

Literature Review

“IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE”: WRITING *BIKĀS* IN POST-1990 NEPAL

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1. Dev Raj Dahal and Kishor Kumar Guru-Gharana, eds. 1996. *Development Strategy for Nepal*. Kathmandu: Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies.
2. Madan K. Dahal and Horst Mund, eds. 1996. *Social Economy and National Development*. Kathmandu: Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies.
3. Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan and Chaitanya Mishra, eds. 1997. *Developmental Practices in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University.
4. Bishwa Keshar Maskay. 1998. *Non-Governmental Organizations in Development: Search for a New Vision*. Kathmandu: Centre for Development and Governance.
5. Nepal South Asia Centre. 1998. *Nepal Human Development Report 1998*. Kathmandu: Nepal South Asia Centre.

Introduction

The more liberal political environment in Nepal ushered in by the 1990 people's movement (Jana Andolan) has expectedly unleashed intense contestations among a myriad of social groups, each vying for a secure space in the emergent socio-political landscape of the country. Not surprisingly, the development status quo¹ continues to be one of the most 'successful' contestants. The reasons for its 'success' seem to be related to the social characteristics of the people involved in the enterprise.

1 By 'development status quo', I refer to the powerful players of development. That includes donors, development 'experts', development consultants, high ranking bureaucrats, politicians, members of the National Planning Commission, powerful people from big (I)NGOs, and development managers who are drawn from the politically, economically and culturally elite section of Nepali society. The terms 'development status quo', 'development establishment' and 'mainstream developmentalists' are used interchangeably in this article.

Although the rhetoric would have us believe that development is associated with the poor, powerless and the marginalized section of the population, given the prospects of power and profit involved in the enterprise, the socially, economically and politically powerful groups constitute the most prominent players in development. They often overtly use the power at their disposal to dominate the field of development. Their dominance is, however, not always maintained through the overt use of power. A sustained dominance is made possible through the deployment of complex and varied cultural tactics.

The modernizing elite in Nepal has since the early 1950s twisted the genuine wishes and needs of the people, and packaged them in developmental rhetoric in such a way that the space for the elite development managers is continually broadened.² The 1990 movement brought about changes in the political equation. The development status quo was, however, not only unscathed by the political changes, but has actually further entrenched itself, encompassing new(er) players, precisely because of its ability to twist 'people's agenda' to serve its own interest. The movement for democracy was certainly a call for better development, in a way a revolt against the appropriation of the people's agenda for development by a certain development clique for its own profit. But the development status quo used the political and cultural power at its disposal in such a way so as to make it seem as if the *jana āndolan* was a demand for its greater involvement.³

2 It must be noted that the so-called development paradigms have changed several times since the 1950s. Especially since the 1980s, there have been greater calls for people-centred and participatory models of development. The Nepali development establishment, characteristically, has been aware of these conceptual shifts. This has resulted in what Harka Gurung (cited in Panday 1983) describes as the "cavalcade of new concepts" being incorporated in the development rhetoric, not better action. Cf. Des Chene (1996).

3 Why the 1990 movement lost momentum thereafter and why people failed to build upon it for more encompassing democratic and development processes is a controversial and important issue. It is linked with the question of how inclusive the 1990 movement for democracy was and how much it succeeded in changing the power structures. In the popular press the extreme rightists have criticized the movement as not being spontaneously launched by the Nepali people, but rather a design of foreign forces, especially India, through their native agents. The extreme leftists, on the other hand, have viewed the 1990 events as a revolt of the people against the long entrenched power structures. But they blame the middle class leadership of the Nepali Congress and moderate left parties

Academia occupies a controversial position in the development enterprise. Putting aside the debate on the knowledge-power nexus in the project of modernity (e.g., Banuri 1990, Pigg 1995), it is understandable and even desirable to some extent that academia take an active interest in matters related to development. The sheer immensity of the project of development and its subsequent complexity, bearing on the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of the country, require that academics scrutinize the philosophy and assumptions behind development, expose the contradictions, and help articulate the voice of the people at the grassroots, linking people with the policy making processes (see Berreman 1994), so that development is ultimately owned by those to whom it belongs the most.

On the other hand academia may, by design or default, serve as a cultural tool in legitimizing the role of the self-serving development industry. Academia, with its aura of superior, objective knowledge-producing capability, occupies an influential position in the cultural space of society. The donors (and their native elite counterparts), cannot operate without some strong supporters in academic quarters. Some academics join the development establishment lured by monetary and career incentives. Their role is to produce sponsored studies maintaining a façade of objective critique of the developmental processes while justifying the ever expanding role of the development industry. It should also come as no surprise that given this critical role, many incompetent academics would engage in activities to gain visibility so that they can stake a claim in the profitable field of development. If the number of 'sell-outs' and incompetent people passing as development experts - those who claim they understand what development means, and are ready to suggest definitely how it should be achieved - increases, a distorted debate results. This disempowers the people even as it further entrenches the legitimacy of the development status quo.

Given these kinds of interests and the political-economy of *bikās* (development) research, it is necessary that attention occasionally be

for betraying the movement mid-way by compromising with the King. I have not come across any serious academic work on this issue, and exploring it at length is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to deny mass participation in the movement for the reinstatement of the multiparty system, albeit most of the participants had an urban base. It is also true that 'better development' was one of the important rallying points of the movement (see Bhattachan 1994 for the development issues raised during the movement).

turned towards the development knowledge producers. Although a detailed study would be necessary to assess the role of the knowledge producers in the developmental process of the country, especially in post-1990 democratic Nepal, some inferences can be drawn through scrutiny of the literature produced by the prominent and powerful development experts. Apart from allowing us to identify what issues are raised by the development experts, such scrutiny should also help reveal a pattern of *how* the issues are being raised, on the basis of which we may also form some conjectures about motivations for the production of such development literature.

Here I review five books on development which have been published since 1996. Within the proliferating development literature published for public consumption in the 1990s, seminar paper-compilation books constitute the major proportion. I first review three books which have resulted from seminars. The first one is *Development Strategy for Nepal* edited by Dev Raj Dahal and Kishor Kumar Guru-Gharana. The second book, *Social Economy and National Development*, is edited by Madan Kumar Dahal and Horst Mund. Both of these books are published by the Nepal Foundation for Advanced Studies (hereafter NEFAS), an organization that has produced over 15 books on development since it was established in 1992. The third book under review is *Developmental Practices in Nepal*, edited by Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan and Chaitanya Mishra, and published by the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology at Tribhuvan University. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (hereafter FES), a German organization, provided the support for holding seminars and publishing the seminar proceedings in all three cases. Since these books contain papers by academics from different social science disciplines covering diverse topics, they offer us an opportunity to assess how the mainstream academia and development practitioners treat a wide range of issues and debates in development.

I next review two books which have resulted from longer-term research. Compared to the literature that results from seminar proceedings, books that deal with a particular theme at length are fewer in number. The fourth book under review, *Non-Governmental Organizations in Development: A Search for a New Vision* by Bishwa Keshar Maskay, is one such book. The final book under review, *Nepal Human Development Report 1998* (hereafter also referred as the *Report*), was prepared by a large group of social scientists and development experts led by Devendra Raj

Panday and Chaitanya Mishra.⁴ These two books are interesting here because they allow us not only to see how more ‘seriously’ produced literature differs from the volumes more easily produced through seminars, but also to assess how Nepali academia perceives and presents two of the most omnipresent development themes in the 1990s – non-governmental organizations and human development.

These five books are fairly representative of the type of development literature recently published for public consumption by the mainstream development experts. Many of the authors and editors are professors in the country’s major university, Tribhuvan University. Some of them have worked as members of the National Planning Commission. Almost all have been extensively involved in large scale governmental and/or non-governmental development projects as experts and advisors.⁵

After an extensive review of the content of each book, in the concluding section. I synthesize the issues and trends found in these writings. I argue that though the mainstream knowledge producers on development have debated wide ranging issues on development in the 1990s, most of the writings suffer from conceptual weaknesses and lack methodological rigor. I especially point out the general unproductivity of development seminars. I also question the objectivity (thus the usefulness) of the mainstream producers of knowledge on development as they are socially, culturally and financially entangled in the political economy of the national and international development establishment.

Search for development strategies

The first book under review here, *Development Strategy for Nepal*, is the outcome of a seminar organized by NEFAS with support from FES in

4 Although the *Report* mentions that a series of workshops were organized for comments on the earlier drafts, the *Report* differs from the first three books under review here in the sense that it is not simply a compilation of seminar papers.

5 There is certainly a great deal of ‘grey literature’ on development, produced by different individuals and agencies for their internal use and there might as well be serious works which have not found publishers, which may provide a different picture of the literature on development. Comparing the content of the grey literature and that which is made public is important but beyond the scope of this review. We also need studies that investigate the relative influence of the grey literature and the published literature on policy-making, funding, etc. Similarly, the politics of language (the dominance of English language vis-à-vis Nepali) in development literature needs to be studied.

1995. It has four papers, one each by the editors, Dev Raj Dahal and Kishor Kumar Guru-Gharana, and the other two by Champak Pokhrel and Hari Uprety. In the first paper, “Emerging Developmental Thinking: Putting People at the Center”, Dev Raj Dahal, after presenting standard criticisms of the economic models of development, goes on to sing the virtues of the social development paradigm which he says puts people at the centre of the development debate. His essay contains all the jargon doing the rounds in development circles- participation, empowerment, growth with equity, social justice, decentralization, freedom, good governance, social integration, civil society and many others. Although he lists 21 sources in his bibliography, a close reading suggests that the reader who has gone through ‘The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development 1995’ (text given in Maskay 1996: 138-169) will not find any new perspective or information in his paper. Missing in his essay is any perspective on how the theory of social development links with the concrete reality of Nepal, what specific strategies are needed for translating this ‘perfect’ concept into practice. The essay in fact does not even once relate the theory to the Nepali reality.

The next paper in the book, “Development Strategy for Nepal: Perception from Below”, is by Kishor Kumar Guru-Gharana. The subtitle of the essay leads the reader to expect commentaries, interpretation and perceptions from those who, in development parlance, pass as the ‘target groups’. Guru-Gharana, to the contrary, starts off his paper with a brief review of the five-year development plans, then goes on to summarize the ‘messages’ of the World Bank’s *World Development Report 1990*, and UNDP’s 1990 and 1992 *Human Development Reports*. He further lists the ‘major findings’ of *Nepal: Poverty and Incomes* (1991), an IIDS and New Era conducted study on poverty in Nepal with joint funding from World Bank (WB)/UNDP, and the report of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Independent Commission on Poverty Alleviation, *Meeting the Challenges* (1991). His essay is further supplemented by statistics supplied by other prominent agents and agencies in the development industry. These sources provide the perspective of people who occupy exalted positions in the development industry, nowhere near the ‘below’ the subtitle promises. It is a telling example of the urge among the ‘development experts’ to use empty but fashionable jargon. Guru-Gharana’s failure to include even a single

sentence in his 40-page essay which truly brings forth the 'perception from below' makes the reader feel cheated after reading the article.⁶

As for the content of the paper, the all too familiar set of statistics recur in Guru-Gharana's essay to demonstrate how poorly Nepal fares in the socio-economic front. He covers the entire gamut of developmental problems: political instability, bad governance, ecological degradation, poor sanitation, ethnic and caste disparities, and so on. But he treats none of the issues with the seriousness they deserve. He offers solutions which are not unfamiliar: increase people's participation, decentralize the polity, practice good governance, utilize foreign aid properly, make sure that the poorest of the poor benefit from developmental programs. His recommendations lack any specificity at all. His essay concludes the way most development seminar papers do: "And, above all, the government must show strong political commitment towards poverty alleviation and human development in Nepal to enlarge people's choices to participate in the market and political processes, and to help them meaningfully realize their identity, creative life and liberty in a sustainable manner" (pp. 47-48).

Nor does the book add any new information or perspective by including Champak Pokhrel's essay, "Issues in Economic Development: The Nepalese Context". Most of the topics he discusses are already included in the preceding article by Guru-Gharana, and Pokhrel follows the same pattern of arguments as Guru-Gharana. After providing a general overview of the poor status of development in Nepal, using data from the *Economic Survey 2050/51* and the *World Development Report 1995*, he discusses "Some Important Issues of Economic Development". He covers 14 economic issues including liberalization, dual economic structure of the country, subsidy, population growth, foreign aid, politicization of bureaucracy and narrow tax base. For most of these issues, he spares only one paragraph where he states the problem and offers a solution. One typical example is his discussion of "Increasing Unemployment". The problem: "There is growing unemployment on the one hand and shortage of required type of labor, on the other." The solution: "Reform in the

6 It is possible that Guru-Gharana is addressing the expatriate donor community and assuming that anything that comes from Nepalis, as members of a Least Developed Country, is a perspective from 'below.' This is one of the ways of conveniently erasing all the internal hierarchies that exist in Nepali society. See Tamang (1997) for a discussion on how (non)representative the voices of the leading women's rights activists of the common Nepali women are.

education system, skill-oriented training, changing youngster's psychology to honor private jobs and incentive to entrepreneurs to use local labor should come as a package program, in this regard" (p.66). In another paragraph-length treatment, on the issue of foreign aid utilization, the problem is that, " Since 60 percent of our development budget is financed through foreign aid or loan, we are walking on a very sensitive path. Superficial [sic] approach on the utilization of foreign aid could take us to serious problems in the future." His only suggestion to address this complex issue is that the "Degree of scrutiny that we were undergoing in the past, in this regard, has to be substantially geared up" (p.68). All this results in making his short essay similar to an economics examination paper of a mediocre undergraduate student.

Hari Uprety makes a critical journalistic survey of development issues in "Development Issues in Nepal: A Critique". He raises a series of questions on a wide range of development issues: labor economics, decentralization, politicization, economic diplomacy and ecological ethics. Though Uprety takes up key issues, he then skips over each one without sufficiently elaborating upon them. At times this results in his making controversial (because sweeping) but vacuous statements. For instance, discussing the political economic issues of development, he says that the problem with national development strategies is that of all the political-economic theories of development -from the Marxist to the free market capitalist ones- none of them are produced in Nepal. They are forced into the country by the donors. Curiously, Uprety does not find fault with any of these prescriptive theories themselves, rather the problem is that "we want all of them to work at the same time" (p.77). He seems to be calling for us to stick to one paradigm, but refrains from specifying which one he sees as the best and why.

In another section, where he discusses the so-called 'social capital' approach to development, Uprety makes controversial statements. First, he uses the two distinct concepts of social capital and human development interchangeably.⁷ He criticizes the multilateral institutions for prescribing

7 According to Uprety, the notion of the social capital approach to development "refers to the ability of the states or societies to develop a sense of community conducive to economic growth"(p.77). It implies that economic growth is the end and social capital the means. At least rhetorically, the proponents of the human development paradigm are critical of the notion of treating economic growth as the end. See the section on the *Nepal Human Development Report* below, and also *Nepal Human Development Report 1998* (pp.28-31) for the conceptual

the government to invest greater resources in social infrastructure projects. What we lack, he says, are resources and not such new prescriptions. He asserts that “In fact, all so-called miracle economies have shown that it is the amount of resources pumped into an economy that counts [sic] for rapid growth and an equitable distribution, rather than changing development concepts” (pp.77-78). He does not specify which miracle economies he is referring to, but more importantly, does not cite any studies which show that the relationship between resources pumped into the economy and equitable distribution is so direct and causal.

Similarly vague yet controversial is his discussion of decentralization. He says, “In fact, before even mulling over the idea of decentralization, it might have made better sense to talk about a strong central authority. Decentralization could have come later. Since this is a nation in the making, there is a lot that needs to be done for the nation’s sake before the fruits of nation building can be taken to the grassroots level”(pp.83-84). What does a strong central authority mean, and how much stronger do we need to make it ? Do we still really need to postpone decentralization to make the central authority stronger ? For how long? What exactly does he mean when he refers to Nepal as “a nation in the making,” and which nation-building processes would be hampered by pursuing decentralization policies now ? Would not decentralization be one of the ways to build the nation ? Who is to be entrusted with the task of manufacturing a package of nationhood that then will be delivered, readymade, to the ‘grassroots’ ? These are some of the questions the editors of the volume could have asked Uprety to clarify (which evidently they did not), before including his paper in the book.⁸

differences between the social capital and human development approaches.

- 8 In a book that purports to deal with development strategy, it is curious that such statements should pass unnoticed by the editors. In the current development debate in Nepal, there seems to be a consensus that radical decentralization should be an integral part of any development strategy. Among the books reviewed here, see for instance: Development Strategy for Nepal: Perception from Below by Kishor Kumar Guru-Gharana in *Development Strategy for Nepal* (pp.39-41); Local Development Strategy in Nepal: Insensitive Government, Conflicting Donor Agenda, and Emergent NGO Initiatives at the Grassroots by Bihari Krishna Shrestha in *Social Economy and National Development: Lessons from Nepalese Experience* (pp.57-58); Developmental Practice in Nepal: An Overview by Chaitanya Mishra in *Developmental Practices in Nepal* (pp.1-15); and, *Nepal Human Development Report 1998* (pp.203-205).

As a conclusion, Uprety invokes the need for national consensus in matters of national interest, lamenting that “Everyone seems to have their own views of development and divergent opinions are aired even while pursuing policy, as if the national viewpoint did not exist”(pp.93). But how do we decide what is in the ‘national interest’ when so many of the people are effectively excluded from joining in the debate? Divergent opinions on development issues may after all not be so bad or unexpected, precisely because there are divergent groups of people with divergent interests.⁹ Uprety’s paper is similar to the preceding two papers by Guru-Gharana and Pokhrel in that it also covers a wide gamut of development issues, while treating none of them seriously. The rhetoric he employs throughout the article is no substitute for well-grounded arguments.

According to the prefatorial note by the editors, “The idea behind the search for strategy was to clinch the overriding concerns of ordinary Nepalese citizens.” This statement, together with the subtitles of the first two essays, “Putting People at the Center” and “Perception from Below” leads the reader to expect that the book might break with the tradition of arm-chair, paternalistic speculation on development by elite ‘development experts’, instead bringing to the centre the voices of the people at the grassroots. But this does not materialize anywhere in the book. The reader is left wondering why Dahal, in the opening essay, states that the remaining authors “consistently” suggest “what Nepal has to do in the emerging winds of development and change and how to expunge the growing gap between life and vision” (p.10), when these papers consistently fail to do so. The book reads like a collection of papers on development randomly selected, not revolving around any particular theme. All that Dahal does in his paper is extol the virtues of the social development paradigm in the abstract. Guru-Gharana, trying to summarize a list of development reports ends up saying nothing in particular himself; Pokhrel refuses to budge beyond the economic development model and repeats what Guru-Gharana said in the earlier paper anyway. Finally,

9 See Tiwari (1998) for a different view on the rhetoric of national consensus. Tiwari says that “After all, everything in Nepal is so diverse that it has always resisted any group’s one-size-fits-all sort of consensus.” Instead of opting for “easy, fuzzy consensus”, Tiwari calls for “assumption-shattering debates on all issues”. He goes on to say, “Sustaining open-ended national debates, as opposed to giving in to close-minded narrow consensus on issues that matter remains our renewing hope for the continuing vitality of our Nepali democracy.” Constructive proposals need to be forwarded after such debates.

Uprety asks interesting questions but evidently expects somebody else to answer them. For a book that purports to suggest a novel development strategy, it is surely problematic that the volume itself lacks any strategy or direction.

Traditional economy in an era of globalization

Like the previous book, *Social Economy and National Development: Lessons from Nepalese Experience* also attempts to debate the overall development strategy for Nepal. But its major concern is to argue for the continuing importance that the traditional social economy should be given in any development strategy in this age of globalization. The volume contains six papers. I will review four of them.¹⁰

“Outward-Oriented Economic Nationalism: A Model for Development in Nepal” by Madan Kumar Dahal, the first paper in the book, may potentially prompt readers to abandon the book altogether. That would be unfortunate since a couple of interesting papers appear later on in the book. His main thesis is that we should strengthen the traditional economic sector or the social economy (for survival),¹¹ and take advantage of the globalization process (for growth) simultaneously. However, the reader is hard put to follow his line of reasoning, not only because of his problems with expression but also due to his contradictory statements. Compare these two statements: “Economic nationalism is a force to reckon with the social economy of developing countries that would take care of survival aspect, while *economic globalization will consider the growth or development aspects of the economy*” (p.5, emphasis added). In the concluding section, on the other hand, he asserts the need to “modulate

10 Since the paper “Induced and Indigenous Self-Help Organizations in the Context of Rural Development” by Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan is conceptually not different from his later paper in *Developmental Practices in Nepal*, the next book under review, I do not review the former. The last paper in the book, “A Note on Social Economy and National Development” by Hari Uprety, is largely a summary of the seminar discussion, and thus is not relevant for review here.

11 The social economy, Dahal points out, “is linked with the efficient management of the household economy, access to resources to landless and marginal farmers, practice of small scale irrigation, multiple cropping and intensive farming systems, growth of small and cottage industries in rural areas, implementation of micro-power projects, self-help, community participation and decentralization, promotion of small business and handicrafts, mobilization of indigenous resources such as human, capital and natural including subterranean resources and the application of appropriate technology” (p.4).

the policies towards strengthening the survival of the economy by improving the status of the *household economy instrumental to sustain growth or development...*” (p.38, emphasis added). Here he equates development with growth and is inconsistent as to which one of the two sectors, social economy or economic globalization, will ‘take care’ of development. He avoids precise discussion of economic nationalism and instead refers to it vaguely as “a doctrine that assumes and advocates the safeguarding of a nation’s own economic interests as an anchor line of its economic policy” (p.5). He then becomes even more vague: “Expressed in simple terms, economic nationalism is the conduct and management of the economic welfare of the nation” (p. 5). The reader is left wondering how he conceptualizes development and the framework for its pursuit.

Dahal lists four basic foundations of the Nepalese economy for sustainable development: 1) biodiversity, 2) water resources, 3) human resources, and 4) tourism. It is unclear why and on what basis he assigns such a priority to biodiversity as he himself laments that “the extent of its affluence and commercial potential is not yet fully known” (p. 18). For developing water resources, he calls for a tripartite agreement between India, Nepal and Bangladesh because, “Nepal’s Himalayas have immense potential to enrich not only the region but also the entire world” (p.33). To develop human resources, he suggests that focus be placed on education and health because, “With the expansion of qualitative health and education facilities, productivity of the domestic economy as well as international competitiveness can be enhanced to meet the global demand” (p.19). As for the fourth foundation, “Since the global demands for tourism will increase further by the internet revolution in the days ahead, Nepal’s potential for tourism development is no secret that must capture the regional as well as the global demand. Tourism is a competitive industry that will take care of globalization” (p.19-20).

It seems that his identification of these four sectors as the foundations of the Nepali economy is arbitrary. He does not define the criteria by which a sector can be assigned ‘foundational’ status. For example, could agriculture not be viewed as a more important foundation of the Nepalese economy than, say, tourism or even water resources? (see NHDR 1998, Chapters 1, 6 and 7. Cf. Badri Prasad Shrestha’s article in *Developmental Practices in Nepal*, discussed below). Moreover, his plans for harnessing benefits from the two of the ‘foundational’ sectors of the economy, tourism and water resources, are precarious. Evoking what is currently a wide spread and influential, but little-examined image of the water resources just waiting in order to transform Nepal into a Switzerland – he

pins great hopes, unrealistically, on the tripartite Nepal-India-Bangladesh undertaking as a means to transform that dream into reality. His hopes for the prospects of windfalls through the tourism sector because of the 'internet revolution' and globalization are equally simplistic.

It is, however, his seven proposals to "harness" the benefits of globalization that stand out in the paper (pp. 32-34). The first is that the "Hetauda-Kathmandu tunnel road in the private sector should be linked with the proposed Asian highway¹² which can be called SAARC highway- a new Silk Road in the region." The second is that "Pokhara, a land of beauty and ecological heritage, should be made the capital of SAARC." He says that "This would help promote the proposed International Financial Services Centre in Nepal. In this context, the Swiss Bank could be invited, and the regional headquarters of international organizations could be established." He further adds that "The ultimate goal of this financial centre is to make Nepal the 'Switzerland' of Asia, which will not only secure an independent role in the international community but will also become a centre of all forms of investment, including those needed for domestic growth." His third suggestion is that "A SAARC University may be established in cooperation with the United Nations University, preferably in Lumbini, to strengthen human resource development in the region. With this university Nepal could be a centre of excellence that would attract talents from all over the world." The other four proposals similarly border on fantasy. It is ironic that in a book that is supposed to discuss the important role of the traditional social economy, the editor devotes most of his paper to the grand results he expects for Nepal from the globalization process.

Despite the impressive words he chooses for his title, and efforts to give the impression he has come up with a fresh 'model', there is nothing novel in his main thesis that a "combination of both economic nationalism and globalization that could be called 'outward oriented economic nationalism' would be the best alternative path for the economic survival and growth or development of the economy" (p.5). This cliché thesis combined with his proposals for how specifically we should go about dealing with these two sectors simultaneously (e.g., his 'seven proposals' on harnessing the benefit from globalization, and his call for ropeway networking all over the hills of Nepal for the

12 Dahal does not specify what the 'proposed Asian highway' is, who has proposed it, who is to finance it, when it is going to be initiated and completed, etc.

development of the traditional economy¹³) make his paper, as a whole, tedious, bombastic and confusing.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha's "Local Development Strategy in Nepal: Insensitive Government, Conflicting Donor Agenda, and Emergent NGO Initiatives at the Grassroots", is a more coherent paper than Dahal's. Shrestha points out that although "local development denotes the development of localities both rural and urban", because of the differences in their sociological and economic characteristics, the strategies for their development necessarily differ (p. 49). He takes up rural development as the subject matter of his analysis because he says, Nepal is an overwhelmingly rural country and likely to remain so for a long time. Rural development, according to Shrestha, "must mean nothing more, or nothing less, than effective alleviation of rural poverty" (p.51). Shrestha says that rural development is a *sine qua non* for national integration and building a nation from the grassroots. Only through rural development efforts to build a united and participatory society, can Nepal thwart ethnic tension and successfully deal with other countries as a united nation.

Having argued for rural development, Shrestha goes on to provide a brief sketch of the history and present status of rural development strategies in Nepal. Beginning with the 1953 American government-assisted Tribhuban Village Development Program, Nepal has seen the evolution of approaches and strategies for rural development (cf. Fujikura 1996). Some of the 'breakthroughs' in rural development, according to Shrestha, were the establishment of a separate Ministry of Local development in 1980 and the adoption of the concept of User Groups as the "main institutional basis for planning and implementation of projects at the grassroots." One of the major hurdles to rural development, Shrestha complains, has been the Government's unwillingness to devise and implement radical decentralization policies.

Before discussing "The Emergent Essentials for an Effective Rural Development Strategy in Nepal," Shrestha discusses the role of the other major player in rural development, the donors. A heavy presence in the country, they have fragmented the development process by "each one of them toeing their own approaches", carrying out projects "designed by in-

13 He calls on the National Planning Commission to devise a "special package program" to facilitate industrialization of the hills and mountains, where there is "acute poverty," through "the development of ropeways in the hills and mountains and expansion of its net-working all over the kingdom. This will reduce transportation cost, integrate national market and help preserve the mountain ecology" (p.25).

coming advisors...who do not continue to live in Nepal to monitor the results of their implementation and see for themselves the follies they ended up committing” (p.61). He blames the government equally for not ensuring that the donors work within the policy framework set by the planning bodies, rather accepting “anything that was offered...”. He cites two main reasons for this state of affairs. Firstly, most of the donors “habitually included some mundane attractions in the project package to attract the personal interest of the concerned bureaucrats to ensure its smooth functioning”. Secondly, the Finance Ministry, with its perpetual balance of payment problem has been compelled to work under the “unstated motto” that “Money coming into Nepal in any form cannot but be good for the country”. The government officials are well aware of the fact that “hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted on failed projects, but they seemed terrified by the prospect that any search for more effective options on their part could result in more delays in the already slow flow of donor money into the country” (p.61).¹⁴ The donors are aware of this situation and manipulate it to suit their own interest. He however points out that there have been some successful donor assisted programs as exceptions.

Shrestha presents interesting case studies of the UNDP implemented Participatory District Development Project (PDDP) and the Institutional Development at the Grassroots for Poverty Alleviation implemented in Arjun Chaupari and Sri Krishna Gandaki VDCs in Syangja and the GTZ supported Dhading Development Project, Gorkha Development Project and Lamjung Development Project. He criticizes the UNDP programs for their unrealistic and ambitious objectives, mistaken assumptions, centralized control of the project and expensive inputs. Shrestha finds no major faults with the GTZ projects, and suggests that we learn from their successes.¹⁵ The reasons he cites for its success are that they have built-in mechanisms to learn from past experiences and plan accordingly, they include “a significant number of sound Nepali professionals” (p.80) and are sufficiently decentralized. In contrast to UNDP which implements the projects itself, GTZ implements its programs through the local NGOs.

14 This analysis omits the serious problem of corruption – both bribery and illegal commissions, and conflict of interest in the form of oversight responsibility on the one hand and, on the other, personal financial interest in organizations receiving donor aid.

15 It must be cautioned that the comparison may be biased because Shrestha worked with GTZ as a consultant.

Shrestha delineates the following four characteristics of successful rural development interventions: a) organization of beneficiaries into self-help groups; b) mobilization of group savings through members' individual contributions; c) beneficiaries' sustained access to inputs and technologies; and d) external catalytic inputs. He concludes his paper with the observation that "there now exists sufficient experience in the field of rural development in the country both in terms of successes and failures, some of the recent successes being quite outstanding in content" (p. 82). He states that some NGOs now have enough experience of running successful grassroots poverty alleviation programs which could be used as models and replicated elsewhere.¹⁶ Shrestha, however, avoids analyzing whether those NGOs could survive without donor assistance and whether the programs supported by donors such as GTZ, which entail huge costs, can be replicated and sustained elsewhere. His evaluation of successful

16 He cites the Swabalamban Programme of the Centre for Self-Reliance Development (CSD) as an example of a successful rural development program run by a Nepali NGO. After GTZ saw that the Swabalamban Program of helping the poor through the mobilization of Income Generating Groups had been a "resounding success" in Palpa, it invited CSD to implement a similar program in Dhading. There, Shrestha says, by 1995, it had helped form 144 Income Generating Groups in the "specifically targeted poor neighborhoods" in 21 VDCs. Each member contributes about 20 rupees a month to a group savings fund. He says that group savings had amounted to 1.0 million rupees by the end of 1995. The villagers are helped by a motivator deputed by the NGO who acts as a "friend, philosopher and a guide." He says that "because each member, both poor and non-poor alike in the groups, contributed equally to the common pool of savings, the participation by members has been total and complete in group decision-making notwithstanding their mutual disparities in their class or caste status. Sanitation is a must and each member household has a latrine that is used properly. Mutual cooperation among the villagers has been effectively fostered not only for infrastructure construction and maintenance but also during personal calamities. With the income generating group functioning as pivot for mutual cooperation, the communities, by all accounts has been proud and happier" (pp.74-75). Of course, the question of how these kinds of portraits of rural harmony get generated is a serious one. This account has many markers of the *bikās*-fantasy report based on research that, by its very design, misses all the real and problematic power dynamics (within a community and between a community and NGO/INGOs). For example, the notion that contribution of an equal amount of money to a savings group somehow automatically banishes from the dynamics of the group all the asymmetrical power relations that exist among its members is problematic.

NGO-led rural development reveals that he views development as construction of toilets and some income generation, but does not bring the important variable of power relations into the picture. His paper would have been stronger had it included some rural grassroots organizations' success stories in development without external support. Moreover, his assertion that rural development is 'nothing more than poverty alleviation' is rather paternalistic, consistent with the tone of the rest of his article where he criticizes the government and the donors' policies but never the assumption that rural development is possible only with external support and guidance.

Dilli Ram Dahal's "People's Participation and Development: Lessons from the Forestry Programs in Eastern Nepal" is the most interesting paper included in *Social Economy and National Development*. He takes 'people's participation' in the development process, one of the terms most abused by the development industry in Nepal, as his subject of inquiry and successfully demonstrates that "there is more talk than truth about people's participation in forestry programs in Nepal." Unlike most of the seminar papers, his paper is based on primary field survey data that he collected in 1993 from seven Forest User Groups (FUGs) in Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha and Illam. Out of the total number of 656 members in the 7 User Groups (2 from Dhankuta, 3 from Sankhuwasabha, and 2 from Illam), he sampled 425 (68.9%) and through a detailed household survey and case studies set out to examine, 1) the extent of collective participation in the management of the forest resources and 2) the sustainability of the FUG programs.

His findings are quite interesting. Although the need for women's participation in the management of forest resources is much talked about in the literature, female representation was only 3.5% in the FUGs. Despite the legal provision that at least one third of the executive committee members should be females, their representation was only 20.7%. And most of them "were simply nominated and they had no idea that they were participating as members of an executive committee. Some women members said that they were there because their husbands or fathers had forced them to participate" (p.91). Similarly, he shows that the democratic decision making, the other much publicized attribute of FUGs, is simply absent and "the leadership role in the local FUGs suggests that it is strictly hierarchical and operates in the traditional model of patron-client relationship, inhibiting the effective participation by the economically poor and low caste users in the local setting" (p.102). There is also too much "Reliance upon the usual traditional definition of

people's participation without understanding seriously the changing socio-economic context of the Nepali society. Particularly, the model of people's participation is based on the assumption of a more or less static framework of Nepali society and that every family's primary subsistence comes from agricultural production alone" (p.88). On the contrary, Dahal's socio-economic data shows "that users are not exclusively dependent on agriculture and the static agrarian model of people's participation is rather weak in justifying the active participation of the users in the near future" (p.102).

On the basis of the study findings Dahal stresses that "While developmental inquiry and programmatic institutions that are closely associated with them present an elegant world on simple models incorporating universal variables, the real behavioral context is not so simple" (p.104). Dahal points out that it is not just among the forest resource users in eastern Nepal that effective participation is blocked by the elite. The whole "development game" in the country suffers from the same problem. Those who dominate in the private domain also orchestrate ways to dominate in the public domain too. One way is to arm themselves with fine-sounding development jargon such as "participation", about which they neither have proper understanding nor faith, nor serious interest in implementation

Dahal's paper is a welcome break from the jargon infested but empty papers churned out by the development seminar circuit. Apart from the insightful content, it is also the form of Dahal's paper that is refreshing. His paper is based on fieldwork, which helps him understand what he is talking about and how theory relates to the ground reality. He takes a manageable area for inquiry, states the problem he addresses precisely, describes the methodology of data collection and analysis, defines the scope of the paper and openly admits its limitation.¹⁷

17 The paper on the "Role of Rural Development Projects in the Growth of Cottage and Small Industries in Nepal" by Vidya Vir Singh Kansakar is a short historical overview of the cottage industry in Nepal and its current status. Being a descriptive paper, apart from presenting statistical data on the dwindling status of the industry and arguing for more support for the sector, it does not have any particular analytic perspective to offer. The paper may be of interest to researchers interested in the history of cottage and small industries in Nepal. I do not review it here.

Multiple approaches and actors in development

The third book under review, *Developmental Practices In Nepal*, is the outcome of a seminar organized by the Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tribhuvan University in February, 1997. As in the case of the previous two books, the publication and the seminar that preceded it were funded by FES. Edited by two Nepali sociologists, Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan and Chaitanya Mishra, the book contains six papers by Nepali social scientists, a short foreword by Peter Hering of FES and a summary of the discussion by the participants at the end. Unlike the first two books, the main aim of the seminar was to generate teaching/reading material on "Developmental Practices in Nepal," for the B.A. program in Sociology and Anthropology, and "Sociology of Economic Development," an optional paper in the Masters program in Sociology/Anthropology at Tribhuvan University. The chapters in these books follow the syllabus of these courses. The other stated goal was to "spark off a debate on developmental practices in Nepal among academicians, students, policy makers, and development practitioners" (preface).

In the first chapter, Chaitanya Mishra provides a succinct overview of the genesis and career of the currently dominant developmental discourse at the global and the national level. He argues that many societies across the world had their own indigenously evolved complex notions of and institutions for development, if development is to be understood as the collective human endeavor to attain material, moral and intellectual progress of individuals and societies. Mishra points out that some examples of development in our part of the world include the Indus Valley civilization, the period when the main Hindu/Buddhist scriptures were formulated and reformulated, the massive terrace preparation culture in the Himalayan foothills, the Kathmandu valley civilization especially between 12th-14th centuries, or for that matter, the contemporary household/kinship/community network in Nepal.

Mishra contends that the plurality in conceptions of what constitute development and how it should be pursued virtually came to an end after the 'modern developmental era' emerged immediately after World War II under the aegis of the increasingly hegemonic western capitalist establishment. Since then, in a unilateral Western monologue, 'development' has been equated solely with economic growth rendering concerns with other crucial human components such as equality, democratization and social cohesion irrelevant. Mishra implies that this specific conceptualization of development was tailored to serve the interest

of the global capitalist establishment rather than the poor and marginalized sections of the population. That the gap between the rich and the poor at the global and national level started increasing at an unprecedented rate precisely with the emergence of the modern developmental era is the logical conclusion of this process. He convincingly argues that entrusting development entirely to the market forces, as is increasingly the case since the 1980s under the pressure from International Monetary Fund-World Bank-Core state capitalist nexus, is certain to further already sharp economic polarization, political centralization and environmental degradation since market forces are intrinsically propelled by private profit motive.

Mishra attributes the development failure in Nepal to the above global situation and also to the action of the “narrowly-based modernizing elite” within the country who were the self-appointed brokers of development. This elite “was far more conversant with prevalent European development clichés than with the native notions and practices and, as charged, sought to wrap the clichés around the native notions. This schism forced between the two worlds gave rise to the ethos where development was delivered rather than practiced, reflected upon and achieved” (pp.6-7). Although some important development initiatives were taken during the *Panchayat* period, including the land reform, communication and national education program, they failed to produce results because of the structural set up which blocked politicization (as distinct from ‘party-ization’) and “devolutionary and yet synthesizing” democratization. Mishra says that although the recently reinstated multi-party parliamentary system provides a promising formal framework for development, the experience so far is “not encouraging”. He says only locally evolved rather than planted notions of development can hold promise and for that to happen there need to be “broad based, deep and plural contestations and struggles” which in turn can take place only through “incessant politicization of all dimensions of development – including political, economic, cultural...” (p.12). Mishra is of the view that development may be pursued successfully through different strategies as long as it is genuinely democratic. Although he is not explicit, at least at the macro-policy level, he seems to lend some support to the East-Asian model of development which was characterized by complementarity between the market and an active state which executed early land reform, invested highly in health and education and carried out locally appropriate poverty alleviation programs.

In what is an insightful and provocative overview of how we can come to terms with 50 years of Nepal's experience with 'development', there are nevertheless some problems. First, although his call for "incessant politicization of all dimensions of development" and "democratization of development (including of the process of arriving at a specific definition of development, development-strategy formulation, implementation, evaluation and reformulation of the entire process)" (p.12) is certainly desirable, he is silent about how such an ideal situation can be achieved. It might be just another wonderful idea that is far removed from the practical reality of the country. Second, even though the historically locally evolved development paradigms he cites as examples do demonstrate that conceptualizations and practices of development have not always been the monopoly of 'Westerners', he is silent about whether such alternative paradigms are all now simply history or whether they persist – whether they can be and have been applied in the context of present day complex politico-economic realities.

The irony of Development Practices in Nepal is that the very next chapter, Kishore Kumar Guru-Gharana's "State-led Development Strategy in Nepal" devotes its entire 25 pages to equating development solely with economic growth (problem shared with Sharma's and Shrestha's papers). He quotes extensively (so much so that sometimes the reader feels that s/he is reading not Guru-Gharana but the different authors he quotes) to prove what is already conventional wisdom, namely that economic growth (read development) has not been and can not be achieved by either the state or the market acting alone. "Johnson (1990:521) concludes," quotes Guru-Gharana, "that, 'economic development is a process of cooperation between the state and the private enterprise, and that the problem is to devise the best possible mixture' " (p.27). If one is in the mood to read a list of clichés on the advantages and disadvantages of planned and free-market economies, s/he may assuredly turn to Guru-Gharana's article.

Guru-Gharana is all praise for the East Asian 'Tigers'. Evidently the seminar was held just before the onset of economic and political turmoil in those countries and therefore before suspicions were raised among mainstream development thinkers that they may not after all have stood on unshakable local foundations. His suggestion is that we try to follow in their foot steps. Though he is right in pointing out that (economic) development hinges on good governance, perhaps he is reaching to conclusions of far ranging implications too fast and on too flimsy ground when he at times treats good governance and democracy as if they are mutually exclusive, favoring the former over the latter (following the East

Asian example). The criteria by which good governance is to be judged, according to Guru-Gharana, is accountability, transparency, predictability, openness and rule of law in respect of government actions. He is unclear about how truly good governance is possible without democracy.

Badri Prasad Shrestha, in his article "State-led Growth Strategy in Nepal", presents a more balanced picture of the state of Nepal's economy. His main point is that despite many years of a planned process of development, Nepal's economy remains dualistic with an increasingly affluent modern sector and a vast, stagnant agrarian sector. The state should therefore "gradually withdraw its participation in the modern sector" while expanding its participation in the rural sector, with especial efforts directed at the rationalization of the agricultural sector and greater allocation of government funding to the social sector. Shrestha says that decentralization is the key to fast economic development.

Shrestha, perhaps unjustifiably, sees great hopes in the newly formulated 20-year Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP) which, he implies, will bring about "a dramatic change in the Nepalese economy in terms of higher growth rates, substantial alleviation of poverty and correction of dualism" (p.50). But how is one to expect that a plan such as APP, which lacked input from farmers during its formulation, will transform the entire economy? The problem with Shrestha's article is that he seems to see a neat linear relationship between state economic policy-making (which is largely non-participatory) and development, while remaining oblivious to other intervening variables (such as the socio-cultural structure and different perceptions of development among actors at the different levels of the polity) which affect the way plans are translated into practice. Shrestha also at times suffers from the tendency to present ad hoc statements. For instance, in the concluding section of the article, he asserts that, "a state-led growth strategy is needed, at least for the next 20-25 years..." (p.50) without giving a clue to the reader about how he arrived at such a time frame.

Shankar Prasad Sharma in his paper "Market-led Development Strategy in Nepal", presents a straight-out-of-the-text-book view on how richly a full market orientation would pay in the long run despite certain hiccups in the short run. Sharma goes on to detail how the Nepali government is aware of this 'fact', what steps it has already taken in this direction and, with the help of a set of statistics, he explains how the country is already showing encouraging 'developmental' trends. He asserts that "The impact of economic reforms has been positive and encouraging" (p.63). He provides statistics from the Ministry of Finance that show that

after the economic reform programs: imports and exports relative to the GDP have grown, revenue mobilization has been "satisfactory", the average ratio of the fiscal deficit to the GDP has declined, and the current account deficit has decreased. He further asserts that, "Inflation has also been brought under control after the initiation of the reform program. The average annual rate of inflation declined from 21 per cent in FY 1990/91 to single digit rates in each of the three previous years. Inflation came down to 7.5 per cent in 1994/95 and is estimated to decline further..." As a whole, he says that "It is believed that the reforms have been a boon to almost all sectors of the economy, including the wholesale and retail trade, transport and communication, banking, real estate, business services, and community services" (pp. 64-65).

Of course these statistics showing 'positive trends' hardly relate to the real life experience of the vast majority of the poor people living in the rural areas where living standards have seen continued decline. He avoids the issues which ardent proponents of the free market usually avoid. He talks only about growth, and not distribution. He similarly does not address the question of the pressure that market forces exert on natural resources and the environment. He refers to fifteen public enterprises already privatized and thirteen in the process of being privatized (at the time of writing the paper), without discussing the undervaluation and corruption scandals that accompanied the privatization process. He does admit that the government has to pay attention also to poverty alleviation in the rural, agricultural areas. But like Shrestha he sees, simplistically, the APP as the solution. He says, "To address these issues [poverty alleviation and increment in rural income] and to shape the medium and long-term agricultural strategy, an Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP) is being implemented. ...After the successful implementation of APP, the population living below the line is expected to decline significantly" (p.65). Sharma's paper reads like a typical report submitted to the IMF by a pliant Third World bureaucrat.

In Chapter 5, Meena Acharya presents an analysis of the "Non-Government Organization (NGO)-led Development Strategy in Nepal". After discussing the theories behind NGO activism in development nationally and internationally, Acharya goes on to analyze the policy environment for NGOs in Nepal, kinds of NGOs and the strategies of developmental NGOs in the country. She then discusses the strategies, priority, impact and problems of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in Nepal. Her main thesis is that the NGOs are one of the most promising alternatives to the rigidly bureaucratic and

power-centralizing state on the one hand, and the unbridled market in this age of globalization on the other. They thus have potential to achieve people-centred development that is marked by justice and equity besides economic growth.

However, though she concedes that national and international NGOs in Nepal have made some contribution in channeling resources to the poor, her overall impression is that their role leaves a lot to be desired. Despite the rhetoric, their activities are top-down, informed by their own value systems rather than guided by the perceptions of the intended beneficiaries, they lack transparency and are undemocratic. Moreover, many NGOs are set up by the elite to siphon off the available donor funding and are run according to their own covert motives. The INGO-NGO relationships are strained and state-NGO relationships are marked by competitiveness rather than complementarity. Acharya calls for soul searching among the NGOs to "reexamine whether they are adhering to the basic principles of volunteerism, cooperation and caring, paramount to the good functioning of NGOs" (p.96).

Although she finds that many NGOs have not played the role they *should* be playing, she retains faith in their *potential* to do so. She says, "NGOs of the South and the North *could* play a catalytic role in this [development] process if they can cooperate meaningfully, working with people's agenda, not their own." (p.95, emphasis added). Acharya also suffers from the tendency among development academics to believe in the infallibility of development models even when the empirical facts do not support the models.¹⁸

The last paper in the book is "People/Community-Based Development Strategy in Nepal" by Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan. As it is a poorly worked out paper, the reader is hard put to follow Bhattachan's arguments. Wading through the jumble, however, it turns out that Bhattachan puts forward a bold idea that genuine grassroots development is only possible if the present community or user group approach is radically revised in favor of a paradigm which recognizes caste/ethnic groups as the key agents of development (indeed, in his treatment, the sole key agents). Unlike other authors in the volume, he sees no difference between the market, state and NGOs in Nepal, for they are all controlled by the same people who are bent on subjugating the indigenous and 'low-caste' people. He attributes the failure of the past development programs,

18 I discuss this point in more detail below while reviewing Maskay's book, *Non-Governmental Organizations in Development*.

including the Small Farmer's Development Program (SFDP)/Small Farmers Cooperative Limited (SFCL), Institutional Development at the Grassroots for Poverty Alleviation (UNDP's Model), Swabalamban and Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), to their reliance on an "induced" as opposed to indigenous community-based approach. He criticizes the prevalent assumption among developmental practitioners that 'community' or 'people' is defined just by territoriality, and gender and class to some extent, neglecting other important attributes of communityhood/peoplehood namely caste, ethnicity, language and culture.

His criticism of the neglect of the important attributes of caste/ethnicity in the development process is valid. However, to see caste/ethnicity as the only important variable for consideration in the development process is to revert to an overly simplistic sociological analysis. Bhattachan seems to have missed the point that development failures or successes are bound up with the complex and intricate interrelationships between the global, national and local historic, economic, political and cultural forces. Bhattachan does not look into the possibility that much of the problem of exploitation of the ethnic or 'low-caste' people by the central and local elite and minority high castes might be solved by radical devolution of power to the local bodies which would provide a framework for the people to freely define their collective identities (along caste/ethnic, religious, gender, linguistic, class, ideological or whatever lines they choose to) and engage in democratic contestations for the welfare of their respective collectivities. Moreover, his proposed scheme is silent about how a strictly caste/ethnic based development paradigm would respond to the realities and needs of heterogeneous, especially urban, but also rural, areas.

When a novel and interesting idea is proposed, the reader naturally expects a substantial focus on positive arguments which support the idea. But Bhattachan disappoints the reader by devoting the entire paper to criticisms of past or present developmental paradigms without putting forth any explicit arguments to convince the reader not only that the past paradigms were wrong but also that what he proposes is workable. The reader has to turn to the chapter on the "Summary of the Floor Discussion" to find discussion on this point. There he clumsily argues "that there are so many strategies that are not proven approaches to development, and we still keep on trying, so why not ethnicity based-development be tried once ?"(p.159).

Except for a couple of stimulating articles, the book contains papers which are full of rhetoric, unjustified generalizations, plenty of high sounding but unrealistic policy prescriptions, and poorly developed, or completely missing, conceptual frameworks. The subject matter deserved to be treated with much more theoretical sophistication backed up with rigorous empirical research/references, and the book required more serious editing if it was genuinely intended to achieve one of its stated objectives: “to spark off a debate on developmental practices in Nepal among academicians, students, policy makers, and development practitioners” (preface).

Seeking a vision for NGOs

Non-Governmental Organizations In Development: A Search for a New Vision by Bishwa Keshar Maskay is perhaps the first major academic work in this subject in Nepal.¹⁹ Maskay’s attempt is a welcome step in the context of recent development practice in Nepal, where the burgeoning NGO sector is increasingly asserting itself conceptually (almost all the seminar-wallahs refer to the significance of the NGOs) and physically into the modern development arena which had remained the monopoly of the state for a long time. Maskay accords a comprehensive treatment to some of the issues that revolve around the NGOs, and attempts to combine theory with the insights he gained from his “involvement in, and experience with, a number of voluntary organizations over a couple of decades” (preface).

In this volume we once again encounter the problem of the adequacy of the data upon which interpretations and claims are based. The extensive use of secondary sources of data from the Social Welfare Council (SWC) (previously the Social Service National Coordination Council, SSNCC) make the book appear to be an extremely useful source of information for students, researchers and academics with an interest in the study of NGOs in Nepal. However, a major weakness of the study is its complete reliance on the national level quantitative data from the SWC records, whose reliability and completeness is questionable. It is surprising that the author should consider the study complete without primary qualitative data from the field.

19 An earlier book on Nepali NGOs is one by Chand (1991). Chand, however, does not organize his book within any conceptual framework, while Maskay has attempted to do so. Also, Chand's book is not as comprehensive as that of Maskay. There are, on the other hand, many less extensive, papers on the subject.

The book is divided into six sections. After the introductory section, Maskay makes an overview of the international literature on the history, theory and concepts relating to NGOs. The third and the fifth chapters together deal at length with the evolution of NGOs in Nepal, their achievements, and limitations, and the policy environment under which they operate. The fourth chapter presents the 'empirical results' of a survey conducted among an educated elite section to discover "perceptions and perspectives on NGOs." In the sixth chapter, Maskay provides a summary, conclusions and the recommendations of the study.

By failing to state explicitly in the introductory chapter what the theme of his study is and how he will develop his arguments, Maskay does not prime the reader about what to expect in the book. He starts the book with this statement, "This study is about the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the ascribed/ hypothesized role of catalysts of development in Nepal" (p.1). He points out that "NGOs display a bewildering universe with regard to their institutional origin, orientation, approach, structure, objectives, and functions," which 'baffles any attempt to encapsulate the different meanings of NGOs in a neat conceptual category with universal validity.' He adds, "As a matter of fact, definitions of NGOs can be laid down only on the basis of the existing socio-economic and political condition of particular countries and the origin, structure, purposes and functions of NGOs in this given background." He then goes on to state that, "If a particular economic context alone goes on to clarifying conceptual matters about NGOs, then by the force of the same logic it can be said that the hypothesis of NGOs playing the role of 'a development catalyst' can also be substantiated. The context is Nepal and the hypothesis validation occurs in the setting of Nepal - the central mission of the present study" (p.3). Perhaps the reader as well as the author would have had an easier time had Maskay concentrated on where his strength lies and not undertaken a project he was obviously ill-prepared for. Instead of pretending that he sets out to validate a hypothesis (he never states the hypothesis specifically nor the precise methodology for its verification or falsification), it would have been more honest of the author, and less confusing for the reader, had he plainly admitted that he presents a descriptive history of the evolution of 'modern' NGOs in Nepal, and his suggestions for making their role more meaningful in the country in the context of the recent global geo-political development. For that is what the book, deals with, and it does so impressively.

In the second chapter of the book, “Perspectives on NGO Development: An Overview of Theories and Concepts,” Maskay covers wide ranging global issues surrounding NGOs. He discusses their genesis, the varieties of NGOs and definitional complexity, strengths and weaknesses of NGOs as development catalysts, the political space for NGO operation, the problems and prospects for NGO-government coordination, etc. Unfortunately, he ends up presenting discrete summaries of theories relating to NGOs rather than synthesizing them to develop a specific line of argument. Although he devotes a substantial proportion of the book to this chapter, he makes very little use of the theoretical discussion in this part of the book in his analysis of Nepali NGOs in the subsequent chapters.

The third chapter is a very useful history of the evolution of the NGO field in Nepal. Maskay also provides an account of attempts by the government, social workers, academics and development professionals to conceptualize and classify Nepali NGOs. He then presents disaggregated data on the sectoral and geographical distribution of, and trends in resource allocation of the Nepali NGOs. Apart from the detailed information on the status of NGOs in the pre-SSNCC period, the information he provides about the context of the evolution of a more institutionalized NGO ‘movement’ culminating in the establishment of SSNCC is telling. A national level workshop of ‘social workers’ in Jawalakhel in 1977 recommended that an apex body be formed for the coordination of NGOs. An ESCAP representative present at the conference pointed out that the apex body of NGOs in the Philippines had developed an efficient mechanism of coordination under the leadership of the then First Lady Emelda Marcos. Maskay states that the “participants expressed the device [desire?] to install a similar institution in Nepal under the leadership of a Royal dignitary who had mostly been involved in promoting social work in the country. Her Majesty the Queen offered herself to head this apex institution” (p.79-80). Maskay does not provide the details of who these ‘social workers’ were but it seems that the ‘modern’ NGO history in Nepal was elitist from the start. Apart from this pressure from social workers, the other major reason Maskay cites for the formation of an apex body at the time was that the “NGOs were felt to be appropriate medium to attract increased quantum of international aid. Without opening legalized parapets for NGO promotion, the creation of a national institution being one, attracting external assistance was becoming increasingly difficult” (p.79). Although Maskay does not take up the theme for further inquiry, his discussion indicates that NGOs, at least as

understood at the popular level, were a promising new conceptual tool that the elite seized upon to reap the benefit of international aid. Maskay also does not look into the more political aspect of the NGO history. Through the use of NGOs, the ruling class was co-opting the educated elite into the *Panchayat* system by promoting a lucrative but controlled sphere and also trying to shut down oppositional use of the '*sewa*' (service) rhetoric that the state was promoting.

The NGO 'movement' still seems crippled by that legacy to a large extent. Maskay does not venture to research into the social connections and characteristics of the most well-funded NGO people in Nepal. Had he done that he could perhaps have found that the majority of such big and 'successful' NGOs were, and are still, run by powerful people from the government, the rich, upper caste, politically connected and urban elite (and to some extent rural elite with urban connections as well).

That the NGO movement in Nepal as a whole is not so elegant as self-portraits suggest is revealed by Maskay's data and observations. Maskay's disaggregation of unpublished data from SWC sources (for the year 1996) shows that of the total number of NGOs registered with the SWC, 67% were from the Central Development Region, while the combined percentage for the Mid-Western and Far Western Regions had a bare 4-5% share of the total pie (p.97). This, Maskay observes, goes against the 'principle' that the NGOs work for the most backward regions and people. In a country with an overwhelmingly rural population, 57.7% (in 1992) of the NGOs were working in urban areas. This pattern, Maskay says, shows that the NGOs are "rewarding areas which have good facilities and penalizing others which have less facilities and are less developed" (p.100). A notable characteristic of most of the national level, centrally-based NGOs are that they have "virtually remained under the influence of the government authorities or donors for all of their objectives and operational modalities." Moreover, "Most of these NGOs appeared to be individual based institutions established with the leadership ambitions of the founders and attended with no second tier of command, thus giving an impression of their being just like personal household affairs or private enterprises" (p.93).

Analyzing sources of funding, he presents data that shows that the NGOs are becoming increasingly externally dependant. In 1977/78, 42.2% of NGO funds came from external sources. By 1990/91, it had increased to 86.9% (p.102). This, Maskay warns, will make NGO-led development, among other things, "governed not by national will and sacrifices but by charities from elsewhere, no matter how these charities are described..."

(p.103). The virtually exclusive reliance on external sources of funding makes the NGOs in Nepal “liable to go out of existence any time the international aid system become unpredictable” (p.103). His analysis leads him to conclude that the NGOs “commitment toward development at the grassroots level is doubtful” (p.103). In the next page he says all NGOs “are lacking in voluntary spirit.”

But these data and observations, revealing in their own right, create conceptual problem for Maskay’s study. By failing to operationally define development and use the term consistently throughout the book, he leaves the reader uncertain which development framework he subscribes to. Nevertheless, it seems that when he talks about ‘NGOs in development’ he is generally referring to the ‘people-centered’ development paradigm. Describing the features of people-centred development, he says that “The principle puts emphasis on empowering the people, specially the previously excluded, through their active involvement in the entire process of development....It means galvanizing the social energy of people for initiating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating self-defined development program...” (p.23). Elsewhere he says that, “The concept ‘people-centred development’ views development [more] as a people’s movement than as foreign-funded...project” (p.30).

Although he is not explicit in defining NGOs, the following statement from the preface will illuminate what he wants the reader to understand by the term in his book:

As a core element of civil society, NGOs movement today marks a departure from both state maximalism and the supremacy of market materialism to people-centred development with key elements of creating choices for the people to participate in the entire project cycle of development through the empowerment of their allies, such as self-help organizations, indigenous institutions and communities, citizens’ groups, *voluntary non-government organizations* and civil society (emphasis added).

His usage of the term ‘voluntary non-government organization’ implies that he views NGOs as distinct from self-help organizations, indigenous institutions and communities and citizens’ groups. But take away the latter groups from the scene, then you will end up with those formal government-registered institutions which are infested with all the problems discussed in the preceding paragraphs. On the basis of Maskay’s data and observations, it can be *generalized* that as a sector, the NGO sector, as popularly understood in Nepal and with which Maskay deals with in the book, is *not* a movement oriented, participatory phenomena,

and is not capable of realizing people-centred development. If Maskay had ventured to research into the huge proportion of the money²⁰ that is ostensibly meant for the poorest of the poor, but ends up with the Kathmandu-based and out-of-valley elite and the implications of this for an equitable society, he might have come up with strong grounds to support this thesis.

The conclusions Maskay does draw are problematic, both in form and in content. He states, "It can be said conclusively that there is a long and arduous road to traverse to make the ascribed or hypothesized role of the NGOs as 'a catalyst of development' in the context of Nepal" (p.172). The form is problematic because this conclusion is not conclusive at all. A hypothesis does not 'travel' a 'long and arduous path'; It either gets verified or rejected. There is problem with the substance of the conclusion because all his observations and data should have led him to reject outright the hypothesis that NGOs are catalysts of development in the Nepali context. But he does not do that. His conclusion amounts to saying that it is beyond doubt that NGOs *are* catalysts of development, but until now Nepali NGOs have not assumed that role, and somehow in the future they will do that. This has perhaps resulted from his total belief in the view that NGOs can not but be good. That they are the panacea to all the development ills created by state maximalism and market materialism. He does not, however, seem confident enough in this view to even look at the possibility that it was produced in a different socio-political or historical context, that it may not be applicable universally, and that it can be modified if it does not fit the empirical reality it purports to explain. The way he concludes his study shows that he somehow believes that it is not the theory but his empirical data that is problematic.

That also explains why he occasionally comes up with statements that contradict his data when he speaks generically or in the abstract as in the following examples:

Nepal certainly makes the fitting case where the 'NGOs can complement the government and compensate the people' in areas where the bureaucracy is pragmatically weak. As such, the indigenous NGOs can complement the government in its endeavor to provide

20 On p.103, he cites sources which estimate the annual amount of foreign aid that goes into the NGO sector at anywhere between 4.5 to 10 billion rupees per year.

services toward alleviating the colossal and mounting poverty (p.147).

The effort of NGOs in Nepal, like elsewhere, has led to an increased awareness about the acceptance of development design and management based on indigenous resources, local experience in the use of technology, and proper participation in planning. With an ideology of neo-institutionalism, NGOs with philanthropic motive are gradually becoming a safety-net for vulnerable section of society especially the poor, women, children and socially disadvantaged communities (p.145).

Maskay's main policy prescription is that the NGOs should enhance their capacity so that the government cannot impede them in their "peoples' empowerment" mission. Similarly, the government should accept the complementary role the NGOs can play in the development process and accordingly allow them more political space as well as devise strategies to make them more transparent and accountable.

His major prescription, that the NGOs should enhance their capacity so that the government cannot impede them, raises the theoretical question of exactly what notions of democracy and civil society are at work and for whom. If a theoretically democratic polity is in place, what exactly does the project of creating a large sector involved in every fundamental social and economic domain that the (people's) government can not touch and regulate amount to? This is a serious question. Like many people writing on NGOs, Maskay slips right past it.

Moreover, both of his major prescriptions are based on shaky assumptions. One assumption is that the NGOs are genuinely interested in their empowerment mission or indeed want their capacity to empower the people improved. The other assumption is that the people in the government are hostile to the NGOs because they are not transparent or accountable, and are their competitors in the foreign aid business. The Nepali experience, on the contrary, shows that many of the politicians, law makers, and high level bureaucrats have their 'private' NGOs and are aware that attempts to make NGOs transparent and accountable would be against their own interest. It would not be at all surprising if neither the government nor the NGO establishment heed his policy prescriptions. But despite such shortcomings, the book is a useful descriptive resource for those interested to conduct further studies on the subject.

Assessing Nepal from a human development perspective

The *Nepal Human Development Report 1998* (also referred to hereafter as the *Report*), was produced by the Nepal South Asia Centre (NESAC). This is the first major country-specific study in Nepal using the human development framework. Although the study was conducted by a Nepali organization, with a team consisting exclusively of Nepali social scientists (led by Devendra Raj Panday and Chaitanya Mishra), it must be seen as a part of the larger global project of the UNDP.

Human development is the conceptual framework conceived and propagated by UNDP. Since the publication by UNDP of the first global *Human Development Report* in 1990, apart from annual global reports and some regional reports, country-specific human development reports with UNDP support have been published in over 100 countries (UNDP 1998). UNDP has been directly involved in the production of the human development reports the world over.

The human development framework is significant for the way it conceptualizes development coupled with the timing of its entry into the global development debate. It claims to have brought human beings back to the centre of the development debate. Unlike conventional development paradigms, it views development as the process of expanding peoples' choices in life. The choices are seen to be enlarged if peoples' capabilities and functionings are expanded (UNDP 1998, 1993). Its emphasis, that human beings are more than the means for the never ending (and grossly inequitable) accumulation of wealth is in reality not so new in the history of development debate (e.g., the Social Development paradigm, Freire school of thought (Freire 1968), etc.).²¹ But it is in the context of the backlash of the neo-classical theory of development (which makes no secret of its faith in the primacy of inequitable capital accumulation which is assumed, through 'trickle-down,' to benefit the poor majority in the

21 Nationally, the rhetorical emphasis on health, education and standard of living has existed for a long time (e.g., the phrases, *gās, bās kapās* (food, shelter and clothing); *sabaiko lagi śikṣā ra swāstha* (health and education for all); and *śikṣāk oujyālo ghām bāta kasaile banchit hunu naparos* (let no one be barred from the bright light of education), etc.). The novelty of the human development paradigm has also been challenged at the conceptual level. For instance, even the title of Srinivasan's (1994) paper "Human Development: A Paradigm or Reinvention of the Wheel?" is telling. But see especially UNDP (1993:104-114) for a response to such criticisms. It is nevertheless true that the Human Development Index measure has seriously challenged the GDP measure.

long run) since the 1980s, that the less economistic human development paradigm has attracted attention.

The publication of the *Nepal Report* is significant in the history of development discourse in the country. Here, however, it is not by introducing a new concept of human development *per se* in the development debate that the report gains significance; the Nepali development industry, characteristically, had started using the phrase soon after it surfaced in 1990. Its non-subscription to the IMF/World Bank – promoted highly economistic development theory is also not new in Nepal where the leftist academia and political forces are a conspicuously influential presence in the country. It is rather how they go about saying what they say that makes the *Report* different from other publications on development.

The *Report* attempts “to cover the entire gamut of the development canvas.” It extensively draws upon available secondary sources of data. The data are not just transferred to the book from some source as is too often the case, they are fully utilized in the process of analysis. The *Report* comes up with wide ranging and specific policy recommendations. It is the incisive and insightful content of the book as well as its presentation, that succeeds in inspiring interest in the reader. The information and arguments contained in the text are supplemented by many informative “case study boxes.” Unlike so many development publications produced in Nepal, the *Report* is well edited. The *Report* provides annexes at the end providing the readers an opportunity to look at the methodology used in the analysis of the data, the limitations, and also the detailed findings of the report (The major organizational deficiency of the *Report* is the absence of subject index at the end). The seriousness with which the authors treat their subject matter has resulted in their coming up with an excellent study which will undoubtedly be an important resource for policy makers and those pursuing development studies in Nepal.

In addition to the summary section at the beginning, the *Report* has fifteen chapters divided into four parts. The first part of the *Report*, “Basic Development Structure and Processes” consists of a single chapter that “examines the relevant underlying natural, social, cultural, economic, political and developmental structure and processes as a background to understanding what is involved in understanding and enhancing human development in Nepal”(p. 2). What is particularly interesting here is the prominence the *Report* gives to the socio-cultural spheres in putting the development debate in perspective. Socio-cultural institutions are seen as

heavily impinging on the development process and should be seen as positive resources as well as hindrances to development. It is encouraging to find that the *Report*, unlike most development reports, follows up on this theme through most parts of the book.

Part II (chapters 2 and 3) of the *Report* deals with the “concept and components of human development as observed in the literature and as perceived by the authors of the report.” Chapter II, “Understanding human development,” provides a moderately critical and frank assessment of the concept of human development. The authors critique the previous and current major schools of thought in development which include the market-led economic growth approach, human capital approach, growth with equity approach, basic needs approach, liberalization and structural adjustment approach, and social capital and social development approach. The authors point out that the human development framework “has evolved by *selectively* incorporating and internalizing” (p. 31) certain themes from these approaches and as a result, they claim, it provides a more holistic conceptual framework for the understanding of “peoples, societies and development.” The salient features of this new framework are,

The reestablishment of the primacy of human beings as participants or potential participants in the creation of their own future, the singular emphasis on peoples' capabilities and on enhancement of their capabilities, the analysis of institutional conditions conducive to the use and enhancement of peoples' capabilities, the renewed emphasis on universalism and the focus on exclusion and deprivation (p.31).

Central to the framework are the notions of capability and deprivation. Development is seen as increasing peoples' choices through the enhancement of human capabilities and the opportunity to use those achieved capabilities. Income, health and knowledge are given prominence not only for their intrinsic value but “also because they enable the possessors to use their other capabilities even as they facilitate the enhancement of all capabilities” (p.31).

The discussion in this chapter on “conceptual/ideological as well as policy legitimacy” gained by the human development framework within the last eight years, vis-a-vis other competing frameworks, is interesting for the reasons it suggests and for those it evades. Disillusion with the disparities and degradation of human life brought about by the half century of economic and utilitarian models of development at the global level is cited as the chief factor for the acceptance of the more humanistic

developmental model that the Human Development is claimed to be. The success of the East Asian and Scandinavian countries to achieve economic growth through their investment in human capital and the success of Sri Lanka and the Indian state of Kerala to achieve human development even with relatively low levels of economic growth are cited as examples to illustrate that there can be more humane and practical alternatives to the *lassiez-faire* market led approach to development.

However, the authors fail to satisfactorily justify their claim to the legitimacy of the human development framework both at the conceptual/ideological and at the policy level. Their own critique of this framework later on in the same chapter, which I discuss below, points to its serious conceptual loopholes. Indeed, at the outset of the chapter the authors note that "there is the overwhelming instrumental emphasis given to the economic domain and economic growth in general and public expenditure in particular in the literature on human development" (p. 21). And whatever its pros and cons, the authors do not propose any criteria by which to judge whether policy makers are paying any heed to the human development model. There are no signs to indicate that the core capitalist countries are realigning their policies as suggested by the UNDP nor are there more than token responses from the Third World and authoritarian governments. One of the most serious problems with the paradigms sponsored by the international bureaucratic institutions such as the UNDP is that *realpolitik* forces them to come up with compromised models which reflect the interests of the state actors, not those of the grassroots people. The abandoning of the Political Freedom Index (the variables used for the calculation were personal security, rule of law, freedom of expression, political participation and equality of opportunity) since 1992 in the HDRs is a case in point. With all these theoretical and practical problems, it is questionable whether this 'paradigm' would have gained the same amount of attention had it not been for the immense public relations blitz the UNDP undertook. It is equally questionable whether over 100 national human development reports would have been published around the world had it not been for the financial inputs of the UNDP.

One of the most controversial issues regarding the Human Development Reports has to do with the Human Development Index (HDI) which purports to concretize the concept of development in quantitative terms. The HDI is composed of the unweighted average values of what the HDRs delineate as the most fundamental human capabilities – "longevity as a proxy for health-related capabilities; education, as a proxy for information and knowledge-related capabilities;

and income, as a proxy for capabilities to acquire a particular level of living" (p.33).²²

The authors provide a stimulating summary of the criticisms of the HDI, their bearing on the legitimacy of the concept and the responses of the UNDP to such criticisms. They point out that the UNDP has "handled well" some of the criticisms but has restricted its "innovativeness at the level of *indicators* and has been quite conservative at extending innovativeness at the more encompassing levels of *concepts* and *dimensions*" (p.34). The three most significant criticisms, the authors point out, have to do with firstly, the adequacy of standard components; secondly, universally equal salience of standard components; and thirdly, the salience of politics and culture. Regarding the first issue, they point out that the UNDP's response to the call for broadening the concept of human development by correcting the inadequacy of the HDI to give equal importance to other human dimensions such as empowerment, cooperation, equity, sustainability, security, etc., has been less than satisfactory. The standard response has been to insist that the *concept* of human development goes much beyond the *measure* which can never be worked out satisfactorily, and to cite the practical difficulty of meeting the data requirement that it entails. The authors do not find the first response convincing and state that "After all, the legitimacy of the HDI, the *measure*, is only as good as its proximity to human development, the *concept*" (p.34). They dismiss the second response outright by insisting that "inclusion or exclusion of specific dimensions is a conceptual rather than a practical problem and demands in the first instance, a solution at the theoretical level" (p.35).

On the issue of whether the three standard components of the HDIs are universally equally salient, the authors point out that,

22 The operational definitions of longevity, education and income have been changing over the years since the publication of the first HDR in 1990, making comparison over the years tricky. Now, longevity is operationally defined as life expectancy at birth; education as adult literacy rate (2/3 weight) and combined enrollment ratios at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels (1/3 weight); and income as "real per capita GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) in US dollars with severe and progressive correction at the upper end of the spectrum under the assumption of diminishing marginal utility of income in enhancing human development at the upper levels" (p.34). The index values of HDI (and also of other indices discussed below) vary from 0 (the lowest) to 1 (the highest). They are used to measure and compare the achievements in human development of countries or of different groups within a country.

capabilities are necessarily linked to the organization of society- and of polity, economy and culture. Illustratively, education may be a less sanguine capability in a subsistence-agricultural society where the majority is self-employed than in one where the majority is engaged in manufacturing/service wage work (p.36).

The authors go so far as to accuse the HDRs of downplaying global plurality and complain that,

much more importantly, the HDRs refuse to conceptualize variations in economic, political and cultural organizational forms as genuinely *plural* forms of organizing peoples' lives and, instead, view them as being reducible to differences in the *level* of development, implying not only that diversities are transient but also that the genuine social-organizational pluralism is a hopeless, even undesirable, and therefore illegitimate, agenda (p. 36).

The authors also complain that the HDRs treat the political and cultural spheres ambivalently and warn that it may lead to "policy prescription that the economic growth strategy – after all is said and done and particularly during the current period of liberalization and structural adjustment – is the most concrete, actionable, and therefore most promising, strategy for human development" (p.37). The authors call for explicit and greater recognition of the polity and culture as "independent instruments for human development promotion." They explicitly assert the inadequacy of the existing human development paradigm and state that,

It thus appears that the human development frame needs to foster much deeper academic as well as global public inquiry and debate on components and *alternative* strategies of human development promotion and human deprivation alleviation (p.37).

The reader receives a disappointment after going through the next chapter ("Human Development in Nepal: Measures and Indices") because the authors have made no attempt to correct the shortcomings of the measures (and concept) of human development that they themselves have pointed out so persuasively in the previous chapter. It is intriguing to speculate why the authors calculate the Human Development Index using the same three standard components of income, health and knowledge and make no attempt to include other variables, especially related to culture and polity, which they argue, have a lot of bearing on human development. They have not undertaken a rigorous examination of the validity of these components in the context of Nepal. Perhaps a sensible

choice for the authors would have been to either revise the Human Development Index to reflect at least the components they say are important but not included by the UNDP or else to abandon it altogether. At the very beginning of the report the authors state that “the UNDP has given us full intellectual freedom and editorial autonomy to design and complete the study.” But the subsequent strict adherence to the methodology sanctioned by the UNDP in calculating the measures related to human development raises two suspicions. Either the UNDP had in fact given them limited intellectual freedom (‘play around with the peripheral issues and leave the core UNDP-sponsored assumptions untouched’) or they were not innovative/confident enough to include the other human components that they have earlier pointed out are crucial.

All this suggests that we treat the validity and relevance of the measures and indices presented here with a certain degree of caution. These shortcomings notwithstanding, this chapter does, nevertheless, have very interesting findings. It should also be noted, however, that the report draws entirely on secondary sources of data collected by the various government agencies for purposes other than analyzing the human development status and trends of the country.²³

Apart from the HDI, the report disaggregates data to construct a Gender-Related Development Index (GDI),²⁴ Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (see below), Capability Poverty Measure (CPM),²⁵

23 The major sources of statistics for calculating the indices are *Nepal Living Standard Survey* 1996, HMG/N, Central Bureau of Statistics; *Nepal Family Health Survey* 1991 and 1996, HMG/N, Department of Health; *National Census Report 1991*, HMG/N, Central Bureau of Statistics; and *Local Election Reports* 1991, Election Commission (Annex, p.254). The other sources include the UNDP global *Human Development Reports*, the World Bank *World Development Reports*, and sources from the HMG/Ministry of Finance.

24 The *Report* states that “GDI, portrays gender disparities in basic human capabilities...GDI is an HDI index adjusted for gender inequality and GDI/HDI ratio is an approximate indicator of the depth of gender disparity under which the lower the ratio, the higher the magnitude of disparity” (p. 44). “The computation of GDI requires the calculation of: (a) the equally distributed index of life expectancy; (b) the equally distributed index of educational attainment; and (c) the equally distributed index of income. GDI is the unweighted average of these three equally distributed indices with a value ranging from 0 to 1” (p.257).

25 “The Capability Poverty Measure (CPM) focuses on human capabilities and reflects the percentage of people who lack basic capabilities – capability to be well nourished and healthy – represented by malnourished

Human Poverty Index (HPI)²⁶ and Human Deprivation Measure (HDM).²⁷ The disaggregation of these indices by ecosystemic²⁸ and development regions, eco-development sub-regions,²⁹ districts, rural/urban locations, and gender and caste/ethnic groups point to not only the overall low state of development but also the huge disparities across geographical and

children; capability for healthy reproduction, proxied by the proportion of births unattended by trained health personnel; and capability to be educated and knowledgeable, represented by female illiteracy. It is the unweighted simple average of the three indicators that reflects the percentage of the population with capability shortfall in these three dimensions" (p.260).

- 26 "HPI is the reverse image of the HDI but focuses on human deprivation instead of human achievement. It concentrates on the same components of HDI – longevity, knowledge and decent standard of living. Thus, for the calculation of HPI, we need the indices of deprivation in three dimensions: deprivation in longevity (P1), deprivation in knowledge (P2) and deprivation in a decent standard of living (P3). P1 is typified by the percentage of people expected to die before age 40, P2 by adult illiteracy and P3 jointly by unweighted composite value of the percentage of people without access to safe water (P31), percentage of people without access to health services (P32) and percentage of malnourished children under 5. That is, $P3 = [P31 + P32 + P33] / 3$ " (p.260).
- 27 "HDM, like the CPM and the HPI, is an obverse of HDI and focuses on the same three indicators – health, education and income. However, HDM is interpreted in terms of deprivations suffered particularly by children. HDM is based on three variables: health deprivation (measured by access to safe drinking water and by underweight children under five years of age), educational deprivation (measured by adult illiteracy and children out of school) and income deprivation (measured by the lack of minimum income needed for the basic necessities of life). Since HDM includes the measures of income poverty, it has been claimed that it is more representative, realistic and broader than CPM or HPI" (p. 55).
- 28 The three ecosystemic regions are the Mountains, Hills and Tarai.
- 29 The 15 eco-development sub-regions are the products of the three ecosystemic regions and the five development regions. They are Eastern Mountains, Central Mountains, Western Mountains, Mid-Western Mountains, Far-Western Mountains; Eastern Hills, Central Hills, Western Hills, Mid-Western Hills, Far-Western Hills; Eastern Tarai, Central Tarai, Western Tarai, Mid-Western Tarai, Far-Western Tarai.

social groups. The HDI value for 1996³⁰ is 0.378.³¹ To put it into perspective, Nepal ranked 154th among the 175 countries in 1996; it ranks third last in South Asia, Bhutan and Bangladesh scoring lower HDIs; and the trend analysis shows that it will take Nepal about 14 years to reach the 1996 HDI value for Sri Lanka. Disaggregated indices show, that the rural HDI (0.306) is about two-thirds of the urban HDI (0.518); eco-development region-wise, the Central Hills (which includes Kathmandu valley) scores the highest HDI value (0.441) which is approximately 1.8 times more than the HDI value for the lowest scoring Mid-Western Mountains (0.241); district-wise, the highest scoring Kathmandu (HDI value 0.603) fares four times better than the lowest scoring district of Mugu (HDI value 0.147). The disparities across caste/ethnic groups are striking too. The Newars, who are mostly urban residents, score the highest HDI value (0.457) followed by the Brahmans (0.441) and Chhetris (0.348). The occupational castes and Muslims are the most deprived (HDI value 0.239, which is approximately half the value for the Newars). For other hill and Tarai ethnic groups (such as Gurung, Magar, Sherpa, Rai and Limbu in the hills and Rajbansi, Yadav and Ahir in the Tarai) the HDI value is much below the national average (0.299 and 0.313 respectively).

The GDI and GEM show that there is substantial gender disparity in Nepal from a global perspective. Although gender disparities are high across all the social and geographical groups, there is also variation among these groups. The average global GDI is 2.3 times higher than in Nepal, and Nepal fares poorly even within South Asia with GDI for Sri Lanka and India being 2.5 and 1.5 times higher than that of Nepal. Bajhang district fares the worst in gender disparity closely followed by Bajura, Mugu and Kalikot districts (all having less than 0.2 GDI value).

The GEM was introduced in the 1995 global HDR to complement the GDI because “women’s deprivation may not always be linked conveniently and invariably to deprivations in health, education and income alone” (p.49). GEM purports to bring in the additional issues of participation and empowerment into the picture. Although GEM may serve as a relatively meaningful indicator for global comparison, its relevance in comparing among the various groups within Nepal is questionable because of the variables which are chosen for measuring

30 The latest data available was for 1996.

31 0.325 using the better indicator of mean years of schooling in place of combined enrollment ratio.

participation and empowerment: “gender-adjusted per capita income in PPP [Purchasing Power Parity] dollars, male/female share in professional/technical and administrative/managerial jobs and male/female share in parliamentary seats” (p.49). The second and the third variable are not particularly relevant in comparing the disparities across geographical and administrative regions in women’s empowerment. These measures do not touch the question of the situation of the majority of Nepali women who are subsistence farmers (see Upadhyaya 1996 for criticism of similar problems with other studies relating to women). The *Report* omits disaggregation of GDI and GEM by ethnic/caste groups, which is sociologically an interesting and important area of inquiry.

Quite expectedly, the Report also comes up with dismal figures in the other indices: CPM, HPI and HDM. Nepal has the highest human poverty in South Asia. The authors point out that enhancing human capabilities and functionings requires much more than focusing only on income generation. Attention needs to be directed to the structures and processes that perpetuate inequality and hinder the enhancement of different capabilities.

Part III of the Report (chapters 4-10) may be subdivided into two parts. While chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 deal with what may be labeled the ‘hard core’ components of human development – health, education, work, and employment, income, consumption and poverty –, the remaining three chapters analyze the political and socio-cultural spheres. Drawing extensively upon secondary sources of information, the authors analyze each sector with considerable seriousness. The ‘hard core’ chapters follow a similar pattern. After pointing out how each sector is central to human development, the authors examine the current status and trend in (barriers to) access for different geographical and social groups, analyze the financial aspect (external, public and private) and present policy prescriptions.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 compensate for the neglect of the socio-cultural and political aspect in the construction of the indices in chapter 3. In chapter 8, “People’s Participation in Public Affairs,” the authors look at the “linkage between the character of polity and participation” (p.135). The practical reality vis-à-vis the constitutional provision which guarantees participation of people in local governance through decentralization is examined. The authors then look at the participation of people in political affairs, development activities and the role of civil society, NGOs and the media in providing avenues for participation. The uneven distribution of political participation among the caste/ ethnic

groups and women in election, political party and bureaucracy are discussed. The next chapter on “Political Freedom and Citizen’s Access to State” provides analysis of the status of human rights and peoples’ access to the executive, legislature and judiciary. In chapter 10, “Social Institutions and Social Capital,” the authors discuss how socio-cultural institutions at the micro-level impinge both positively and negatively in the development process. These chapters prepare the groundwork for the next part of the book which synthesizes all the information to provide policy recommendations.

Part IV of the book (chapters 11-15), which the authors suggest may be labeled as the “vision” section, “focus[es] on the possibilities and instruments for human development promotion,” calling for “substantive reorientation of society, polity, economy and finance.” Chapter 11, “Reorienting Society for Human Development” starts with the complaint that the human development framework neglects the linkage between society and human development. The authors describe the overemphasis on the linkage between economic and public financial policies and human development as “surprising and distressing” (p.177). The authors apologetically remind us that with its virtually exclusive faith in macro (especially the state) structures for the delivery of development, this framework still views people as objects and passive recipients of “top-down supply-driven strategy” (p.177). The other damning assumption made by the framework, the authors point out, is that “well-meaning governments” can implement human development policies without the resistance of vested interests at various levels of the polity. The policy measures should therefore empower the people at the grassroots “not only to promote the agenda of the human development in the first instance but also to confront such resistance on a sustained basis” (pp.177-178). The rest of the chapter deals with the ways to generate social actions so that there is popular ‘ownership’ of the human development agenda. They delineate three “broad fronts” to concentrate on: enabling the people to take centre-stage in the human development agenda; universalizing human development, and resisting exclusion of the women, income-poor and certain caste/ethnic groups. They call for politicization of the human development agenda and also call for constitutional amendments which would recognize primary education and health as peoples’ right.

The polity needs to be reoriented, the authors argue, through the democratization of political space so that all the individuals and social groups regard themselves as an integral part of the nation. This, they suggest, will require democratization at the ideological level as well as

change in the state structures through the reformation of political parties, the electoral process and the constitutional bodies. Reorienting the economy for human development promotion would involve a balanced market and state-led 'high-quality' growth as well as equity promoting policies. They argue that the economic policies need to give prominence to restructuring land ownership patterns. They provide suggestions to promote agro-enterprises, the industrial sector, and develop the tourism, water resources and human resources sector. One of the major emphases of the human development reports is on restructuring public finance for human development promotion. Keeping with the trends set by the global human development reports, the *Nepal Report* also recommends greater social spending in general and particularly in what it calls the human development priority areas which "include primary health care, basic education, rural water supply, essential family planning services and nutrition programs for the most deprived groups in society" (p.228). More important than the specifics of the "vision" section is the major message it attempts to convey. This message is that the three domains of economy, culture and polity "are both intricately interactive and embedded in one another" (p.247) and this fact should inform all attempts at human development promotion.

This exceptionally well-conducted study does have certain limitations. The study team consisted solely of Bahun, Chhetris and Newars – that is, individuals from the most dominant social groups (those at the top of the HDI for Nepal).³² It was a well-funded study, at least in the Nepali context, (the total cost was over 30 lakhs Nepali rupees)³³, which was incidentally led by two prominent scholars who in 1983 had been vehement critics of development aid (see Panday 1983, and Mishra and Sharma 1983). Having spent so much money, the authors could surely have collected supplementary primary data needed specifically for measuring and analyzing human development in the country. They might

32 This does not seem to have resulted in the compromise of the quality of the book, nor would the inclusion of other ethnic/caste groups necessarily have resulted in a fundamentally different perspective. But the recent concerns expressed that the over-representation of people from the dominant caste/ethnic groups in the knowledge-production process has resulted in a distorted interpretation of Nepali history and society does seem to be valid. Why NESAC did not find scholars from the other caste/ethnic groups for the study is an important question that the *Report* does not answer. Similarly, there is also severe under-representation of female scholars.

33 Personal communication, Devendra Raj Pandey.

then have had enough data to present (even if experimental) an HDI with the inclusion of the socio-cultural variables which they repeatedly point out are important but missing from the standard calculation of HDI. That would also have produced study less handicapped by the limitations of the secondary sources of data that the *Report* draws upon (see Annex 3.1, pp 254-255).

The other limitations of the study, which are more directly linked to the nature of the UNDP, also inevitably have a bearing on the *Nepal Report*. The UNDP is an international bureaucratic structure which is vulnerable to political pressure from member states. Such a politicized institution's capacity to promote development paradigms which may reflect the concerns of marginalized people but seem too radical to the powerful states is questionable. The abandoning of the Political Freedom Index since 1992 partially reflects that UNDP concepts succumb to pressure. The choice of the three 'fundamental capabilities' may have been prompted by the concern to be non-controversial by highlighting the importance of the sectors about which there already was a consensus. The concern was again to avoid being drawn into controversy by the diplomatic exclusion of other "hot" peoples' issues such as human rights³⁴, ethnic discrimination, etc., slipping past such issues with an implicit attitude of 'such issues are important, but only the three sectors of health, education and income are what development is *really* concerned with'. The assumption that educated and healthy people will automatically achieve democracy, development and equality is naïve. The structures that perpetuate repression and inequality need to be dealt with more directly. Other limitations of the human development concept are pointed out by the authors of the *Nepal Report*, themselves, as discussed above, but this fundamental point they do not tackle head on.

The *Nepal Report* does recognize these limitations and also makes a limited attempt to correct them conceptually while applying the concept in Nepal. But what the reader finds confusing is the contradictory stances the authors take on the issue of the conceptual robustness of the human development paradigm. At times they make statements that they find the human development concept to be the ideal development paradigm. But at other times they make such serious criticisms of the inadequacy of the human development paradigm that the reader is led to suspect that the reasons for the authors' spending so much time and intellect in a project

34 See Forsythe (1997) where he argues that the UNDP has always shied away from getting directly involved in human rights issues.

they did not have a complete faith in may have been the prospect of monetary benefits accruing from the project. This conceptual vacillation may also arise from the excessive guarding of the concept by the UNDP. It is directly involved in the production of human development reports the world over and sees to it that the hard-core content of the concept (especially the construction of HDI) does not get altered. This bureaucratic conceptual protectionism is inappropriate in itself, but it may also give an impression that human development is almost a 'copyrighted' agenda of a particular international organization.³⁵ This may lead the international organization-sponsored-concept and the project-fatigued people in Nepal to perceive the *Report* as just another 'Development Project.' That would be unfortunate as the *Report*, despite its problems, is a far more critical and thought-provoking document than one generally encounters in the conceptually-deprived arena of development literature.

Conclusion

Judging by the proliferating number of development publications in post-1990 Nepal, at least the volume of academic debate on development appears to have increased. There could be several reasons for this. One reason may be that the liberalized political environment, which ensures more open academic discussions, coupled with the growing complexities and contradictions on the global and national development scene may have prompted the development academics to debate the issues more. The other reason may be that the access to resources, at least for some groups, may have increased with diverse funding sources interested to support such endeavors. A third possibility also exists. The necessity among the development experts and institutions they have set up since 1990, to keep themselves visible in the crowded and competitive development arena in order to enhance their bargaining power in the lavish development consultancy world may also be one of the major reasons. The (poor) quality of the bulk of the mainstream development literature, including the ones reviewed here, suggests that the second and the third reasons

35 Although there are basic 'agreements' on the concepts of development (such as decentralization, empowerment, human development etc.), the perception of the local people on the origin and ownership of such concepts are important. For instance, the *Āphno Gāū Āphaī Banāū* (lets build our village ourselves) program, initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) government in 1994, does have some human development overtones. But the two have very different origins, with the former having more potential power in Nepal since it had local origins.

given above largely account for the increase in the production of the more 'visible' literature on development. Knowledge production on development is closely related to the political economy of the development enterprise; the content of development literature needs scrutiny in tandem with the context in which it is produced.

One of the major issues of concern in Nepal has been the insidious and incestuous relationship between foreign aid and development. Indeed, some critics have regarded foreign aid and development as synonymous in the Nepalese context (Pigg 1993). Foreign aid has been criticized for helping further entrench the status quo by providing material and ideological resources to the dominant groups with which they can encroach upon the life of the people all over the country (see Des Chene 1996, Mishra and Sharma 1983, Pigg 1993) Foreign aid has also been accused of eroding the local and national initiatives for change and making every development effort entirely dependent upon foreign resources (Dixit 1997). These are serious issues. Proper analysis of development necessarily entails an objective and thorough analysis of the linkages between development and foreign aid. Can the mainstream development knowledge producing institutions, which are so thoroughly dependent upon foreign money, come up with such objective analyses of development? As is true for virtually all the mainstream development publications, the publications reviewed here were made possible through foreign aid money. The publication (and the seminars that preceded the publication) of the first three books were funded by FES, a German organization.³⁶ Similarly, the research and publication of NHDR was commissioned by the UNDP.

Apart from these publications being funded through foreign money, the authors work as development consultants in governmental or non-governmental foreign funded projects. Although this gives them the benefit of having firsthand experience of the inner workings of the development world, it also makes mainstream development academia, as a class, parasitic upon foreign aid. How independent can this class be in dealing with the issue of foreign aid (and its synonym – development)? In Nepal, the financial and cultural benefits accruing from involvement as technocrats in foreign-funded projects automatically and rapidly transforms the class status of the development managers. How representatively can this class, firmly a part of the self-serving development apparatus (cf. Des

36 The source of funding for the research and publication of Maskay's book is not stated.

Chene 1996), articulate the voice and concerns of the marginalized people on whose behalf they incessantly claim to speak?

Questions about the representativeness and motivations of the developmentalists are often raised at the popular level through cynicism expressed about the development seminars held at expensive hotels, where the upper crust elite get highly paid to worry over the plight of the poorest of the poor.³⁷ The imagery of the seminars is, of course, used to express cynicism towards the larger development scene. However, given that seminars remain one of the most dominant sites of (re)production of mainstream knowledge on development, it is necessary that the productivity of the seminars *per se* be examined.

Let us leave aside for the moment the questions of virtually complete dependence of the seminar organizers on foreign money, the high costs incurred and the non-representativeness of the seminar participants. Some may even argue the inevitability of this state of affairs in the Nepali context. Seminars can still be useful if scholars of development come together to share new insights they have gained through rigorous empirical research. They can be useful sites where academics grapple at the conceptual level with the new complexities at the global, regional and national level which impinge on the development of the country, so that clearer visions emerge, and fresh debates are sparked. Judging on the basis of the three, seminar-produced books reviewed here, the mainstream development seminar-circuit is, as a whole, weak on this front, too.

The articles in the first two books reviewed do not revolve around any theme. Rather they seem to be a collection of papers on the generic theme of development chosen for inclusion in the book simply on the basis of having been presented in a single seminar. For instance, the nature of these books would not have been notably altered if the papers had been swapped from one book to another. Similarly, any article with the word 'development' in the title would seem to qualify for inclusion in these books. The papers presented at the seminars are directly bound together in a volume; it is evident that the editors have no role to perform (or at least perform no role). The books contain numerous grammatical and print errors. Moreover, lack of editing results in different papers repeating the same points (e.g., Guru-Gharana and Pokhrel in the first book reviewed),

37 Cynicism about the development seminar circuit has also been occasionally (but not extensively) expressed in scholarly work. Dor Bahadur Bista criticizes the "modern form of seminar punditry" in which, "secular erudition has been substituted for Vedic ritualistic erudition" (1991:149).

or the inclusion of articles in the same book which do not seem to connect with one another in any way (e.g. Dahal's and Uprety's papers, also in the first book). A concluding/synthesizing chapter is made conspicuous by its absence in all these three books. Such a chapter would have helped make the books at least somewhat more cohesive. For instance, although the third book reviewed here is comparatively better organized than the other two, in the absence of a concluding paper, the book reads disjointedly. Different authors discuss state-led development, market-led development, NGO-led development or propose ethnicity-centred development as if these possibilities could be isolated into water tight compartments. In reality, all of them interpenetrate and interact with each other resulting in a composite development scene – the whole is more than the sum of its parts. A chapter at the end should have dealt with *how* these models interact with each other, their contradictions, and the implications for development.

These books would have been much better had the editors ensured that the papers presented at the seminars were subjected to peer review before being published. That would have perhaps forced the different authors to improve the quality, coherence and credibility of their papers (see especially the discussions above on papers by Madan Dahal, Guru-Gaharana and Bhattachan). Although almost all the authors stress the need to give prominence to the voice of the grassroots people during the entire process of development, virtually no author has based his paper on research conducted in the field. The narratives of the grassroots people are completely missing. Dilli Ram Dahal is the only author who collected primary data in the field to investigate a sufficiently narrowed down (and thus manageable) theme; he presents the methodology used to arrive at the conclusions, and openly admits the limitations of the study. In the scholarly community, such an approach should have been taken for granted. It is ironic that his paper should stand out just for fulfilling the basic norms every academic paper is expected to follow.

The absence of the necessity to base papers on primary data from the field and to explicitly state the methodology used to arrive at conclusions results in books which have the same content even though they have different, attractive titles. Most of the papers follow the same format: Quote the World Bank or UNDP reports supplemented by HMG-produced statistics to prove how poor Nepal is. Blame the visionless policy makers and corrupt politicians. Say that we have to devise the best combination of state-led and market-led development strategies. Emphasize the need to involve the NGOs. Infuse the paper with all the jargon currently in

vogue, such as participation, empowerment, people-centred, sustainable development, gender, equity and social justice. Finally, come up with a vague list of recommendations (of the 'utilize foreign aid properly' or 'practice good governance' or 'improve education and health' type) which nobody will contest (see Upadhyaya 1996 for similar problems found in the studies of status of women in Nepal). Looking at the list of participants provided at the end of the books, it is the same small group of people attending these various seminars. Why organize so many seminars if the same group of people repeat the same articles for the same audience?

The answer may be, because the seminars organized and attended by the mainstream development experts are more cultural than scholarly events. When writing papers (and 'editing' volumes) is such an easy undertaking, and when donors (with whom the seminar organizers often have good personal relationships) are not only too willing to fund the seminars but also profusely praise the 'timeliness' of the seminars and the 'insights' of the papers presented (see the 'Forewords' in all the three books), the urge to organize seminars is understandable. But there is more than personal ambitions at work. Seminars are forums where donors and their powerful native counterparts socialize with each other. Widely covered by the state run electronic and print media, such seminars provide the appearance that the developmentalists are constantly worried about the development of the poor masses. These events also provide the opportunity for the donors to disburse the funds easily. They are thus handy in ensuring the sustainability of the development industry. These are events where the developmentalists freely admit the failure of the last development paradigm, and offer an infallible new 'paradigm' (in essence a load of new jargon), thus reaffirming the legitimacy of the development establishment to continually intervene in our society (cf. Des Chene 1996, Pigg 1995).

Compared to the seminar-produced books, the last two books fare much better, especially the *Nepal Human Development Report*. They are edited well. Both the books read coherently as they stick to their theme throughout. These books should be successful in sustaining the interest of the readers to the end, partly because they are the first major works produced in Nepal dealing with NGOs and human development, the two omnipresent phrases in the development parlance of the 1990s.

Pigg points out that "Development categories never quite fit local realities, and this disjuncture generates a series of persistent problems in program implementation" (1995:48). Serious (and extensive) research work, in contrast to seminar papers, would be useful if it scrutinizes this

interface of the free-floating concepts of the international development arena and the local realities. Studies on NGOs may be taken as a case in point. In an age when there is so much consensus (from the World Bank to the leftists) on concepts such as participation, empowerment, the primacy of socio-cultural factors, etc., research on the implementing actors such as NGOs (also Village Development Committees, District Development Committees, user groups, etc) is important. The task of putting these grand ideas into practice ultimately falls on these actors who have likes and dislikes, incentives, interests and specific behaviour patterns. Studies on NGOs need to go beyond mere reporting of the number of NGOs working in poverty alleviation or those operating in the Far West, or providing chronological information on the activities of the Social Welfare Council. Complaining that NGOs in Nepal are not fulfilling the reified, formulaic roles they are supposed to play (as Maskay and Acharya do) is not a productive approach to the issue. Academic analysis must, instead, be directed at this process of reification of development theories, taking fully into account how the specific history, politics, society and culture provide the context for such processes. Before blindly assigning (or accepting) the 'alternative' role of NGOs, attention must be turned to the basic assumptions under which NGOs operate, the foundations from which they have evolved.

Analyzing the history of community development discourse in Nepal, Fujikura notes that although the present day NGOs claim their aims and practices to be qualitatively different from previous programs, "most present day efforts of NGOs and others to create 'community empowerment' appear to find it necessary to operate...on the 'foundation' provided by the development discourse of past decades." He goes on to suggest, "If this is so, then efforts to create 'different' projects ought to involve conscious struggle within and against the existing discursive field, in order not to be merely a repetition of the same assumptions, embedded in the ever new slogans and acronyms" (1996: 307). 'New visions' for NGOs will not emerge from studies that work under the same old assumptions.

Another area of consensus among all the developmentalists, at least at the rhetorical level, concerns the need to give prominence to socio-cultural factors. However, the books reviewed here show that most of the developmentalists are economists or other social scientists with faith in economic models. They have started paying lip service to the social and the cultural, but without internalizing the concomitant methodological and theoretical challenges that it demands. As a result, they have not been

able to add to 'policy analysis' a people's 'perspective from below.' To be able to do that, the development academicians need to work harder, take more initiative (and do more side-taking), use less jargon and be more concrete. The *Nepal Human Development Report*, despite certain limitations, is the only book among those reviewed here that makes a serious attempt to integrate socio-cultural factors into its analysis of development, and is thus able to present more solid policy analysis, and wide ranging and specific recommendations. Even the authors of this *Report*, however, seem to be constrained by the necessity to stick to the framework (which they themselves complain is unduly economistic) of the funding agency, so that they are unable to fully pursue the task.

Such subtle censorships which sources of funding impose on intellectual freedom lead us to a larger question about development writing. Pigg forcefully argues that "Inquiry into the role of development in Nepal should not be limited to asking the questions development institutions themselves ask." She calls for "analysis of the ways the *activities* of development themselves *shape* Nepalese society as a whole" (1993: 45). But can the mainstream producers of knowledge on development in Nepal, entangled in the cultural and political economy of the international development establishment, seriously step out and question the institutions on which they are dependent and of which they are a part? And unless and until that happens, would it not be unrealistic to expect them to come up with a fully indigenous perspective on development (cf. Berreman 1994), whatever that may prove to be ?

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