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A journey from Telecom to Natural Resources

(Photo of Sunil Kumar Pokhrel)

“To understand simply, the eating mouths and working hands are more in Tarai but the source of income is in the hilly and Himalayan region. The division on the basis of ethnicity has the possibility of inviting unexpected accidents/conflicts to the country.”

Sunil Kumar Pokhrel worked for 22 years in Nepal Telecom as a civil engineer. He is also considered as a natural resource distribution expert by many politicians and academicians. Working as deputy manager, Pokhrel has broken the stereotype an engineer can explore in other sectors beyond technicalities. Very few people who study technical subjects keep their deep knowledge on the social subject as well.

He is successful in his profession. Successful in terms of that he is clear with the vision of the company and implementing projects accordingly. “This is a high-tech age. Technology has increased the productivity of people. Manpower is dependent on technology.”

This statement by him clears that technology must be used maximally. He has defined telephone service in the same way. Just back to the half century, people used to write a letter to get connected with but with the technology transformation rapidly now people can easily talk with each other through video call and that also in cheaper rates via the internet. Not only this, the telephone service currently has been already developed as a medium of entertainment. Pokhrel understands the development of telephones accordingly.

Nepal Telecom has become successful in introducing modern technology in the telecommunication sector following global trends. The company earns billions of profit annually. Pokhrel, who remained as an advisor for the ninth five-year plan in the National Planning Commission, is of view that the profit earned by the company needs to be invested in the productive sector. Keeping billions of money uselessly is equal to not to fulfill liability toward the country. Development cannot take place unless expanding investment. Telecom has invested in Upper Tamakoshi and Trishuli 3A.

Pokhrel's capacity is not limited in the telecom sector only. He acquires good knowledge of the distribution of natural resources into the local levels. After completing engineering he did his masters in rural development from The Netherlands and also did his second masters in information system on a geographical information system from The Netherlands, and did his third masters from the US in conflict and coordination. He got an opportunity to gain expertise on natural resources and conflict from his third masters. His research in the distribution mechanism of natural resources remained outstanding and Harvard University awarded him for the same. Research in different aspects and roots of conflict helped him to make success.

Pokhrel also suggested political parties of Nepal on the distribution of natural resources in federalism. To understand simply the eating mouths and working hands are more in Tarai but the source of income is in the hilly and Himalayan region. The division on the basis of ethnicity has the possibility of inviting unexpected accidents to the country. Many global incidents have already proved that the root cause of conflict is resources. His experience says: it is a usual phenomenon for the economically backward country like ours to have a conflict on the rights of resources. Citing an example of Indonesia, Pokhrel says Ache continent wants to get separated due to the natural gas. Underneath the interest of ownership over the natural gas the continent is fighting in the name of religion. The armed conflicts that took place in Angola, Burma and Afghanistan are for natural resources.

He has done micro-study on the availability of resources in different districts and benefits that can be gained by its local through the utilization. Citing an example of Manag district, Pokhrel said, "Utilization of natural resources can help earn annually more than NRs.600000.00 for locals. But locals of Siraha district will have to be satisfied with less than NRs. 20,000. If the central government is not given proper attention to manage rights and access over the natural resources, Pokhrel claimed that there is a chance of division of the country as well as intra-community conflicts. "If we do not give attention to the time it will be a major reason to splinter the country." If the benefits obtained by locals from the income of Fewa Lake in Pokhara is distributed to the people of Saptari district then federalism will be more powerful. He is against restructuring of the country on the basis of ethnicity, providing a special right to governing ethnicity. Political parties are not clear regarding the reason for restructuring the country. The state needs to be restructured on the basis of access, resource availability, and opportunity but political parties are continuously igniting and provoking local people on ethnicity and religion.

Pokhrel acquired knowledge while studying the subject of various development possibilities of a nation which has suffered from armed conflicts. He presented the working paper on “proper distribution of natural resource to the local level in the peaceful transition” to many political parties and committees of the Constitution Assembly. He suggested restructuring based on natural resources consisting of multiple cultural identity to manage the potential conflict in the society.

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