

Rural Society of the Mountain Region: Road Access and Economy

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ABSTRACT

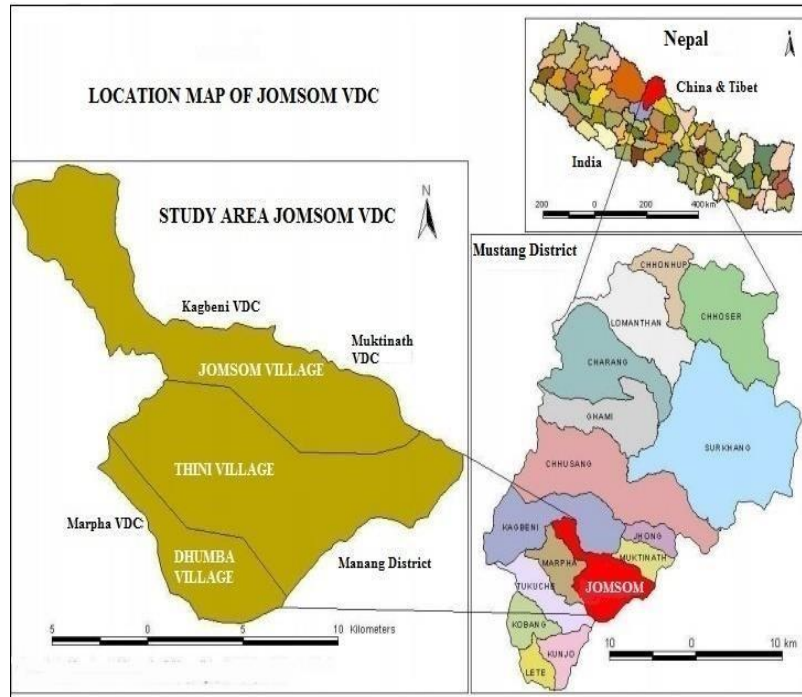
Accessibility of roads plays an important role in the overall socio-economic transformation of the rural society of the mountain region. This paper focuses on exploring the influences of road accessibility in the economy of the rural social structure of the mountain region. The research is located in the Mustang district of Nepal which represents the rural social structure of the mountain region of Nepal. This article is guided by a qualitative research approach. Both primary and secondary data are used. Primary data are collected through the case study method, and secondary data are collected through the content analysis method. The content analysis method is used to analyze both primary and secondary data. The rural road has played a vital role to change the traditional agrarian and pastoral subsistence type of economy in the rural structure of the mountain region. The rural people of the Mustang district of Nepal which represents the rural social structure of the mountain region of Nepal shifted to market-oriented economic activities. But the economic activity of the Mustang area is also highly dependent on the nearby cities, Pokhara, Beni, etc. for example; the flow of internal tourists is highest during the period of vacations in nearby cities. These facts are analogous to the argument of the dependency theory. Similarly, as stated by Immanuel Wallerstein in World-systems theory, Pokhara has developed as a core and Beni as semi-periphery and Jomsom as a periphery after the opening of Beni Jomsom Road. The exploitation of the local products (apples are transported to Pokhara before the harvesting period) is increasing. In contrast, cheap labor exploitation by the core is not seen but labor in the periphery (Jomsom) is supplied from mostly semi-periphery (Myagdi district and another nearby area). These facts are only partially concurrent to the explanation of world-system theory.

Keywords: Agriculture, Road, Rural Economy, Rural Society, Tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an inter-relationship between road access and economy in the rural society of the mountain region. Rural road access is the backbone of the infrastructural development of the mountain regions. Traditional farming and subsistence livelihood and the use of simple technologies are the key characteristics of rural society. After the linkage of road access, economic activities are influenced. Due to the changing pattern of economic activities, rural social structure is also dynamic in the mountain region [1]. Rural transportation is the major factor to provide economic and public services in rural society. It promotes mix-up and exchanges the labor forces and products to the rural population. It helps to minimize the spatial isolated situation of rural people and geography. Rural transportation is a key to raise living standards in poor

rural areas. There is evidence that because of poor geographical accessibility, basic public services do not reach the majority of the population. Under this background, claims have also been made that by reducing isolation, better roads and optimal facility locations reduce vulnerability and dampen income variability. Thus, accessibility to various public facilities is important for the economic survival and the welfare of rural communities [2]. The aim of road connectivity is ultimately the purpose of national development by contributing access to rural people to generate socio-economic activities. Rural roads are majorly considered as the main tools for achieving socio-economic transformation in rural areas. The transportation cost is the major factor to generate market dynamics and to enhance the agricultural economy. To stimulate off-farm diversification and other income-generating opportunities



65 percent of geographical areas is surrounded by hilly and mountain region. More than 17 percent of the land is located in a snow area. Jomsom is the headquarter of the Mustang district which is recognized as the valley of “Himalayas”. Before the construction of the Beni-Jomsom rural road, it was isolated from the national road network. At that time, the economic activities of the Mustang district was subsistence and traditional pattern. After the connectivity of the rural road network, the economic activities of rural people are associated with road nexus. In this context, this paper is going to find out the influences of road accessibility in the economy of the rural society with a specific study of Beni- Jomsom rural road which represents the rural road of the mountain region of Nepal

2. OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH METHOD

This research focuses on Mustang district which is rural of the mountain region of Nepal. The main objective of this research is to explore the influences of the road in the economic activities of the rural society of Mustang area. This research design is guided by qualitative research approach. Both primary and secondary data are used in this research. Primary data are collected through case study and observation methods. The cases are selected through purposive sampling method. Key informants’ interview was also conducted with officials from government and non-government offices, local political leader etc. to collect additional information. Secondary data are obtained from published and unpublished sources of publications from government and non-government offices through historical content analysis method. The

collected data through the case study analyzed by content analysis method. The content analysis method is used to analyze the collected data.

3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Santos (1969) argued that dependency theory developed in the late 1950s under the guidance of the Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, which stressed the external causes of underdevelopment [3]. These were seen as an overriding influence on the internal economic situation of underdeveloped countries. Existing inequalities between countries lead to the transfer of resources from the most backward and dependent sectors and countries to the most advanced and dominant ones. This process not only explains inequality but also deepens it, transforming it into a necessary and structural elements of the world economy. The dependency theory concentrates on phenomena like export dependency, deterioration in terms of trade, import-substitution, etc., and explains from these the poverty and stagnation of the underdeveloped countries [4]. Ritzer (2011) quoted Wallerstein (1996) and discussed the world system theory, the peripheral geographical areas provide the raw materials and cheapest labor force [5]. Core area exploits the resources and refines by the high level of technology. After refinement and production of industrial goods supply to peripheral areas in high cost. This paper is going to discuss using the argument of dependency and world system theory.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Road and Agriculture

It is estimated that 15 percent of crop produce is lost between the farm gate and the consumer in the world because of poor road access, Road links rural communities and their agricultural fields to the main transport system and markets [6]. The study revealed that road has encouraged farmers to work harder for increased production, added value to their products, reduced spoilage and wastage having positive impact on their productivity, income, employment and reduce poverty. Case 1 (Farmer) excitingly expressed popular nepali songs has changed to 'hamri ama sarai ni bathi chhan chamal sit pitho po satichhan' after the road, the market of the local product has increased heavily, the flour which we used to get 100 per kg in past is around 700 per kg, now the demand for apples and local products are so high that buyers come here to pick from the trees and farmyard themselves. The interaction with the local people and case studies indicated that the access of this road has motivated the people of this area to change their farming practices subsistence farming to commercial farming through the use of modern seeds, pesticides and modern tools and equipment. Case 2 (Farmer) said, cropping pattern changed from subsistence to commercial and farmers are more towards cash crops. In past, farmers used to cultivate mostly wheat, mustard, barley, buckwheat and naked barley, but it changed to apples, potatoes, herbs and vegetables. These days, recently he sold vegetables which is worth one lakh rupees, he added. Similarly, he told that he was also using tractor to plough his agricultural plot which was saving his time and money too. Case 3 (Farmer) said due to the high demand of apples in nearby cities, they are transported before it gets fully ripen and the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pollution from vehicles. Different insects and diseases are appearing in the crops these days, mosquito was rare in the locality but after road mosquito appeared in the area, he adds. According to the contents of cases, the cropping pattern of the area has also changed after the road accesses people which are now toward high yield crops and crops with higher market value and to increase the rate of production and easiness the use of modern technology and chemical fertilizers is in increasing rate. Although some threats like maintaining quality of apples, extinction of local crops and local breed livestock like -Lulu, outbreak of new diseases in crops and maintaining quality of high demand fruits are the major challenges brought upon [7].

4.2 Linkage between Tourism and Road

Tourism destination can be analyzed for its present tourism scenario and future potentials on the basis of 5 "As". They are Attraction, Accommodation, Accessibility, Amenities and Activities Accommodation together with transportation which are two major backbone of the tourism industry [8]. Case 4 (Tourism Entrepreneur) remembered a day of 9 years ago German tourist told why your government is constructing a road in this restricted area and later, an old age man replied that why people travel to zoo that is to see the wild animals, similarly we are in isolation like in zoo that is why you come to see us. Like the old man's answer today, the tourism sector has boomed although the pattern has changed from trekking tourism to adventure, sports and pilgrimage tourism. Despite of some dilemma among tourism entrepreneur, it can be concluded that the area has become more popular tourist destination although the type of tourists travelling has changed from trekking tourists to pilgrimage tourists, from Western tourist to India and domestic tourists. Road has boosted internal tourists and other forms of tourism like pilgrimage, filming, adventure etc. After the road volume of tourist has increased heftily and tourism has increased the economic activity in all sectors of the area. Case 5 (Hotel Owner) said, although the quality of tourist has decreased, but the quantity has increased hugely which in turn has increased the economy of the area". Similarly, Case 2 (President of Women's Group) shared that in past, there was a trend of seasonal migration during 6 months of winter for earnings in nearby lowland areas. Now, almost every year, tourists is so high and the locals do not have to travel to nearby cities. Case 6 (Representative of Citizen's Society) admits that in the past, tourists traveled the area by 7 to 10 days and could benefit most of the village people along the route, but now the opportunities from increasing number of tourist after the constructed road, are concentrated in the major area, like Jomsom and Muktinath only. To sustain and to excel the benefits generated from road; blacktopping of road, construction of new alternative trekking trail, managements of wastes, promotion of tourism spots, policy to prolong stay of tourists and preservation of culture and environment is essential. Although road have concentrated the tourism related to the activities only in the major growth centers in past, other areas including hinter areas have benefited economically through other opportunities brought upon the road. The data collected from Annapurna Conservation Area Project also show that there has been an increase number of tourists travelling after road and tourism has shifted to the religious tourism. [9]

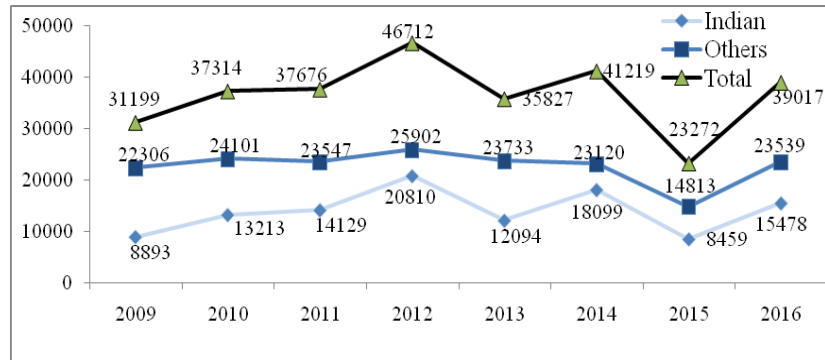


Figure 1 Tourist Flow trend after Beni-Jomsom Road
Source: ACAP, 2016

4.3 Income Pattern and Amenities Added after Road

Case 6 argues that there are opportunities for income from the roadside business that is supportive to solve household economic problems such as education, health treatment, etc. Similarly, case 7 (House Wife) told that being a housewife, the transportation price of the daily commodities has decreased considerably. She tells that after the road the basic needs of people have changed how people are towards luxurious items like the solar water heater, mobile phone, dish home, televisions, etc. She admits within the increased income-expenditure pattern has totally changed. These facts reflect the changing situation of the rural people of Mustang district which represents the rural social structure of the mountain region. Before the linkage of rural roads, the rural people had the problem to manage family expenditure. Due to the connectivity of roads, imported goods are easily available in rural markets. People motivated to consume ready-made goods.

4.4 Creation of Employment opportunities and Occupational Change

Case 8 (Transport Entrepreneur) told before 8 years, he owned 15 mules and he used to transport basic goods to the village from Pokhara with the rate of 8 rupees per kilogram later after the road access he now owns a bus and he is happy with his earning from the bus. He always cultivates fruits and vegetables for supplying to Pokhara and runs a tourist hotel too. Case 9 (Hotel Entrepreneur) told that before 14 years, he migrated to Kathmandu for the hotel business and then went abroad due to limited opportunities, now he is back in his area before 6 years and engaged in the hotel business, agriculture, owns buses and fresh house in Jomsom. The above cases reflect that employment opportunities have been enlarged and diversified after road. All the households in the area is engaged in more than one occupation where agriculture and tourism-based business has dominated. One interesting point to be noted here is that the locals have not changed totally their profession but with the enlarged market they have

increased their volume, shifted toward commercialization, and added new occupations. Among all the most promising changes brought upon by road in this area is people are more attracted towards the agriculture sector unlike in other parts of the country.

4.5 Credit Facilities

The volume of credit increased highly after road with the growing opportunities and economic activities due to road. Purposes for taking credits also changed with the arrival of road, which were basically for meeting household expenses before which changed for starting and upgrading business. Case 10 (Village Mukhiya) shared regarding the practices of taking the loan that the traditional practice of “Dhukuti” of the “Thakali” community is still very popular. Although many financial institutions have opened after road people’s first choice is still “Dhukuti” because people find it easier than banking institution. He added people usually take credit these days to add vehicles and to expand their business unlike in past for storing food items from nearby area. Case 11 (Mother’s Group Member) shared the traditional practice of Dhukuti of the Thakalil community is still very popular. People usually take credit these days to add vehicles and to expand their business unlike in past for storing food items from nearby area. From the information above, it can be derived that before the connectivity of road, there was more traditional practiced of economic sharing. Beyond expectation, after road Dhukuti is still popular although many banking institutions opened after road because people find it easier in process and trustworthy.

4.6 Price of Essentials after Road

Daniel & Ibok(2013) argued, there is positive impact of rural roads to reduce the cost of production. But the local people of Mustang district had experienced oppositely [11]. According to case 12(Ward member of Jomsom village development committee.), transportation price has decreased heftily

from 10 rupees to 5 rupees per kg. Similarly, Case 13 (Journalist) expressed although the transportation of goods is easier these days but beyond expectation the per unit transportation cost is almost same which is surprising. The only thing is that we do not need to store the goods at once for using all around the year he adds. From the case studies, in contrary to expectation, it is found that although the transportation cost has declined after road, the price of essentials has not changed. This is due to fact that the road is still fair-weather road and the area being developed as a major tourist destination after road.

5. CONCLUSION

The rural road has played a vital role to change the traditional agrarian and pastoral subsistence type of economy in the rural structure of the mountain region. The traditional market system is shifted to the cash-oriented market system. The mentioned data reflected the market-oriented economic activities of the rural people of the Mustang district of Nepal which represents the rural social structure of the mountain region of Nepal, Similarly, beyond the expectations of the locals, tourism has flourished heftily but the pattern has been transformed. Now because of the growth in tourism and agriculture, there is a rise in living style and nearly year-round employment is available in the area. Thus, there are positive linkages between road accessibility and rural livelihood which demonstrate a driving force in the sustainable development of the rural area of the mountain region. It is changing the lives of rural people and society.

But the economic activity of the Mustang area is also highly dependent on the nearby cities, Pokhara, Beni, etc. for example; the flow of internal tourists is highest during the period of vacations in nearby cities. These facts are analogous to the argument of the dependency theory. Similarly, as stated by Immanuel Wallerstein in World-systems theory, Pokhara has developed as a core and Beni as semi-periphery and Jomsom as a periphery after the opening of Beni Jomsom Road. The exploitation of the local products (apples are transported to Pokhara before the harvesting

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