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## Research Proposals

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#### IV. RESEARCH PROPOSALS

##### \*Population Change and Poverty in Nepal (excerpts from the proposal)

Researcher: David Seddon, University of East Anglia

The proposed study will focus on a number of specific topics with a view to analysing the complex relationship between population change and poverty in Nepal.

##### 1. Causes and consequences of population growth and migration

Population change cannot be treated simply as an independent variable, but rather as the product of changing economic political forces as they affect the immediate social and physical environment within which households and individuals act. It is, however, a central issue and the starting point in the proposed study.

Between 1911 and 1971, despite net emigration, Nepal's population doubled, from 5.5 million to over 11.5 million, and at current estimated rates of growth it will take only half as long to double again. In 1981, the population is just over 14 million, and more than 40% of the population is aged fifteen and under. The population is overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, with less than 5% living in towns over 5,000 inhabitants. More than 60% of the population lives in the hill areas, which account for only about a quarter of cultivated land. Consequently population pressure is intense; the World Bank reported in 1973 that "population density per square km. of arable land is probably as high as 1,100, a concentration similar to that found in certain Asiatic deltas but where, in contrast, the soil is more fertile and the climate allows two or three crops a year" (IBRD, 1973:4) As far back as 1967 B. P. Shrestha observed that "the prospect for initiating a fairly high rate of economic growth in Nepal in the face of mounting pressure of population is very bleak" (Shrestha, 1967, 30).

It will be necessary to consider both the causes and consequences of population growth in some detail. There is now sufficient literature available for it to be possible to provide some analysis of the social determinants of population growth in Nepal, making use of primary data collected in the rural household survey and secondary data from official and other sources. In considering this issue, it will be necessary to explore the possibility of differential fertility and mortality rates among different social classes, ethnic groups, etc. Equally, when analysing the determinants of migration, it will be necessary to disaggregate as far as the level of the household in order to identify the proximate as well as the general underlying causes.

##### 2. Food Supply

One response to population pressure has been increasing intensification of land use, and the cultivation of winter wheat in the hill areas has become widespread over the last ten years. Also, extension of the cultivated area onto steeper slopes and an intensification of use of the remaining forest and pastures are very marked. Despite this, the hill areas are now almost entirely foodgrain deficit and although the plains are still able to produce grain surplus, their capacity to do so is being rapidly diminished.

There is a national crisis of food production, and an acute problem of food shortage in the densely populated hill areas. The dimensions of the national and regional food crisis will be examined, paying particular attention to the determinants of food shortage in order to assess the relative importance of (a) technology and farming techniques; (b) different systems of production relations (exploitation of wage labour, sharecropping, use of domestic labour, etc.); (c) environmental degradation through over-use and insufficient nutritional input (fertilizer, manure, etc.); (d) differential population growth by region or social class (e) inequality of access to food as a result of inequalities in resource allocation and income distribution.

An important element here is the effect of migration of various types upon the rest of the household left behind; and upon all households (whether or not a member or members migrate). An analysis will be undertaken to relate migration to agricultural activities, food production and consumption.

The investigation of food supply would permit, on the one hand, an analysis of the various production conditions prevailing in different regions, localities and social groups in Nepal, and on the other an analysis of the consumption of food and other basic goods, again in different spatial and social circumstances. Here again, data from the rural household survey and from the urban consumption survey, together with primary and secondary data on grain prices over time, would allow a serious analysis of 'access to food' in different regions and among different groups in Nepal.

### 3. Agricultural technology, energy and environmental deterioration

One of the most obvious features of the Nepalese landscape is the large-scale erosion and landloss consequent upon population growth, forest reduction and extension of cultivation to marginal area and steep hill slopes. Less obvious, but no less serious, is the progressive reduction in yields, particularly in the hills. A consideration of the causes of these processes would require an investigation of flows of energy in different farming systems. The political economic issues of the control over private land, grazing land and the forest, and the effects of state intervention upon the most vulnerable households are of central importance here. Also the economics of purchased (imported) sources of nutrients is another important issue.

### 4. The relationship between regions

As has already been argued, it is necessary to consider the relationship between population change and poverty, not only in terms of a global analysis of the political economy of Nepal, but also in terms of 'centre-periphery' relations within Nepal (and between Nepal and India), which necessarily involves an analysis of inter-regional flows of resources, commodities, labour, etc., and, in particular, of the hierarchy and scale effects associated with these flows. For Nepal, the relationship with India is of crucial importance -- not only politically but also economically -- for virtually all trade, both legal and illegal, with the outside world must go through India, and India is Nepal's major trading partner. Inequalities between regions within Nepal and the underlying determinants of those inequalities should be an essential part of the analysis, for poverty in Nepal (as elsewhere) has a spatial aspect.

### 5. The relationship between classes

In an important sense, the 'class analysis' suggested in this section is such an integral element of the total perspective that it permeates the examination of all other issues in some way or another. But it will be important to make clear precisely what we understand to be the dynamics of relations between classes, whether at the national or at the local level. In the context of this proposed study, however, a central concern will be to elaborate the analysis of the peasantry. Only from an understanding of the dynamics of peasant production and its relationship to production on larger holdings (and also to commodity production whether on the basis of domestic labour or hired wage labour) is it possible to understand the inexorable movement of the mass of the rural population towards landlessness and pauperisation and be able to identify, with the help of the concept of 'access' and the simulation model, those kinds of households particularly vulnerable to loss and destitution.

### 6. The role of the state

As we have argued earlier, the state cannot be seen as an 'entity' standing above society in any simple fashion, whether as a neutral instrument for the formulation and implementation of policies or as a tool of the ruling class. An analysis of the Nepalese state must be an integral part of the analysis of the Nepalese political economy as a whole. In particular, however, we shall need to confront the role of the state in aiding or attacking the socially and materially disadvantaged; this will require a consideration of legislation and other forms of intervention to alter the 'balance of forces' in favour of those most vulnerable to social and 'natural' pressures, and also of the state's repressive role towards these disadvantaged sections of Nepalese society. We shall examine the history of state intervention in agriculture and manufacturing to determine how far the necessary development of productive capacity and accumulation potential has been helped or hindered by different forms of state activity (in terms of specific projects as well as ongoing national policies). We shall examine the extent to which the new conventional wisdom of the 1970s -- relating to basic needs, integrated rural development and popular participation -- has affected state policy in the way it envisages the role of the masses in rural and urban development, and in the reduction if not the elimination of poverty.

### 7. The nature and distribution of poverty

It must be emphasized that, despite its importance in the proposed project, the concept of poverty is itself highly problematic; the term may cover quite distinct aspects of disadvantage and deprivation under the guise of material hardship or low levels of consumption and obscure the crucial fact that poverty is a social product, created in various forms over time in the context of changing structures of social relationships, and affecting different sections of society through different processes. Poverty is, importantly, socially defined as well as socially produced and reproduced; we are concerned to provide an total explanation for the reproduction of poverty in Nepal, and the subjective evaluation of poverty provided by case studies from the OECD project would provide an important complement to objective analysis by ourselves. We shall be concerned to describe and explain the distribution of poverty, both spatially and socially within Nepal, relating it in particular to ownership and control of productive resources (e.g., land) and to 'access' to employment or other sources of

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income. The relationship between landlessness, unemployment and poverty, in particular, will be explored in detail. Finally, we shall examine the impact of different types of policy measure and of state intervention on poverty.

#### 8. Sources of data

The great bulk of the data to be utilised in this study derives from the three previous projects undertaken by Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon: the original evaluation of highway development, the SSRC study of inequality, and the study of 'the struggle for basic needs'. The main sources of primary data will be the following surveys from the original fieldwork during 1974-75: the rural household survey, the lower-paid workers survey, the urban consumption survey, and the traffic survey giving data relating to inter-regional flows. These will be supplemented by other data from our own research, and also secondary data from other work relating to Nepal. Since our earlier research in Nepal, there has been some important work done which bears on the main themes of this proposed research. An updating exercise is therefore required. Ideally, this would involve a trip to Kathmandu. Detailed information on population change can be derived from the most recent (1981) census. The Nepal collection at the University of East Anglia is one of the fullest documentation centres in Britain and contains most recent documents as well as books, articles and primary data. The proximity of the library to the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London (of which David Seddon is a member) would complement this collection and ensure that the data base was more than adequate.