the Tharu people are facing the problem of cultural identities because the influence of modern culture is high in the study area. Cultural tourism cannot develop in the study area because most of the tourist visit Sahuraha are involved in jungle safari, boating, or jungle walking. Core Tharu village has changed to the city of modern hotels and restaurants. Environmental pollution, floods, and noise pollution occurred due to the development of an unmanned city in the study area. There is also a conflict between humans and wild animals. Economic benefit from the tourism sector is high in Sahuraha, but national park administration and hotel owners benefit from the tourism sector, and poor people are only involving low paid workers. Only a limited number of local Tharu people involve in the tourism business, and the rest of them are

engaged as workers. It is necessary to change the as policies related to the national park and conservation area.

### **Declarations**

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This research maintained ethical considerations during response taking process throughout interviews and group discussions with participants.

### **Consent for Publication**

We give consent to publish the manuscript in the journal.

### **Conflict of Interests**

There is no conflict of interest with any individual or institution.

### **Author's Contribution**

All the data used in this study were collected by the authors, and the data were also analyzed by the authors.

### **Use of AI**

It is declared that the article has been completely written by ourselves and only a few pieces of information have been adopted from AI.

### **Acknowledgements**

We thank the authors whose works were cited in this study. Like that we acknowledged to the participants of this study who provided information while we were in the field study.

## **References**

- Acharya, P. (2020). Ecotourism and its impact on local community in Sauraha, Chitwan National Park, Nepal. *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(5).
- Adhikari, S. R., Chongbang, N., Bhandari, M., & Iskamoto, D. (2024). Community adaptation to climate change: A sociological analysis of the Madi region, Chitwan, Nepal. *Intelligence Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(1), 45–58.
- Berozzi, H., Borel, L., Chang, C., & Imperatrice, F. (2020). *The impact of tourism on the livelihoods of Tharu households in Bachhauli (near Sauraha)* (Master's thesis). University of Copenhagen.
- Carney, D. (2003). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: What contribution can we make?* Department for International Development.

- Central Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *National population and housing census 2021: Ratnanagar Municipality population data*. Government of Nepal.
- Chaudhary, C. P. (n.d.). *Impacts of village tourism on Tharu* [Unpublished case study]. Tribhuvan University Repository.  
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14540/18684>
- Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. (2023). *Chitwan National Park*. Ministry of Forests and Environment, Government of Nepal. <https://dnpwc.gov.np/en/conservation-area-detail/2/>
- DFID. (1999). *Sustainable livelihoods guidance sheets*. Department for International Development.
- Dhakal, C. P. (2021). Economic condition of the Tharu: A study of Kalika Municipality of Chitwan District. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 2(1).
- Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford University Press.
- Folke, C. (2006). Resilience: The emergence of a perspective for social-ecological systems analyses. *Global Environmental Change*, 16(3), 253–267.
- Folke, C., Carpenter, S. R., Walker, B., et al. (2010). Resilience thinking: Integrating resilience, adaptability and transformability. *Ecology and Society*, 15(4), 20.
- Gautam, B., et al. (2022). Hybrid knowledge and climate-resilient agriculture practices of the Tharu in the western Tarai, Nepal. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4(1), 1–12.
- Gurung, M. B., & Bhandari, S. (2015). Conservation policy and impacts on local livelihoods in Nepal. *Journal of Forest and Livelihood*, 13(1), 46–55.
- Holling, C. S. (1973). Resilience and stability of ecological systems. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 4, 1–23.
- Household vulnerability study. (2021). Household vulnerability to flood disasters among Tharu community, western Nepal. *Sustainability*, 13(5), 1–15.
- Kantipur. (2025, October 26). Chitwan National Park sees increase in visitors

- during Tihar. <https://ekantipur.com/business/2025/10/26/en/chitwan-national-park-sees-increase-in-visitors-during-tihar-06-16.html>
- Khatri, B. B., & Pasa, R. B. (2023). Climate change adaptation strategies of the communities in Bagmati Province, Nepal. *Pravaha*, 29(1), 20-35
- Nepal Tourism Board. (2023). *Chitwan National Park*.  
<https://www.welcomenepal.com/place-to-go/national-parks/chitwan-national-park.html>
- Pandey, S. (2012). Tharu traditional practices and livelihood systems in the Terai. *Nepal Journal of Anthropology*, 4(2), 99–117.
- Paudel, S. (2025). The Tharus, their indigeneity, and the effects of modernity in Sauraha, Chitwan. *KMC Research Journal*, 3(1), 1–10.
- Paudel, Y. (2022). *Contribution of tourism on livelihood of Tharu community (A field study of Bachhyuli village of Ratnanagar Municipality, Chitwan)*. Tribhuvan University Elibrary. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14540/18684>
- Poudel, J. (2014). Socio-cultural impact in tourism: A case study of Sauraha. *Journal of Advanced Academic Research (JAAR)*, 1(2), 55–62.
- Scoones, I. (1998). Sustainable rural livelihoods: A framework for analysis. *IDS Working Paper No. 72*, 55-61
- Smith, A., & Rai, B. (2018). *Historical land use and resource access policies in CNP and their effects on livelihoods*. Centre for Conservation Policy and Practice.
- Tourism Info Nepal. (2025, September 3). *Sauraha's big tourism push: Local businesses ready to welcome the world*.  
<https://tourisminfonepal.com/sauraha-tourism-entrepreneurs-gear-tourist/>
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2023). *Chitwan National Park*.  
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/284/>
- Walker, B., Holling, C. S., Carpenter, S. R., & Kinzig, A. (2004). Resilience, adaptability and transformability in social-ecological systems. *Ecology and Society*, 9(2), 5.40-55

### About the Authors

**Chandra Prasad Dhakal**, PhD, (<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9070-8368>) is an Assistant Professor of Economics in Tribhuvan University. Dr. Dhakal is an accomplished academic and researcher with over 25 years of teaching experience in the field of economics and development studies. He completed his PhD in 2018, specializing in microfinance for poverty alleviation among small farmers. His research focuses on rural development, financial inclusion, and sustainable livelihood strategies. He has contributed significantly to academia through numerous research publications in reputable journals. He possesses a strong commitment to advancing knowledge and promoting evidence-based policy solutions. In addition to teaching, he actively engages in research and scholarly activities to address socio-economic challenges.

**Rishiram Adhikari**, PhD, (<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4877-3603>) has been teaching English at Nepal Sanskrit University, Balmiki Vidhaya Pith since 2069. He obtained his PhD degree in English from Tribhuvan University in 2012. He has published research articles and reports in various fields such as language, culture, literature, economics, and foreign affairs.