

Distribution of Natural Resources and Conflict Management

(Author's Photo)

By Sunil Kumar Pokhrel

Conflict in itself is not bad. Society moves ahead through conflict. It is important to fight for rights, to be united, create pressure, and protect the rights are the agents for the positive change in society and it is considered as a part to defend justice in the society. But if the conflict turns into armed war then it will lead to negative results. Professor Thomas C Ceiling at Howard University in his book, 'The Strategy of Conflict' has said- "Strike in the protests is considered as successful only if there is no strike." Any protest for the rights is considered successful only they are peaceful.

It is said that weapon does not have an eye so it kills whoever is in front. It cannot separate culprit or innocent. Human life is beautifully given by nature and nobody has the right to finish in the name of conflict. Nepal should not return in the armed conflict from which we suffered a lot. Armed conflict for any demand or slogan will be dangerous to the public, society, and the country and should not be accepted by anyone. It has been proved by the results of many armed conflicts in the world.

After the Second World War, around 278 domestic wars have already occurred in different countries globally. The impact of these wars has started impacting in neighboring countries as well. While studying the conflicts and violence that took place after the Second World War, among different reasons the four main conclusions can be drawn as follow:

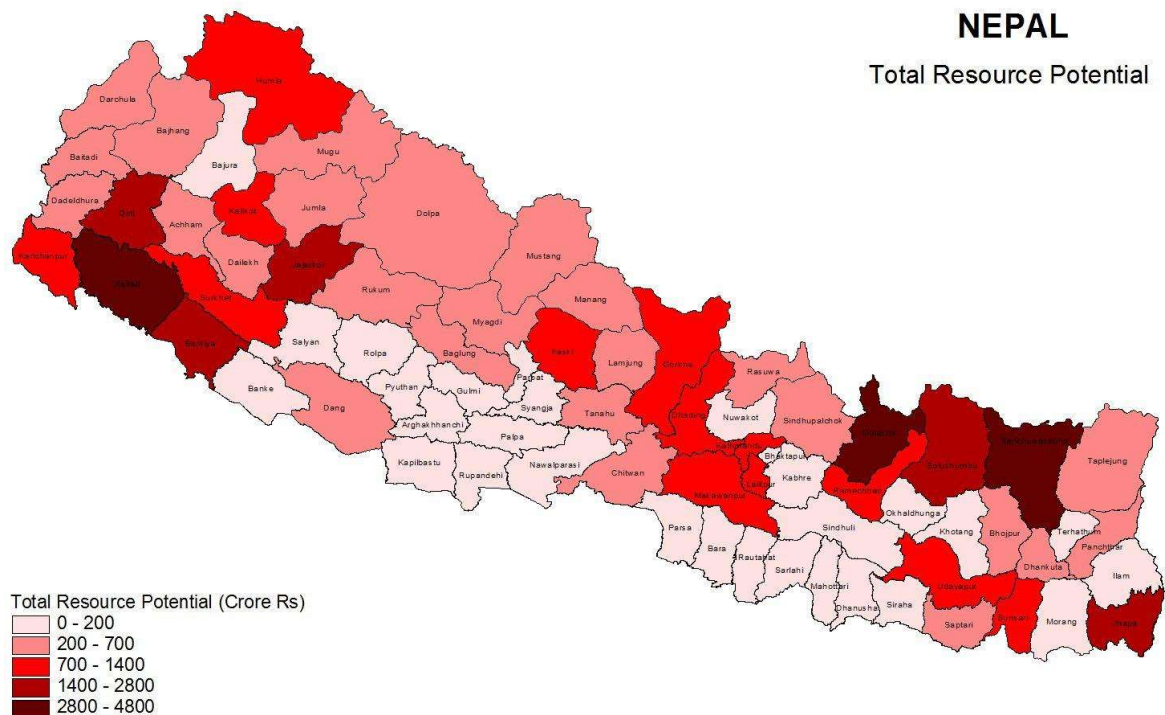
1. Among 278 domestic wars, around 250 wars took place due to caste and cultural problems and ownership rights over natural resources and its distribution.
2. Most of those war affected countries are dependent on agriculture that means more than 26 percent national income is from agriculture. Therefore, the risk of domestic war is high in agriculture dependent countries if compared to others.
3. The risk of domestic violent conflict is high with unemployment and or underemployment rate exceeds more than 40 percent compared to other countries.
4. The landlocked countries whose neighboring countries have negative thinking towards neighbors then there is a high risk of domestic war.

Nepal has been going through from the entire situation mentioned above from the past 50 years. The three problems mention above can be minimized by searching for a solution and the fourth problem can be solved through diplomatic talks.

In this article, I have tried to discuss the above-mentioned problem from 1 to 3 in detail.

To know which district is rich based on potential income from natural resources, we need to look into the relationship of the area of district and population. The district with the high land area is respectively Dolpa (8083 sq. km), Humla (6,052 sq. km), Taplejung (3,646 sq. km) and Mustang

(3,598 sq. km) while district with the small land area is Bhaktapur (123 sq. km), Lalitpur (396 sq. km) and Kathmandu (414 sq. km). The relationship between population density and a land area of the district in Nepal is opposite. The land area of Kathmandu is 414 sq. km with a population density of 2,613 while population density in Humla is only 7. That means on 1 sq km, only 7 people reside while in the same area 2,613 people are staying in Kathmandu. Beside Kathmandu with high population density, Bhaktapur has 1,833 followed by Lalitpur with 853, Mahottari 553 respectively. Dolpa, Manang and Mustang (4 people) in each districts, Humla (7 people), Mugu (13 people), Rasthwa (30 people), Solukhumbu (32 people) fall under districts with less population density.



The calculation of income from the utilization of natural resources has been made with below-mentioned predication:

- The exploitation or utilization of any natural resources has been done with intellectually and scientifically.
- The exploration and utilization of mineral resources have been done from a sustainable way that the reserve will be used in 500 years.
- While utilizing forest and herbs no negative impact will occur in the environment and the land area of current forest will also not be made decreased.
- In terms of rock and sand, only one of the total 10 parts quantities will be taken out from river banks in every year. It is assumed that this will have no negative impact in the environment like increasing depth of the river, landslide, flood etc.
- While predicting the potential of the tourism sector, the maximum income in last 15 years from the sector has been made basis. The potential development and income in the tourism sector can be more than predicted here.
- In terms of electric energy potential in Nepal (more than 80,000 MW), the calculation has been made by considering if all its capacity will be developed and utilized.
- The income of agriculture has been calculated in a way that the productivity will be increased by 248 percent reaching to the level of Hariyana and Punjab, the highest agriculture yield in India.

It is fixed that permanent income source of Nepal for many coming years will be natural heritage. The international migrated labor market is not stable. It is not sure that when the source of remittance will get dry with the global economic recession occurring from time to time. Not only Nepal, many poor countries in the world are getting dependent on natural resources. So it

has become important to keep it on mind that to minimize the internal conflicts between provinces and among people and so that Nepal does not undergo another armed conflict again. Nepal is not in the situation to bear another conflict after already being devastated from 10 years-long armed conflicts. Then what should be done now? What should be the structure of the distribution of natural resources? I have made some suggestions on these subjects. Though it is not complete in itself but will start the discussions for sure.

- It is important to expand and develop the industry and tourism sector by minimizing the dependency on agriculture to save Nepal from armed conflict permanently. Additionally, in the process of minimizing the dependency on agriculture, the development activities need to be forwarded so that full employment and half-employment number will be controlled within 40 percent at any time.
- Except for agriculture and forest, the use and exploitation of other natural resources are happening less than 1 percent. But the exploitation of natural resources in future will increase as development activities increase. Considering the fact, it is important to prioritize the issues of natural resources with the cultural identity issue while making the new federal constitution.
- The royalty received from the use of natural resources needs to be scientifically distributed to the center, province, and local level.
- Observing from natural resources basis, the current development region concept is not feasible because the availability of natural resources in some region is extremely high and low in others. So restructure of the state is essential.

- While utilizing the natural resources, there should be a special right for the employment opportunity to the people of local areas. But for the highly technical skilled person, they should be allowed from any regions.
- By classifying the natural resources, the industry or projects related to natural resources, the rights need to be divided into three levels--center, province, and local government.
- Though the responsibility of environmental conservation will be provisioned for the local government its impact assessment and approval's responsibility needs to be with center government.
- It will be appropriate if the tax and royalty obtained from the utilization and exploitation of natural resources will be divided based on 70 and 30 percent to center, province, and the local level. For example: If the income of any natural resources project operated or promoted through center pay taxes NRs. 100 then it should be provisioned that center government will get Rs.70, province government NRs. 21, and the local government NRs. 9. The question may arise by dividing 70 percent to center government. Center is not a different province along with the people. The central government can spend the amount for the poor province and can re-distribute at the local level or for the operation of the country (security, foreign affairs, border protection, etc.). But after the classification, there should be a provision that benefits from the industry or projects operated in the local level needs to be provided to the local government. Distributing the natural resources in 70 and 30 percent, there will be no huge difference between Nepali of one province to another.

Though Kailali seems to be prosperous district from the perspective of availability of natural resources as shown in the GIS mapping of natural resources, Manang is observed ahead from the view of per person annual income. This is due to the high and low population density in those districts. Population density of Kailali is high while it is less in Manang. From the per-person high income perspective, among 10 districts, all the districts fall in hilly and mountain region and financially marginalized in Terai districts. And the root of the major problem is also the same. The population density is high in east Terai, Kathmandu valley and Rupandehi while less in high hilly and mountain districts. If we look in the map of Nepal with symbolized by all-natural resources, there is alternate in the potential of resources with population density (except Kailali, Morang and Sunsari districts) in the hilly and Himalayan region. This implies that there are fewer natural resources with many eating mouths and less with high natural resources.

With the difference in natural resources potential and its availability and population density, it can create conflicts. If not solved this type of resource disparity on time it has a probability emerging conflicts which may transform into violation. The armed conflicts that took place in many countries around the world have root to the ownership and use rights over natural resources.

Nepal that is in the phase of state restructuring is passing through a big transition. It is a major question of the time that how the new constitution will manage the issue of natural resources. In the name of right, self-government and rights to self determination, some Nepali will be compelled to be poor due to their birth place in Rautahat, Bara, Bajura, Parsa, etc. because of low availability of the natural resources; whereas, some will be rich based on their birth place in

Manang, Humla, Dolakha and Sankhuwasabha because of high royalty and tax from the natural resources. So to not let this situation occur, the maximum equality needs to be created by thinking on time. It is important to be aware of that if high economic disparity occurred between communities among provinces then future violent conflicts unavoidable.

In this context, I propose that the economic difference among provinces and people should not be more than nine times between rich and poor. If the difference becomes more than nine times it would be appropriate to charge more tax to rich and redistribute to poor province and communities. Like, if the per person income in Nepal is NRs. 25,000 and per person income of rich province is up to Rs75,000 then additional tax should not be levied. Similarly, if any province has sufficient natural resources and per person income of local reach to NRs. 225,000 then the additional tax should not be levied. Otherwise, in case of over income, the amount should be redistributed to the public who does not have access to the natural resources by levying an additional tax. The major reason for this is to minimize the difference among citizen leading to conflict in future created due to natural resources disparity.

Analyzing the domestic armed conflicts in the world, clashes on the natural resources and the politically motivated cultural rights agenda have played a major role. Till now no natural resources in the country has originated because of the any specific caste or ethnic people who reside within the territory. It means that a river has not flown because of any specific residing nearby. The habitat has been developed in the process of human development to fulfill the needs. So how much it will be justifying that if a person gets special rights because of her birth place near by the natural resource areas then the other Nepalese needs to suffered because of the

different birth place? Therefore, the problem is not about the birth place or culture. It is the caste and cultural inequality and narrow mindset that need to be eliminated. Further, economic disparity is the biggest problem in Nepal compared to caste and cultural identity problem. The feudalistic system still prevails in the rural area. Similarly, feudalistic thinking is found maximum in the speech or manifesto of political parties as well as within the political leaderships and intellectuals. As per the feudalistic thinking, rather considering the fast development in the country for poor people, politics has been lost in the issue of caste freedom and caste monopoly for the equality of class. It is important to say that it depends on the state restructuring in future that Nepal will remain a country or will be divided into the small caste/culture based state. The state built-in based on caste and culture with the political preemptive rights has not been able to unite people and stay in one unit. So prospering people with economically wealthy and providing equal access and opportunity to the ownership and use over the natural resources and keeping away the old discriminated caste system, the future of the Nepalese people can be assured secured without another violent conflicts. Or else it is not far that a Nepali to think which country to belong from Nepal and which country citizen will be.

(Pokhrel who has done civil engineering was awarded Research and Scholarship Award in 2008 for the investigation in natural resources and conflict of Nepal. He is doing PhD in International Conflict Management from Kennesaw State University, USA. Engineer Pokhrel is involved National Peace Campaign as an advisor.)