



1998

Patterns of Change in Western Nepal: Rural Households of the 1970s and 1980s Compared

John Cameron

Piers Blaikie

David Seddon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya>

Recommended Citation

Cameron, John; Blaikie, Piers; and Seddon, David. 1998. Patterns of Change in Western Nepal: Rural Households of the 1970s and 1980s Compared. *HIMALAYA* 18(2).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol18/iss2/9>

This Research Report is brought to you for free and open access by the DigitalCommons@Macalester College at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.



Patterns of Change in Western Nepal: Rural Households of the 1970s and 1990s Compared

John Cameron

with Piers Blaikie, David Seddon and Navaraj Gyawali

Introduction

This paper presents the initial findings of a rural household survey undertaken in Western Nepal during 1996-97 as part of a larger project on 'rural livelihoods and long term change' (on which a preliminary methodological note is provided by Bagchi et al. 1998). The survey was undertaken by members of the Overseas Development Group (ODG) at the University of East Anglia together with members of Actionaid Nepal, the Lutheran World Federation and the Women's Division of HMG Ministry of Local Government, with a view to providing the basis for a comparison with an earlier rural household survey undertaken in what was then West Central Nepal by members of the ODG in the mid-1970s, also as part of larger project.

The Approach and Methodology

Fieldwork for the Rural Livelihoods Trajectory Research Project (funded by ESCOR for the British Department for International Development, DfID) was conducted in Western Nepal during 1996 and 1997. The approach adopted was 'multi-methodology,' including both quantitative and qualitative techniques, to gain insights into long-run cultural, ecological, economic and political processes. The analysis of the findings of the research as a whole is currently being undertaken, and it is anticipated that a fuller report of the analysis will be published in the near future.

This paper, however, utilises only the results of a formal survey of rural households to allow direct comparisons with the results of a similar household survey conducted in the same region in 1974/75 for a previous ESCOR funded project (the major results of which were published in Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 1980). The sampling frame for the 1996/97 survey was developed with the same objective as that of the mid-1970s: to provide unbiased estimates of households' livelihood positions for the region with some reasonable claim to representativeness.

The 1975 Rural Household Survey

The 1974/75 Project included a rural survey involving 667 household interviews by a team of about five enumerators employed for roughly a year. The sampling frame was designed to produce an unbiased, self-weighting sample of the whole population of rural households of West Central Nepal (an area of more than 10,000 square kilometres with about about two million people).

Claims to representativeness were first established by the use of multi-dimensional stratification, allowing five Districts to be randomly selected within the West Central Region from groupings with similar characteristics. Clustering was then necessary to meet logistic requirements, and 44 Gaon Panchayat wards (the smallest unit of local government at the time) were randomly chosen as the maximum manageable number. The number of wards in three of the Districts was proportional to population recorded in the 1971 Census; they were lower in one relatively urbanised District (Kaski) and higher in the one District with a claim to be representative of higher mountain conditions (Parbat). Within the Districts every ward was given an equal chance of being selected by using a random number table.

A uniform proportion of one quarter of households was chosen in every selected ward to give a proportional-to-population-size, self-weighting characteristic. The final households were randomly selected in the field from an updated electoral register. Interview refusal or non-availability was very rare and so substitutions at the household level were handled in an *ad hoc* fashion on the principle of selecting a neighbour with a similar type of housing.

The 1996-97 Household Survey

The District stratification in the 1970s was based on multivariable calculations from secondary data, and the final results were consistent with the widely accepted

hills/plains divide. Accepting that stratification for 1990s sampling procedure was easily justifiable. In an attempt to capture the full range of experiences, it was decided to work in all five of the original Districts. However, the more limited resources available in the 1990s led to a reduction in the maximum number of wards (now wards of VDCs rather than of Gaon Panchayats) that could be visited to 15, rather than the original 44. The 15 wards were selected randomly by District in four Districts. In the fifth District the 1970s wards were stratified into northern and southern areas on an ad hoc basis to correspond to 'more' and 'less' mountainous and two and one wards randomly selected respectively. There was an additional complication in this District (Parbat) that missing records of ward numbers, redefinition of boundaries and renaming of local authority units made the original sampled clusters exceptionally difficult to identify again.

The number of wards in each District for the 1990s was selected on the basis of being the whole numbers closest to one third of the 1970s numbers—though given the small total involved this produced considerable variation in proportions sampled (from about a quarter to a half of the original 1970s figures). The number of households to be investigated was also similarly proportionally reduced to about one hundred and fifty (157).

In order to give greater proportionality to population size than provided by the ward numbers alone, the number of households in four of the Districts was allocated according to District populations in the 1991 Population Census. The fifth District (Parbat), thought to be more representative of 'mountain' conditions was allocated a higher proportion of households broadly in line with the ad hoc decision made in the 1970s survey. As regards the 'under-representation' of the more urbanised district, the extension of motorable roads and general urbanisation in the past twenty years have placed many more rural areas closer to urban areas in terms of travel time and singling out one District for special consideration in this respect no longer seemed appropriate.

In all five Districts, households were allocated to selected wards proportionately to official records of VDC populations by District. The sampling proportion of households at ward level was relatively high, close to that in the 1970s at around a fifth. The sampling proportion at ward level was not a fixed proportion as the number of cases selected was proportional to the whole VDC population from the population census, not the ward population as in the 1970s. A complete household listing was made from a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) derived map. The map was aimed at capturing the selected ward boundaries as they had been in the 1970s (ward numbers had often changed and sometimes the boundaries with them). But PRA techniques tend to work best in self-defined communities which may correspond to particular

villages or hamlets rather than administratively defined wards. Overall, there must always be an element of doubt, in all the Districts, whether the boundaries of the cluster investigated in the 1990s precisely corresponded to those in the 1970s.

In an effort to improve sampling efficiency, the households were stratified using a wealth ranking technique. Households were grouped for sampling purposes into five or six strata and households selected randomly in proportion to the number in each stratum, though analysis was not intended to be undertaken using this stratification given the small cell sizes involved. Potential substitute households were also selected at this random sampling stage. Wealth ranking for a stratified sample was a useful innovation; ensuring the whole range of household situations was covered in every cluster helped compensate for heavier clustering in the 1990s sampling procedure. It should be noted though that the wealth ranking was specific to each cluster and comparability between clusters cannot be assumed.

In summary, the 1990s sampling frame for the quantitative survey was close, but not identical, to the 1970s sampling frame. It is worth emphasising that the 157 1996/97 households constitute a new random sample: they are not a sub-group of the original 667 households.

In both the 1970s and 1990s, data was collected by a small, well motivated team to maximise data accuracy. This meant the length of season for effective data collection (agricultural slack season plus non-extreme weather conditions) set a limit to the number of locations the team could visit. In the 1990s, the additional desire to do more qualitative investigation, including cohort type research, more than doubled the time per cluster which substantially reduced the number of clusters that could be visited.

The questionnaire used in 1996/97 was modified only slightly from that used in 1974/75 in order to maximise direct comparability of household data. It was designed to cover household demography, asset ownership and indebtedness, agricultural and non-agricultural income generation, farm inputs and inputs, consumption and expenditure, education and health status. It remained over-economistic and failed by and large to encourage an examination of intra-household relations.

Both the 1974/75 and 1996/97 data sets are held on SPSS files—the 1996/97 results have been processed into SPSS 7.0 for Windows capable of being transported by e-mail. The comparisons made here use a "hard copy" of the 1974/75 results (as reproduced in **The Statistical Guide to the ODG Nepal Roads Research Project** (1976), School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia). The 1996/97 data set is the final "clean" version with 87 households from the terai and 70 from the hills.

Preliminary Findings

The analysis is made in terms of numbers of cases and mean values without taking account of sampling and other likely errors. The conclusions drawn are therefore only the most robust that might be drawn. Even so, they must be treated as analytically tentative, especially when generalising to the whole of Nepal.

Access to Land

In 1974/75, 95 acts of purchasing as a means of obtaining land were reported from the terai; in the hills, 30 acts of such land purchasing were reported. In the 1996/97 survey, 24 households in the terai reported having purchased land; 44 reported selling land. In the hills, 32 households reported land purchases; 20 households, land sales. In all cases the amounts of land involved were small, of around 0.1 hectare per household per type of land. In 1974/75 in the terai, 40 households claimed to have sold land within the previous five years. The average amounts involved were considerably higher than in 1996/97—in excess of 0.5 of a hectare. In 1974/75 in the hills, about 50 households claimed to have been involved in the selling of land in the previous five years; the average amounts involved here were around 0.3 of a hectare.

The market for land may be becoming more active and possibly increasing with about one third of currently resident households having purchased land compared to only one sixth twenty years ago. But transactions are small in terms of areas involved and there is no evidence of substantial consolidation of land-holdings. Overall, the 1996/97 figures for land sales and land purchases suggest a mild possible tendency toward consolidation of land holdings through land loss by the most vulnerable.

The evidence suggests a society in which control of land is still widely dispersed in relatively small amounts per farm. In that limited sense, Nepalese rural society can be characterised as "peasant." The process of differentiation in terms of some people losing and others accumulating control over land may be occurring; but such processes are developing at such a slow rate that it is an individual rather than social phenomenon. But "renting" is widespread, though unevenly across regions. The issue of how far such relationships are exploitative in terms of high rates of return to land-owners and/or linkages to tied labour relationships cannot be discerned without further evidence. Livelihoods associated with control over land appear to be under pressure, but renting may be a way of relieving pressure as well as expressing that pressure.

In 1974/75, around 35 households in the terai reported being involved in sharecropping. In the hills, again about 35 households were involved in sharecropping with about two-thirds sharecropping land in. There is little evidence of sharecropping reported by households in 1996/97. Only 6 households in the terai

and 3 households in the hills reported being involved in sharecropping arrangements. Sharecropping as a phenomenon appears to have declined in the past twenty years, though there is no evidence this is associated with the emergence of a class of fully commercial agricultural entrepreneurs.

Food Production

The 1996/97 survey suggests levels of average weekly household expenditure on frequently used items of between NRs 300 and NRs 350—the hills figure being slightly the higher. (Prices for most basic commodities are similar in the hills and in the terai). The cash required to achieve the average livelihood in Nepal is low, providing entitlement to basic food grains is ensured.

The 1996/97 data suggest that access to land for basic farm production is still widespread in both the hills and the terai. A majority of all households grew more than one of the staple crops and kept more than one form of livestock, though in small numbers. Patterns of cropping and livestock holding differ considerably but this probably owes more to ecological (more maize and millet in the hills, more paddy and wheat in the terai) and cultural (more pigs in the eastern hills and western terai) factors than commercial calculation. Rather, it would therefore appear that an element of self-provisioning is widespread.

In the terai, 68 out of 87 households produced paddy and 61 produced wheat; the other basic food crops of mustard, pulses and potato were also widely produced. In the hills, 63 out of 70 households produced maize, 53 produced paddy, 53 produced millet, and significant numbers produced wheat, mustard and potato. But variations in amounts produced per household in all major crops were still considerable, though differences in household size would have to be taken into account in analysing these variations. (It is important to bear in mind that the sample is of households, not plots of land; very large, especially absentee, landowners may have been omitted, though village-level stratification by wealth should partially off-set this).

In 1996/97 in the hills, half the households were food self-sufficient from their own production only for 6 months or less a year; a quarter, though, produced enough food for at least a full 12-month period. In the terai, by contrast, only 13 out of 87 households had 6 months or less food sufficiency and 50 claimed to have at least a full 12-month self-provisioning capability in a year.

Overall, particularly in the hills, most households are at risk in terms of own food production, and have no reserves upon which to fall back. Vulnerability to collapse of basic entitlements to bare subsistence consumption is widespread. On the other hand, only one terai household reported a loan outstanding for food consumption; in the hills, four households reported

loans outstanding for food consumption. It seems possible that entitlements to a very basic, survival diet are not generally secured by borrowing. In 1996-97 in the terai, however, 8 loans had been secured against land or land registration documents; in the hills, 5 loans similarly secured.

The vast majority of households own some land and a substantial minority own sufficient land to grow crops to feed an average household for much of a year with an average monsoon. The majority, however, are unable to provide sufficient food for their families for more than 6 months of the year.

Production for the Market

In both the terai and the hills, the reported range of crops sold was very narrow. In the terai, 70 sales of different crops were reported by households on an annual basis, but only 9 types of crop were involved. Paddy dominated the pattern, accounting for 32 of the crop sales. Only 9 households reported selling sugarcane—the major crop with local large-scale processing capability. In the hills only 5 annualised crop sales were reported, for only 4 crops—paddy, wheat, millet and ginger.

In both the hills and the terai there are some signs that crop sales are dominated by very few households.

In 1974/75, 50% of all terai households sold paddy and 29% sold wheat. Less than 10% of households were involved with the selling of any other crop. In the hills, 27% of households sold paddy, 24% sold millet and 20% sold maize with no other crop being sold by more than 5% of households.

These statistics suggest that commercialisation of agriculture in the terai has advanced in parallel with the increased use of fertiliser and improved seed (see below). But even here households are keeping options open as far as primarily selling crops that could also be used for self-provisioning. In the terai, only one household reported a loan outstanding for cash crops; in the hills, only two households. In the hills, commercialisation in terms of outputs may actually have decreased.

Use of Farm Inputs

On the other hand, fertiliser use on staple crops is now common. Of the 87 cases in the terai in 1996/97, 57 households (two-thirds) were using chemical fertiliser on paddy and wheat; of the 70 households in the hills, 39 were using chemical fertiliser (nearly 60 per cent). But whereas in the terai the average quantity used per household was 155 kg, in the hills it was only 22 kg. (In 1974/75 in the terai only 57 households out of 330—just under 20 per cent—used chemical fertiliser; in the hills, 30 households out of 337—less than 10 per cent). Chemical fertiliser appears to have become much more widely used in the terai and the hills over the last 20 years, but not in such quantities as to

be achieving either maximum yields or risking ecological damage.

Whilst on the subject of fertiliser it is worth looking at the use of improved seed. In 1996/97 in the terai, 52 households used improved paddy seeds and 34 used improved wheat seeds. In 1974/75 in the terai only 20 households used improved paddy seed, although 51 used improved wheat seeds. In the hills, 37/157 households used improved paddy seeds and 23/157 used improved wheat seeds in 1996/97; in 1974/75 hardly any households used improved paddy seeds, but 41/667 households claimed to use improved wheat seeds. Together with the findings for fertiliser, increased use of improved seed suggests some cautious innovation in agricultural techniques over the past twenty years.

As regards farm improvements and investment, in 1996/97, 22 of the households in the terai had invested in their own irrigation systems. There is some sign that the pace of investment in irrigation by households is increasing (10 households reported investing in irrigation in the past five years). In the hills, 10 households reported an investment in irrigation (4 in the last five years). In 1974/75, only 3 pump sets were reported for the whole sample of 667 households. As with fertiliser and improved seed use, investment in irrigation is increasing at a slow rate from a very low base twenty years ago.

In 1996/97, outstanding loans in the terai for farm machinery and other agricultural purchases were owed by 4 households; in the hills the equivalent loans were owed by 3 households. One household in the terai reported owning a tractor and 10 owning grass-cutters; one household in the hills reported owning a mill. In 1974/75 the total sample of 667 households reported owning one tractor and one rice mill between them. Other farm implements of any magnitude were 27 grass cutters and 5 sugarcane crushers. Mechanisation does not appear to be a feature of agricultural change in either the hills or the terai.

Livestock Production

In the terai, 4 households reported loans outstanding for purchasing livestock with an average amount of about NRs 300. In the hills, 5 households reported loans outstanding for purchasing livestock with an average amount of just over NRs 1,000. In both cases about 50 per cent of the total loans outstanding was accounted for by one household. Only ghee and milk were sold in the terai, although about 20 households were involved in such sales; in the hills, there were only about 12 households reporting any sales of animal products—11 sold milk, 2 sold ghee and 1 sold meat.

In 1974/75, of the 667 households, only 22 households sold milk, while 24 sold eggs, 19 sold ghee and a couple were involved in other livestock product transactions. But around 65 out of 70 hill households

owned buffaloes or cattle, and the vast majority of terai households owned buffaloes or cattle.

Ownership of large livestock is still widespread, but probably more a product of the need for draught power than commercial motivation. Livestock production does not appear to be developing into a strongly commercial feature of livelihoods, though the number of households selling milk has increased considerably.

It is likely that the ceiling to livestock numbers is set by access in the local environment to fodder and to yields of staples by limits to local transhumance processes.

Fertiliser is being used to overcome the latter limitation on a considerable number of farms, but there is still an intensive margin potential which could be in terms of improved seeds and animal feed, and even possibly some mechanisation . . . at a price. Many farm decision-makers must be aware of these possibilities from neighbours' activities and, as yet, are still unwilling to adopt. Livelihood improvement through development at the agricultural intensive margin has potential, but must also have powerful constraints.

Local Off-farm Income

It is possible that increased use of fertiliser and improved seed is not being financed by own-farm cash incomes. If this is the case, then livelihoods in the hills cannot be analytically split into farm, off-farm and non-farm accounts, but are best seen as an integrated portfolio of activities.

In 1996/97, 40 of the 87 terai households were involved in agricultural wage labouring: in total, 36 men and 23 women were so employed—almost all adults and on a daily hire basis. In the hills, however, only 15 out of 70 households were involved in agricultural wage labouring—9 men and 10 women. In 1974/75, about 260 households out of 667 were involved in wage labour selling, about half of whom were deriving virtually no income from the use of their own land. It seems possible that agricultural wage labouring may actually be decreasing as a livelihoods option in the hills, while remaining roughly constant in the terai. Changes in agriculture, despite little mechanisation, do not appear to have increased the demand for local wage labour.

In 1996/97, only one household in the terai reported borrowing for a business purpose and two in the terai and one in the hills reported borrowing in order to run a shop. About 50 people from 157 households were involved in running non-farm businesses. In 1974/75, about 80 people from the 667 households appeared to have a stake in running a non-farm business. Entrepreneurial activities appear, therefore, to have increased significantly.

In the terai households in 1996/97, 10 people were reported to be in public service or the professions and 2

people in current military service. The figures for the hills were 32 people in current public service or the professions and 10 people in military service. Pensions were being received by 18 people.

These results suggest career-style, non-agricultural employment was much more significant for households in the hills in 1996/97 than in 1974/75. In 1974/75, a total of 71 households received contributions from military incomes—but a significant number of these would have been pensions associated with past employment.

The contribution of local activities off-farm are significant in terms of proportions of households involved. But they are still marginal on average in terms of contribution to overall livelihoods. Diversification into local non-agricultural incomes is at an early stage and experience as non-agricultural employers and full wage employees is very limited.

External Income Sources

Credit and remittances are two sources of income that a household can receive from sources relatively independent of its immediate local resources.

Information on loans given is notoriously difficult to obtain through a survey questionnaire. But an indication of the level of activity in the market for loans can be obtained by looking at the demand side of the market for credit. The 1996/97 survey in the terai shows 37 out of 87 households reported taking credit at one time or another. More than half of these households said they had taken credit for the first time in the last seven years. In the hills, 35 out of 70 households claimed to have taken credit, of whom half had also taken credit or reported taking credit for the first time in the last seven years. In terms of the sums involved, the 1996/97 survey suggests that on average, households in the terai owed NRs 5,000. The figure for the hills was just over NRs 10,000. But both these average figures are strongly influenced by a few figures of NRs 100,000 or more. In 1974/75, 85 out of 330 households in the terai claimed to have loans outstanding. Similarly, 121 out of 337 households in the hills claimed to have loans outstanding. In both cases the loans were roughly equally divided between investment and consumption purposes.

In 1996/97, in the terai, 17 surveyed households had broadly defined investment loans outstanding (including for buildings for any purpose). In the hills, 16 households had investment loans outstanding. Very few households had loans outstanding of NRs 100,000 or more. Investment in the terai may be increasing; investment in the hills is probably static in terms of the proportion of households. The vast majority of households do not appear to be investing in terms of purchased assets, despite most owning some land. But they may be investing own-labour in improvements which were not recorded in the survey.

In 1996/97, only one household in the terai reported borrowing for a business purpose and two in the terai and one in the hills reported borrowing in order to run a shop. About 50 people were involved in running non-farm businesses.

An indication of possible pressure on land is through land in mortgage for credit purposes. In 1996-97 in the terai, 8 loans had been secured against land or land registration documents. In the hills, 5 loans were stated to be secured against land or land registration documents. As to repayment, 17 terai households and 24 hill households reported loan repayments in the year preceding the survey. The average repayment in the terai was under NRs 1,000; the average in the hills, over NRs 7,000 (but again this average was raised by one or two very high figures).

The 1996/97 survey suggests an active credit market growing in the numbers of households involved. There is no sign that the credit market is a force for radical change in terms of investment or radical asset redistribution; but credit is a means of supplementing income, sometimes on a relatively short term basis. It could indicate that more households require local credit to tide them over difficult periods (eg when food production fails to meet requirements or there is a sudden emergency), until resources are available from elsewhere. In the terai, 7 households had loans outstanding for consumption purposes and 4 for medical purposes. In the hills, 12 households had loans outstanding for consumption purposes and 2 for medical purposes.

Labour Migration and Remittances

In 1995/96, households in the terai reported 34 household members elsewhere; of these, 26 were males and 19 were in India. In the hills, households reported 52 members elsewhere; of these, 46 were males and 28 were in India. In 1974/75, a total of 59 individuals were involved in sending non-military remittances to households in the sample; of these people, half were outside Nepal.

Multiple migrants from a household are a significant feature in the terai: one household accounted for six out of the 25 migrants reported—this household also had food self-sufficiency for twelve months of the year. More generally in the terai, 15 to 20 per cent of households had food self-sufficiency for six months or less. Though more than 25 per cent of migrants came from this group, one household accounted for 4 out of 9. In the hills, half the households had food self-sufficiency for six months or less; but only 48 per cent of migrants (18) were from this group of households. Two households with three and four migrants respectively both had twelve months food self-sufficiency.

These statistics suggest that degree of food self-sufficiency is not strongly complementary to migration

as a livelihood pattern. The data does not reveal causality, of course, but two hypotheses can be derived from the observations for households with both high food self-sufficiency and migrants:

a. migration allows some households to achieve greater self-sufficiency in food production as a livelihood goal;

b. greater food self-sufficiency allows households to invest the necessary resources to successfully release migrants and diversify livelihoods.

Overall, temporary migration appears to be a strongly increasing phenomenon—perhaps tripling over the past twenty years. As might be expected it seems to be a more significant feature of household livelihoods in the hills than in the terai. Significant numbers of people seek employment outside Nepal, particularly in India.

Sex Discrimination

In the terai, the 87 households were recorded as having 273 female members and 303 male members. In the hills, the 70 households were recorded as having 225 female members and 183 male members. The difference in the hills might be explicable through differential male migration; in the terai, the difference is consistent with findings in other parts of South Asia of gender ratios reflecting sex discrimination against females.

Taking the hills and the terai together, the 1996/97 survey suggests there is continuing evidence of considerable discrimination in favour of boys in education. In the age range of 6-16 years, 38 out of 125 girls were reported to be illiterate as against 18 out of 136 boys. Education of secondary level and above showed 87 boys as against 37 girls in school. Looking at the population above 49 years of age in 1996/97, half the men and virtually all the women claimed to be illiterate. Of the 33 men claiming to be literate, 23 owed their literacy to non-formal education.

The 1996/97 survey suggests slow improvement in attendance at formal schooling from a very, very low base; disproportionate male access to non-formal education in the more recent past; and a formal education system where ability to pay is an important feature—at the upper end of the wealth range, school fees of over NRs 10,000 a year were reported.

Permanent Migration

In 1996/97, 12 male household heads reported moving from the hills to the terai since their birth. In comparison, 14 male household heads reported migration within the hills since birth. The total of 26 household heads moving in the total 157 households suggests whole household migration is a significant part of rural Nepalese life. Furthermore, the survey could not expect to find households that have left the

region completely, whether successfully moving upwards as well as away or effectively disappearing to add to the growing numbers of the urban destitute in Nepal and India.

Conclusions

Overall, it is perhaps the lack of dramatic change in the conditions of existence for many households in West Nepal over the years from 1974/75 to 1996/97 that is the most striking feature of the survey results.

It is in the nature of untargeted surveys that they give the clearest image of the middle of the distribution, if there is a significant concentration in the central ground. Results tend to be quoted in terms of averages and significant proportions of cases. Both the rare accumulating rich household and the desperately poor household are likely to be missed and/or treated as difficult exceptions. This bias, plus the numerous forms of error involved in surveys, must make any policy conclusions very tentative.

But it is difficult to dismiss the impression that rural society, at least in West Nepal, has a large core of households who have coped reasonably well with the past twenty years. Coming from a production base in some land ownership, they have prudently bought and sold small parcels of land, experimented with fertiliser and improved seed, increased irrigation, borrowed or lent moderate amounts of money for investment and consumption, put more children (including some daughters) into formal education, and, maintained simple consumption patterns based on self-provisioning food-security.

The trajectory of cautious, risk-averse experimentation has been involved more with agricultural activities in the terai, and more with non-agricultural activities in the hills. In both hills and terai, the surveys suggest livelihoods trajectories for the "middle peasantry" have been 'sustainable' in the

multiple meanings of that word. Such results suggest there is a solid block of households who are neither particularly policy "hungry" nor particularly policy "accessible."

This does not mean such households do not face tests and trials and do not merit access to greater resources in terms of global justice, but there is little urgency in the overall processes of change. It is also worth noting that such households are not in a position to provide great resources for policy either. If this conclusion is accurate, then policy resources are freed to concentrate on those who are taking the strain of slow economic development in Nepal.

The demographic results of the survey point to two groups 'at risk': migrants from the hills and women in the terai. Emigration from the hills in all its forms merits explicit consideration in livelihoods analysis in view of its increasing importance and complex socio-economic causes and effects. The probability that Nepalese women, particularly in the terai, may be suffering from the same life-threatening disadvantages as their neighbours in north India is especially worrying. The young men in the hills and all the women of Nepal, especially those in landless households, may be suffering disproportionately from the slow growth path which the majority of household heads appear to have chosen and the global economic system permits for Nepal. A policy focus on health and education for women and better preparation for skilled migration for young men is suggested from the survey results.

References

- Blaikie, P. M., Cameron, J., and Seddon, J. D. 1980. *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*. Oxford, and Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Central Bureau of Statistics. 1997. *Nepal Living Standards Survey Report 1996*. Kathmandu: HMG Nepal National Planning Commission.