

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL

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Introduction

The study of political perspective on social development in Nepal assumes the fundamental laws of the land that govern and determine the behaviour of social forces, processes, and institutions and shapes the strategies that define the dynamics of society in desirable direction. Unlike other development visions postulating the growth of parts, such as, economy or politics, social development vision embodies the evolution of society as a whole for policy attention. This development vision delegitimises the hereditary inequality of rights characteristic of feudalism as well as fundamentalism irrationally rooted either in class, state, market or religion. Deducing power from society and deriving human rights from the rational nature of human beings, social development vision presupposes that citizens have the right to participate in every decision that affects their lives. This, in brief, involves the democratic exercise of political and economic power and the creation of a system that provides sufficient choice for ordering their meaningful life and liberty. Social development determines the shift of development paradigm from the state and market to civil society, from the individual to community and from the bureaucratic representation of policy-making to the direct legislative power of people in the formulation and implementation of decisions. This means social development emphasises the broad representation of social interest in the functioning of the political system, state, and market, and the democratic control over the policies made for them.

Although it is too early to presume that human beings will live without states, the increasing globalization of political economy has marked the beginning of a crisis on the historical role of the state as an organizing device of society as well as an engine of human development. Proliferation in the forces of civil society and the increasing cuts in public expenditure have minimized the state's autonomous capacity for action. The conditionalities of the global capital markets imposed on state have further put critical constraints on its political and economic effectiveness as well as added loss to the legitimacy and support. The process of globalization has, however, yet to give productive solutions to the problems faced by human beings. It merely sparked off a crisis on the legitimacy of the ideological positions taken by the developmentalists, a crisis created by the primacy of market.

It was natural because the logic of the hitherto development itself is less the control of social evolution, such as equality, justice, solidarity and regional balance, and the consolidation of social and economic democracy in society. The long transition of the market too neither proved to be a legitimizing philosophy nor transformed the growing reality of underdevelopment. It did not even solve the conflicts at society levels: subnational, national, state, and international. In several cases, it even started the process of unemployment, inequality, poverty and deprivation. What led to the crisis in developmentalism – market or state? If both, can the non-state actors do better in the Nepalese context? How long can Nepal as a nation-state sustain the process of economic transnationalization in a stable equilibrium where social forces will not sharply react? And how long will it take to offer benefits to the larger sections of society? These are the key questions to understanding the dilemma of social development in Nepal.

The Political Context

Research in social development is urgent needed to understand whether the integration of the national economy in the world system would preserve democratic control over political and economic processes such as labour employment, provide access to and control of natural resources, develop the capacity of internal market integration, control the financial resources, and maintain access to technology transfer without undermining national cohesion, identity and the freedom of choice. The present crisis in Nepal's development is neither the product of the decline of global communism nor the triumph of capitalism. It is the failure of successive Nepalese governments to serve basic human needs for benefit of these whom they have been created. Conceptually, too, the hitherto crisis in development is, therefore, not global; it is specific to the Third World and decommunized states where governments failed to mediate the ties between civil society and global regimes, between the goals of development and the limitations imposed on it by internal and external forces, and between the process of extraction and distribution.

Nepalese context bears the symptoms of such crisis as democratic processes established after the *Jana Andolan of 1990*, which unravelled several forces beyond the capacity of the Nepali state to control and govern. The convergence between domestic political and social forces and the international civil society movements, and between the liberal economic policies of trade and investment, privatization of the state-owned enterprises and denationalization, and globalization have weakened the socially distributive and statist mode of development. The role of the Nepali state has been historically, and to a considerable extent even today, hyperactive and hypertrophic in the sphere of *production* (land, forest, mines, capital goods, industrial units, and labour in the organized sector), *regulation* (financial, capital, and technological policies), *circulation* (foreign trade, foreign policy, transport, credit, banking, planning and distribution), and *control* (bureaucracy,

army, police and civilian forces). The state's ownership of these resources has been presumed to be a vital ingredient of its sovereignty. Because of the limited private ownership and individual freedom, for a long time the role of the Nepali state has remained largely extractive serving the interests of the aristocracy and bureaucracy rather than traders and producers – the two locomotives of economic development.

Even today delinking with the past is difficult, but the concepts of popular sovereignty; multiparty democracy and social justice underlined in the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990* (HMG 1990), manifestoes of the major political parties and the plan document (NPC 1992 a) are essential conditions to set an environment conducive for social development in Nepal. Political rules of the game and the institutional structures define how citizens' participation is structured in the governance and development processes, who should stay in power, and how the use of power becomes legitimate. Partly because of these and partly because of the *right to know* (transparency) and accountability in the decision-making underlined in the constitution, politics of consensus have emerged now among the political parties of various spectrum on core values of democracy, critical element for social development in Nepal.

In this context, whether the three broad themes poverty alleviation, productive employment, and social integration underlined by the United Nations in organizing the World Summit for Social Development on March 6-12 of this year will concretise the specific points for this new development is still lingering in the attitude of 'wait and see'. A similar attitude prevails over Nepal's report prepared by the National Committee on World Summit for Social Development (1994). What is less traditional in the report is that it reflects a slight departure from the classical economic reasoning where the primacy of economics dominates all other social values, disciplines, and institutions. Still, the crucial questions that are almost missed in the report are: Which social forces are capable of becoming the driving forces of social development in Nepal? What are the social interests in generating that social development? And, how certainly and with what means is this goal achieved?

As social development springs from a complexity of factors, its causal explanation requires both primary and secondary data and thinking in concrete and analytic terms that might cut across ideologies, fixed periods, and processes involving many explanatory variables. Concrete factors are associated with the problems of Nepal's political culture; and analytic factors are mental and conceptual, an abstraction applied to grasp the political perspective. The fragmentation of data and the paucity of interpretation, however, make this game plan of study flexible and its method of analysis descriptive. This flexibility is justified in the sense that very little research have been done in Nepal on this theme to formulate a meaningful hypothesis in advance. Yet, as unlimited rationale spells trouble and risks paralyse the study, it might be useful to define the topic within the framework of democratic Nepal following the *Jana Andolan of 1990*.

The *Jana Andolan* brought a cataclysmic change in the politics of Nepal. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal promulgated in November of the same year promised to guarantee the basic human rights of Nepalese citizens and consolidate the parliamentary system of governance, constitutional monarchy, popular sovereignty, independent judiciary and freedom of press – all considered to be the cardinal features of multiparty democracy. The constitution has explicitly recognized the multilingual and multiethnic basis of the Nepali state and pledged to structure opportunities for various forces of civil society to participate in the democratic and development processes on the basis of equality irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion and region. All the native languages of Nepal have been accorded national status. On the basis of the recommendation of the National Language Policy Recommendation Commission (1994) the government started radio programmes and news broadcasts in some major languages, and steps are expected to be taken for the promotion of national languages as medium of teaching at primary schools.

Since the political change, three elections were held: national elections in 1991 and 1994, and local bodies elections in 1993 to institutionalize democracy at the grassroots level and involve people's representatives in the governance and development processes. The political change itself was triggered off by the emergence of middle classes (doctors, teachers, engineers, lawyers, businessmen, politicians, etc.). Yet, their role as a change agent, for better or worse, is less researched. What is obvious is that their relatively better standard of living, inclination to take part in public affairs, and greater influence on the underclass – which is powerless but in majority – and their acceptability to the upperclass – which is powerful but in minority and almost isolated from the masses, – have made them critical in the national political economy. The culture of these classes is not as well defined in Nepal as in America, Japan, India, and some Southeast Asian countries. But this growth can be regarded as important for the stability of democracy as it has facilitated the upward mobility of citizens which otherwise would have been difficult because of fixed social position in both spatial and hierarchic sense. In the absence of diverse middle classes, the disparity in social position had provided political space only to the traditional elite class for recognition on a national scale for purposeful action.

The role of these middle classes has been proved essential, because without radically breaking the tradition, the new positive social and political values and institutions of democracy and human rights were introduced toward building a just and egalitarian society. The manifestation of political contract among the United Left Front, Nepali Congress and monarchy is clearly discernible in the current constitution. The subsequent political processes it evolved so far have encouraged a moderately secular trend in Nepali politics. As a result, ethnoregional, radical and conservative forces have paled into insignificance in the electoral game. Class and market fundamentalists, too, have to take the back seat as their failure in placing social priorities and

creating a social economy based on the strengthening of family, community and society and weaving them in the web of a long-term cooperative is clearly reflected. As social economies are, by nature, local, non-waged, non-monetized and non-market (Korten 1994:8), their regeneration is fundamental in addressing the proliferating social crises springing from either the transnationalization of economy where Nepalese labourers have less chance of participation; or the marginalization of social forces owing to the lack of a strong social security system. From the political perspective, the assessment of the good performance of the political system is derived from how the infrastructures of democracy develop the mechanism to reduce the cleavages among the political and social forces and mobilize the citizens' loyalty to the goal of social development.

The central concern of political perspective is policy-orientation, that is, to relate means to ends and to create political harmony for social development (Bonveniste 1977:78). The three political transitions-sustained by the interim, Nepali Congress and UML governments now have consistently raised the possibility of democratizing the political structures and culture, perhaps through trial and error, and ultimately evolving consensus on the process of governance. In Nepal, this is partly facilitated by popular verdict, partly by legislative composition, and partly by the constitutional requirement of two-thirds majority while taking initiative on matters of vital national interest. The democratic control over policy process in the identification of goals, mobilization of resources, planning, and anticipation of constraints might bolster people's legislative power and make the power devolution operational. This is important in the Nepalese context characterized by the growth of bureaucracy, lack of transparency in functioning and upward accountability of elected and social leaders. That tradition still continues even today as the Local Government Institutions Acts of 1991¹ and the Eighth Five Years Plan (1992-97) have also subjected the legislative power of citizens to *national policy guidelines*, of NPC and HMG, a clear reflection to sell the trickle-down theory rather than evolve participant political culture.

The political implication of this policy is that the "free choice" of the citizens is being scuttled by the planners and the marcoeconomists who are in the forefront with the claims that the adoption of market mechanism will result in Nepal's overnight transformation from one of the world's poorest countries to a relatively prosperous nation. The grim reality is that subjecting the policy-making responsibility of the democratic government to transnational institutions rendered the Nepalese democracy and development controlled from outside rather than from below, and inclined the state policies to anti-democratic direction. The enabling environment for citizen participation has been confined to elections only. This is the reason Nepalese democracy has yet to take the strong social roots and political culture is oriented to the sharing of power rather than the process of politics. The current UML government's budgetary policy to power devolution though promises of something to everybody, has been criticized by the

marcoeconomists blaming it as populist and difficult to implement as it is alleged to carry no long-term policies except certain welfarist measures for the short-run. Others, however, are inclined to wait.

The basic components of social development underlined in the Nepalese report and the UN document embrace mainly three elements, and the rest of the components revolve around these.

Poverty Alleviation

More than half of Nepal's 19 million population is below poverty line. With a low per capita income of \$202 it is one of the poorest countries of the world ranking to the fifth position. The Human Development Index value for Nepal is 0.289 ranking in the 25th position from below among the 173 countries. That 95 percent of the poor live in rural areas and 82 percent of the rural poor are agriculture-based², testifies that the task of making the poor participants in the national political economy is monumental in scope unless this sector is modernized. But this does not mean that poverty can be ignored as a historical reality or merely as a moral concern of developmentalist. In fact, it can not be delinked from the structural conditions of society that let certain groups stagnate historically and even now. This means poverty alleviation strategy must be linked to the social transformation of the *context* of poverty itself, rather than its *content* only. It is because the underlying causes of poverty – both absolute and relative – are located partly in a set of laws and conditions that prevail over our socioeconomic system and partly the structural defects of world political economy that has excluded Nepal in the decision-making, even if it affected the Nepalese. Since negotiated reform in the world political economy is incremental and beyond our ability to affect other than the wishful articulation, it would be pertinent to argue over *what* causes the poverty to persist; *what* has Nepal done to reduce it; and *what* ought to be done in the foreseeable future.

The Nepalese report on social development cogently states that for centuries Hindu caste hierarchy dominated the social and cultural evolution of Nepal (National Committee on World Summit for Social Development 1995:4). Though this hierarchy provided functional specialization and social stability in society for several centuries, it also fostered an unjust foundation of inequality. A sense of fatalism without any solution to spiritually ordained status structured an attitude that power is delegated from the higher to lower bodies rather than shared to overcome powerlessness in the decision-making process, and therefore it can be used to remove the structural deformities of society. Economically, a sort of feudalism-the characteristic of agrarian economy-continued to persist. In a country where nearly 82 percent of the population are employed in the agriculture sector and the over all performance of this sector is declining as a result of fertile top soil erosion, environmental degradation, poor irrigation, inadequate infrastructure, and improper management, the magnitude of poverty would further surge if this sector is left in backwater. Associated with this factor is anti-democratic control over

the productive resources, such as land, and monopolization of wages. More than 10 percent of the people in Terai are landless. Over 50 percent of the households possess only 6.6 percent of the cultivatable lands. The top 9 percent of the households controls 47 percent of the agriculture land. The unjust control over the land resources, dual ownership, and no access to alternative mechanism have made the Nepalese poor vulnerable, insecure, and low in human development index (149).³

Aside from the four critical factors, limited resource base, its physical location between two large countries – both of which are also poor, and experiencing rapid population growth and poor economic performance (World Bank 1990) – the low level of political awareness fostered a sense of further powerlessness as far as active participation in the political economy is concerned. The calculation of poverty in the country is mainly economic. Therefore, poverty alleviation strategies also involved economic variables in the past: subsidy and transfer programs, integrated rural development projects; food and feeding programs, targeted credit programs, employment programs, and skill-generating programs (Gurugharana 1993). Currently, however, for institutional credit for the poor, training, education, health, and poverty-related activities have been undertaken under different projects. Small Farmers' Development Program (SFDP), Production Credit for Rural Women (PCFR), Grameen Bank, Banking for the Poor, Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), and so forth have been launched. In order to enlarge options for the poor (Upadhyay 1994), 1743 Sajha Societies (cooperatives) and more than 5,000 NGOs have been created to make the poor participant rather than just a recipient in the process of sustainable development. Political will for poverty alleviation is well reflected in the manifestoes of major political parties as each of them includes poor's access to credit, basic needs, land reforms, employment and participation. The only difference is: how to do it?

Despite these efforts, the incidence of poverty continues to grow as concrete implementation hits critical snags. The web of bureaucratic and political power, poor coordination between the different layers of institutions and lack of the devolution of political power at the grassroots hindered the effective implementation of policies. Making the institutional structures closer to the people requires popular participation and accountability. In this context, the Eight Five Year Plan's goals of poverty alleviation, regional balance, and sustainable development are set in motion. Yet, the *modus operandi* for this through the creation of productive assets, generation of additional employment opportunities, and better emphasis on integrated and sectoral programs are attenuated by the structural adjustment to international funding conditionalities rather than offering choices to the people. The ensuing political uncertainty and the problem of governance that cropped up until 1994 further undermined the overall effectiveness of many development programs, including poverty alleviation.

The change in the discriminatory economic and social structures and practices and the creative participation of the poor in the democratic and the

development process require the solidarity and cooperation of national and international agencies in poverty alleviation programs and their access to productive opportunities, public services, education and health, and social protection mechanism. In this context, it is not just the economic power of the consumers or political power of citizens but the human potential to enhance security – *freedom from want and freedom from fear* – that is crucial for poverty alleviation. Human empowerment is, therefore, a key to legislative participation. The social mobilization of the Nepalese poor toward the core public issues is a precondition to the creation of a just society where power is diffused and decentralized, solidarity is maintained through shared economic and political dispensation, and society is run through the institutions of representative bodies. A decentralized democracy cannot thrive on the poverty of citizens, either at the intellectual and material levels, but on prosperity, social justice, equality and solidarity.

Productive Employment

Creation of jobs and work opportunities are essential preconditions for poverty alleviation and social integration in Nepal. In the context of social development employment is, therefore, not only important for utilizing the nation's vast untapped productive potential but also for enthusing a sense of identity, self-confidence and recognition in society and economic security of citizens. Finding work for young people entering the labour market is fundamental for preventing radicalism and alienation, and for promoting social peace and stability. It is the most important issue leading to a more equitable distribution of income. This means job-creation and facilitation to the labourer's skill-improvement, mobility, and personal enhancement are the social responsibility of the government, private sector, and NGOs, because these elements are attached to the overall design of development strategies of the nation. The constitutional reference to the notions of *right to work and increasing participation of the labour force in the management of enterprise and the socioeconomic progress of the country* imply the creation of a welfare state accountable to the people rather than reverting to a kind of Social Darwinism. Unemployment and poverty induce social crisis, erode the vitality of civil society, and degenerate the development potential of the nation.

If productive employment includes both the reduction of unemployment and underemployment, the official statistics, however, point to a grim reality: the level of unemployment in the country is 3.1 percent. The share of females in it is 3.6 percent against 2.6 percent for male. The underemployment percentages are: 41.8 percent for males and 51.1 percent for females. The household underemployment proportion by net work days is estimated at 46.4 percent for urban and 33.3 percent for rural areas. The educated unemployment rate for males and females is estimated at about 4 and 3 percent respectively. Underemployment too is acute: 16 percent of those are working only 6-7 months in a year; 5 percent of them are working for 3-5

months; and 2 percent of about 3 months a year (National Committee on World Summit for Social Development 1994:6). The massive waste of labour is an obvious fact of the Nepalese political economy. Yet, the problems can be simplified if skill and efficiency is counted for. As most of the Nepalese labourers are unskilled or semi-skilled, the employment policy and structural policy accompanying it cannot be left solely to the oft-invoked invisible hand of the market economy (Panday 1995). In the context of globalization, the responsibility for employment must be rooted in the social solidarity of the public sector and private enterprises, a view also reflected in last year's verdict of the Supreme Court on Work-permit for non-Nepalese, the Citizenship Act, and the Labour Act.

For a vastly an agrarian country like Nepal, diversification of crop production, access to productive assets, labour-intensive technologies, and non-farm activities can provide jobs for the rural labour force, while in urban areas small-scale and medium industries, construction and maintenance provide skill-intensive jobs in the service sectors. Additionally, self-employment, employment through enterprises, and cooperatives can be efficient institutional resources expected to enhance equality of opportunity and economic status of the poor, women and marginalized sections of society. A socially acceptable and ecologically sustainable foreign investment and international institutions' employment policies can also meaningfully contribute in this scheme. To compete in the changing global political economy, huge investment in social sectors – especially education, skills, and information – is imperative. Stimulation of international bilateral and multilateral cooperation is no less salient, as the *Economic Survey of Nepal 1992-93* indicates their substantial contribution: 29 percent in social services, nearly 43 percent in transport, power and communication, 21 percent in agriculture, irrigation, and forest activities, and 8 percent in industrial activities. This means solidarity should be the norm between Nepal and the international regime so as to sustain the flow of critical resources to social development. High level of economic activities means more people employed and less dependency and far less social decay.

Social Integration

Social integration is the process of including diverse social forces (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, family, tribe, community, etc.) in the national society through the recognition of their identity and enabling them to exercise their civil and political rights in cooperative harmony. An integrated society legitimately accommodates the differences through collective action, an action based on consensual values and mutually-accepted behaviour. If social integration is taken as a precondition of social development, the policy of Sanskritisation obfuscates the sense of democratic equality as it purports to incline to a hierarchic 'status quo' that primarily relies on governance rather than secular social transformation.

The dominant cultural-religious identity of the Hindu state embedded in the current constitution reflects a theocratic tinge, yet by no means as fundamentalist as practiced in the other South Asian states. The dominant language (Nepali), religion (Hindu), place (Kathmandu), communities (Bahuns, Chhetris, and Newars) and values (nationalism) are beyond doubt asserting on behalf of state and evoking reactions from the regional and ethnic parties.⁴ But this dominance is not based on the melting pot strategy commonly adopted for national cohesion by most of the Western countries. This is the reason the allegiance of historically marginalized, minority and isolated communities is not parochial. The hierarchical integration of Bahuns, Chhetris, and other commercial and artisan classes has provided a kind of social stability, but it has also undermined social mobility and the equality of opportunity because those at the bottom of the social and economic pyramid remain incapable of participating fully in defining the public policies affecting their lives.

The notion of social integration in a democratic polity assumes the character of productive solidarity of peoples within the framework of nation-states that define their opportunities and, at the national and global civil society levels, that delegitimize all kinds of discrimination and injustices against women who are socially subordinated to men, against deprived ethnic groups, and against the poorer strata of society. Any development that is unequal, unjust and polarizing is simply unsustainable. Higher and lower caste values mirror the complexity of different degrees of development and imbalanced social relations. An equal access to educational opportunities that respects the diverse cultures and traditions should be the primary framework of integration process. From a gender perspective, despite more than half of the nation's 19 million population, women's participation or representation in the nation's body politik is grossly unequal. Out of the 205-member *Pratinidhi Sabha*, the Lower House of Parliament, only seven women are currently represented one seat less than the previous parliament. The underrepresentation of women in the local government institutions is even more glaring. Their right to property inheritance, land, credit and ownership should define the linkages to social development. Adequate representation of various social groups in the governance is a functional prerequisite of democratic pluralism because this representation expands the social power of state. Democracy also presupposes the choice for participation of all the social forces and generation of works to realize their basic needs and their intellectual, moral and material well-being, make them capable of playing the rules of political game.

Social integration becomes inseparable from political participation, not just in elections but also in economic, political, social and development frontiers. This is important to reflect the social interest and exploit the institutional resources of the state. The voting turnout in elections is a good index of civic sense. Although voting turnout declined from 65.15 percent in the 1991 elections to 61.83 percent now, it cannot be outrightly labelled as

disgusting given the nation's poverty, illiteracy, and topographical diversity. Due to the better socialization process in elections last year, there was a decline in invalid voting turnout from 4.7 percent to 3.7 percent. More important is the citizens' full participation in the ward assemblies of village and municipalities so that their needs and creativity are clearly manifested and autonomy is maintained before the state and market. The spread of powerlessness, inequality and ecological decline in Nepal so far suggests that statist and free-market development strategies alone are no longer sufficient for empowering citizens and realizing the goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable development unless the community participates creatively on those strategies.

In terms of citizens' confidence in influencing the decision-making process of local and national governments, several surveys point out the opposite of what is being professed in the plan documents and manifestoes of the major political parties. Nearly 45 percent of the voters under study said that they lack the power to influence the decisions of local government (NOSC 1993:45). The sense of this powerlessness is acutely reflected in another survey where nearly 47 percent of the voters revealed politics is too complicated for them to understand. This is further confirmed by nearly 65 percent of the voters who said politicians care too little about what the voters think (POLSAN 1991:97; Khatri 1992). This feeling marks the poor penetration of democratic rights. The integrative functions among several social and political groups and between leaders and the citizens are prerequisite to acquire the resources located in other systems. The political perspective on social integration involves three powerful considerations:

Developing Popular Access to the Institutional Resources of State

In general, the "Directive Principles and Policies of the state" underlined in the constitution reflects the primary responsibility of the state to *maintain conditions suitable to the enjoyment of the fruits of democracy through wider participation of the people in the governance of the country and the promotion of human rights*. Specifically, however, the state policies promise to pursue a strategy for *promoting the interests of the economically and socially backward groups and communities by making special provisions with regard to their education, health and employment*. One such policy is the integration of women in the social welfare mechanism by legitimizing domestic work as a production of wealth and maternity as a social function. Another social policy would be the elimination of oppressive social relations by women empowerment and discrimination in favour of the poor, children, and disabled through affirmative actions. This is important in Nepal because despite the proliferation of women's organizations the implementation of several recommendations hit critical obstacles, and powerlessness stands in the way of their ability to fulfil social expectations (NPC 1994).

Getting the Government Closer to the People

Since people, their values, economy, ecology, and institutions are the primary concern of social development, the fulfillment of basic needs should be the social interest of the government. This social interest of the government provides the motive force to come closer to the people. Democracy, to function, needs constant interaction of the government with the people, their organizations like political parties, professional bodies, consumer groups, NGOs, and other components of civil society that articulate popular needs and put social control over governance (UN 1994:28-48). The key to improving public services is the devolution of power to the local self-government institutions, consisting of 3,995 Village Development Committees and 36 municipalities, and increasing their efficiency and accountability to the people. This process can also be expected to expand the space of civil society and generate resources for social integration. Democratic civil society is a recruiting base for political leaders and it trains them for the service of the government and party politics. These leaders learn how to organize and motivate people, debate issues, raise and account for funds, craft budgets, publicize programs, administer staffs, canvass for support, negotiate for agreements and build coalition (Diamond 1994:9). A legitimate social order, conducive to social development, designed to give the people more self-determination and thus change their lives cannot be imposed from above; it is built from below through their solidarity (Meyer 1992:100).

Building Coalitions for Social Policy Formulation

Social policy formulation is a complex process of building social contract among the diverse forces of society for concertation. In a pluralist society like Nepal where sixty different ethnic and caste groups exist, building coalition is essential to prevent polarization in the perception of governance and development process; if actual implementation of those policies too involves a number of actors, states, and contexts. Since social policy debates also embody the beneficiaries' perception, this entails the coalition partners evolving a down-to-earth approach to make those policies realistic for social development. Involvement of NGOs, private and governmental efforts in the planning process specific to national policies pertaining to children, women, population (NPC 1992 b; NPC 1994), and education have been recognized by various reports. The role of coalition partners such as NGOs, INGOs, self-help organizations, private sectors, Consumer groups, international development agencies, and governmental departments have been underlined in each of the reports owing to their role in grassroots concerns, peoples' participation, concern towards the disadvantaged sections of society, and sustainable development.

Expanding the policy-making space based on social impact assessments similar to environmental impact assessments is imperative in decision-making (Jain and Bongartz 1994:26). In the real world, as people are the real bearers of consequences, all the forces of social development must concert

their actions to poverty alleviation, employment generation, prosperity of communities, protection of environment, and the eventual empowerment of the populace. The organization of the majority of poor and their representatives' involvement in the policy process can create an enabling environment to fertilize human energy for social development in Nepal.

Conclusion

The political perspective on social development in Nepal has so far focused on how the laws of the land, political institutions, and processes have facilitated or hindered the social development vision and why a political perspective is important for generating an enabling environment for good governance and participatory development. The social interest underlying the integration of society's diverse group – minorities, indigenous, poor, women, children, disabled and marginalized – are important to link them to struggle against poverty, unemployment, underemployment, inequality, social disintegration and deprivation. The process of struggle taking place in Nepal involves first, an understanding of the strength of civil society forces before the state and market, their internal solidarity, and their ability to resist the harmful policies of transnational forces that are not subjected to the social control of the majority. For their solidarity to succeed, the civil society bodies must be institutionalized, expressed through their regular meetings and conferences, and involved in all the decisions that affect them. The strengthening of civil society organizations not only help create an "enabling environment" but can also be expected to generate opportunities to cement their connections nationally, and globally, reconcile differences and develop a collective stand to common problems faced by the people.

The approach to their institutionalization requires steady efforts of already existing groups, such as poor, women, NGOs, consumer groups, labourers, professional bodies, and so forth in structuring their agendas democratically in a decentralized and integrated manner. This process fosters democracy at the civil society level which can be capable of defending peoples' rights and their rightful place in society. The vision of social development embodies economic, cultural, political and ecological sustainability while its process and actions are participatory and ultimately transformative. What is significant is the political will for massive investments in the social sectors, maybe twenty-twenty, conducive to generate economic and social equality. The nation-building process in Nepal rests more on the broad-based active support of all social forces. The monopoly of power by a few undermines the whole system. Since poverty implies powerlessness, the empowerment process underlined by a political perspective is crucial for redefining the power relationship in society and recognizing the legitimacy of social development in Nepal.

Notes

Opinions expressed in this paper are the author's own and do not reflect the opinion of any organization he is affiliated with.

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1. *Local Administration Third Amendment Acts. 2048 B.S.*
2. The data used in this article are taken from various sources, such as *World Development Report 1994, Human Development Report 1994, Draft of the Country Paper: Nepal.*
3. *Human Development Report 1994* indicates that up to 1992 life expectancy of the Nepalese people at birth is 42.7 years, adult literacy 27 percent, access to safe drinking water 42 percent and sanitation 8 percent. The total expenditure on health as percentage of GDP in 1990 is 4.5 percent.
4. Nepal Sadbhawana Party, Rastriya Jana Mukti Morcha, Mongol National Organisation, and some other minor parties, therefore, openly articulate for a federalised Nepal on regional and ethnic lines and proportional representation system.

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