

## LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS FOR LANDLESS AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN AN AGRARIAN SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY FROM FAR WESTERN NEPAL

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Land based livelihood options overwhelmingly predominate in an agrarian society like Nepal because non-agricultural sectors, namely, trade, commerce and industry have not flourished and also have not been able to generate employment opportunities to a large number of people. This paper is based on a survey research conducted in the Far Western Region of Nepal during July 2007-Nov 2008. The study reveals that food is barely enough for 0-3 months for the majority in the region. In fact, the poor engage themselves in wage earning in agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, they move to India as seasonal labor migrants, supplement their earning by cutting and sale of fire wood, and engage themselves in caste based occupation etc (true for Dalit) as livelihood options. The paper argues that this situation is a product of, and also regulated by, various local age long feudal social institutions like Khalo Pratha (System), Haliya Pratha (System), Land Mortgage System (Mate Bandaki), Share cropping, etc which exhibit positive and negative relationship. It is also because of structural constraints in land holding pattern (class), existing caste system, and gender disparity. By and large, the most of these institutions have been found as discriminatory and exploitative to the land poor by giving them unfair wage, debt burden, and treating them inhumanly like semi-slavery and social discrimination.

**Keywords:** agrarian society, livelihood option, social institutions, structural constraints

### INTRODUCTION

The Far Western Region is one of the five regions of Nepal which is the most underdeveloped according to the human development index and human poverty index (UNDP, 2009). Land productivity is low, access to health and education is poor and it is also far from the centre, i.e., Kathmandu in terms of power structure. People are relatively poor. Agriculture is the main occupation of the majority of the people (MOAC, 2009). People are conservative and the conditions of *Dalits* (low caste groups or untouchables) are miserable. The region comprises of three ecological belts: the mountain, the hills and the Terai<sup>1</sup>. Three sample districts Bajhang, Doti and Kailali fall in three ecological belts respectively.

Amartya Sen's seminal work on Entitlement Approach (Sen, 1981) argues structure of ownership under rules of legitimacy. Ownership pattern in certain legal system gives space to utilize available socio-economic

opportunities in a society. It is not the question of physical availability, but also issue of entitlement and ownership of food producing resource like land in given system. In same line, his work on 'capability deprivation' speaks about exclusion of landless group who are devoid of land entitlement. Sen's central argument is that social exclusion is linked with capability deprivation (or capability failure) i.e. inability to live certain condition and landlessness is instrumental deprivation which generates general socio-economic deprivation. Borrowing from capability deprivation 'Being able to perform certain basic functioning: person 'capable of doing and being', Chambers and Conway (1992) coined livelihood capability in a sense of 'being able to cope with stresses and shocks' and 'being able to find and make use of livelihood opportunities'.

Scoones (1998) describes the rules of legitimacy as social institution that influence the sustainable livelihood. He further explains it in the following way:

"Given a particular *context* (of policy settings, politics, history, agro ecology and socioeconomic conditions), what combination of *livelihood resources* (different types of capitals) result in the ability to follow what combination of *livelihood strategies* (agricultural

<sup>1</sup>Altitude of three ecological belts, namely plain, hill and mountain are 60- 600 meter; 600-3600 meter; and more than 3600 meter altitude from mean sea level (amsl) respectively (MOFSC, 2002; ICIMOD, 1997).

intensification/extensification, livelihood diversification and migration) with what *outcome*? Of particular interest in this framework are the *institutional processes* (embedded in a matrix of formal and informal institutions and organisations) which mediate ability to carry out such strategies and achieve (or not) such outcomes” (p.3).

Others too have addressed the issue of institutions and organizations in relation to resource entitlement, livelihood and power relation (Giddens, 1984; Scoones, 1998; Bebbington, 1999). A person's asset such as land is not merely a means which he or she makes of living; it also gives meaning to that person's world. Assets are not simply resources that people use in building livelihoods (Bebbington, 1999; Shahbaz, 2009). They are assets that give them capability to be and to act. Assets should not be understood only as things that allow survival, adaptations and poverty alleviation. They are also the basis of agent's power to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources. Access to means or resource is required to undertake activities that secure livelihood i.e., it determines certain level of well being. Access to resources is socially mediated or it is shaped by social institutions that enable people to construct a meaningful livelihoods.

Land is one of the productive and livelihood assets in Nepal. About 32.1% landless and near landless<sup>2</sup> households (landless and near landless are also called land poor) (CBS, 2002; UNDP, 2004) are facing livelihood insecurity in varying degree and intensity due to lack or negligible land entitlements (Pyakuryal, 2007). In fact, such land poor are bound to face various socioeconomic deprivations as Sen (1981) argued. They have no basis for further livelihood and socioeconomic security. These landlessness and near landlessness are causes as well as effects of rural poverty in an agrarian society because other means of

sustenance are severely limited. Farkhanda *et al.* (2009) mention lack of resource is one of the causes of food insecurity leading to perpetuation of poverty. Not only this, they are also not in position to uptake benefit from development intervention by state or state's service delivery. This then enhances increasing gaps and inequality between haves and the haves nots (Pyakuryal, 2007).

Some previous studies (Müller-Böker, 1981; Chambers and Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000; DFID, 2001; Steimann, 2005; Subedi, 2007) reveal that landless and near landless households have adopted livelihood strategies (also called livelihood options) such as share cropping, agricultural and non agricultural labour, and temporal or seasonal migration to city centre of Nepal or different parts of India. These temporary measures have overshadowed the crucial role of land to the landless and the issue of right to livelihoods is not properly addressed. So, this paper examines livelihood options of landless and marginalised community<sup>3</sup> of Far Western Region of Nepal. It also attempts to explore social structural constraints that produce social inequalities in relation to livelihood. This investigation helps in understanding the way people make their living; what they do and which resources they rely on; and how this is organized? There is also a question of why people can access certain resources and not others or what makes certain activities feasible? For this, it is necessary to analyze structural and institutional constraints and capabilities that enable or hinder the achievement of a desired livelihood outcome.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Three districts namely Kailali (Plain), Doti (Hill), and Bajhang (Mountain) in the far western region of Nepal were sampled covering all three ecological belts. Altogether 625 respondents were sampled i.e. 37.10% (230) from Kailali, 31.84% (200) from Doti, and 31.05% (195) from Bajhang. Rationale behind this way of selection is to get a balance representation of three ecological belts which could truly represent the Far Western Region of Nepal. Among the sample, there are 72.40% *Dalit* and 27.59% *Non-Dalit* in three sampled districts to understand all social categories so as to make sample inclusive. These three districts have different socioeconomic characteristics along

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<sup>2</sup>Landless households simply refer to households having no land entitlement or ownership (CBS, 2002). Müller-Böker (1981) states that ownership is opposed to possession of land which means just access for utilization. It is right belonging and it should be taken to mean actual having. In particular, *landless households* are those who have no land entitlement (or devoid of land entitlement) to his/her any household members. Accordingly, they are devoid of virtues of asset entitlement for any purpose. *Near landless households* have land only for homestead and kitchen garden. In Nepalese context, about 0.1 ha., Hectare is sufficient for this purpose. Households having this area of land are also understood as agriculturally landless.

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<sup>3</sup>Marginalised communities are those who are disadvantaged by virtue of class (low land holding) and caste (according to caste system and hierarchy based on Hindu ideology). Here, *Dalit*, who fall at lower rung of caste system, is one of the most marginalised sections in Nepal (Hoefler, 2004).

three ecological belts due to variation in altitude, available natural endowment and respective livelihood opportunities.

Well being ranking was employed to categorize households into three categories i.e., high 'A', medium 'B', and low 'C' based on some specific criteria which were: i) land entitlement, qualities of land-productivity of land, ii) food sufficiency, iii) family size, iv) employment (sources of income) like job/service, v) types of occupation (what do they do), vi) possession and ownership of productive assets like jewellery, and types of house, and vi) good social network (prestige, recognition etc). Aggregate of these indicators determined the economic categories of households. However, land entitlement and food sufficiency were key determinants among these. These indicators are measures of living standards in an agrarian setting as suggested by key informants interviewed during field study. Moreover, these three economic categories are matched through the group discussion in the participatory ways.

In general, economic category 'C' possessed food deficiency with less than 1 month or 1-3 months, homeless, landless or land entitlement with 0-0.15 ha. Under this category, their livelihood is very vulnerable. The medium category 'B' possessed food sufficiency with 4-8 months and land entitlement 0.2-0.4 ha And, similarly, characteristics of high economic category 'A' were food sufficiency with 8-12 months, land entitlement size 0.5-1 ha, and better livelihood (see Table 1 for detail). The landless and near landless households are in economic category C, and hence they were considered while drawing sample.

In addition to these, quantitative and quantitative

methods were employed to complement each other to produce synergy. In particular, survey method was used for collecting factual information whereas case study, group discussions, field observation, and key informant interview were used to gather qualitative information. Data were processed and coded and analyzed through the use of *Statistical Package for Social Science* (SPSS). Moreover, descriptive analysis such as, frequency distribution, and inferential analysis such as F-test, Chi-square test were also employed.

## RESULTS

This section describes the general socio-economic characteristics of land poor households in the sampled districts; and livelihood options and its relation to social institutions that hinder or foster the way people live.

### General Socio-economic Characteristics of Land Poor Households

General socioeconomic characteristics of sampled household are stated as below:

### Economic Categories of Households in Sampled District:

The criteria to fall in categories A, B or C are explained in the methodology section (Table 1).

The Table 2 shows that about half (49%) of all the households belonged to the low economic category 'C'. Actually they are landless and near landless (land poor). Those land poor are highest in number in Kailali (51.83%) followed by Doti (49.60%), and then Bajhang (41.46%).

**Household Headship:** For this research, household

**Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of each category across ecological belts**

Ecological belts	Economic categories (Class)		
	High 'A'	Medium 'B'	Low 'C'
Kailali (Plain)	Food sufficiency more than 12 months in year, land 1.2-1.8 ha or more than this, Job holder, off-farm sources of income	6-8 months in a year food sufficiency, moderate job, 0.4-0.5 ha land holding, small business, medium household size	Food sufficiency less than 1 month or 1-3 months in a year, Homeless, Landless, 0.05-0.15 ha wage labourer, living in Ailani land, cutting and sale of firewood for livelihood, large household size
Doti (Hill)	8-12 months in a year food sufficiency, 0.5-0.6 ha land, good income, job holders	Food sufficiency 4-8 months in a year, land 0.2-0.4 ha land, off-farm income	Food sufficiency less than 1 month or 1-3 months in a year, Homeless, Landless or 0-0.15 ha, large household size
Bajhang (Mountain)	Food sufficiency 8-12 months in a year, 0.5-1.0 ha land holding or more, good job	Food sufficiency 5-6 months in a year, 0.15-0.3 ha) land holding, job holder, off-farm income	Food sufficiency less than 1 month or 1-3 months in a year, Homeless, land 0-0.15 ha, Landless, wage laborer, large household size

(Authors' own Field Study, 2007-08)

**Table 2. Economic categories based on Well Being Ranking**

Ecological belts/districts	High 'A'	Medium 'B'	Low 'C'	Total
Bajhang (Mountain)	175 (29.86)	168 (28.66)	243 (41.46)	586 (100.00)
Doti (Hill)	163 (18.25)	287 (32.18)	443 (49.60)	893 (100.00)
Kailali (Plain)	223 (19.96)	315 (28.20)	579 (51.83)	1117 (100.00)
Total	561 (21.61)	770 (29.66)	1265 (48.72)	2596 (100.00)

Figure in parenthesis indicate percentage (Field Study, 2007/08)

**Table 3. Land entitlement by ecological belts**

Ecological belts/districts	Land ownership					
	Yes		No		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Kailali (Plain)	173	75.43	57	24.56	230	100
Doti (Hill)	121	60.5	79	39.5	200	100
Bajhang (Mountain)	146	75.38	49	24.61	195	100
Total	440	70.65	185	29.34	625	100

(Author's own survey, 2007-08)

head is a person who was present in household for interviewing during the study period and also recognised as had by other family (household) members. The head is the primary authority and has responsibility in household affairs. In other words, s/he has decision making authority regarding household affairs. Overall, there are one-fourth (22.43 %) female headed and three-fourths (77.56%) male headed households. This figure for the female headed household (22.43%) is less than the national average i.e., 23.40% (CBS, 2001; Wiley *et al.*, 2009). The number of female headed household is highest in Bajhang (26.28%) followed by Doti (21.5%) and then Kailali (20.0%).

**Primary and Secondary Occupation:** In the surveyed districts, more than three-fifths (61.76%) of the households reported agriculture as primary occupation. It was followed by wage labor with 28.16%. Remaining 5.76% households were also adopting caste based occupation such as black smith etc., tailoring and shoe making and there was so much variation across the ecological belts. Among three districts, Kailali district has the highest percentage of wage labourer (33.98%) which was followed by Doti district (26.79%) and Bajhang district (23.80%).

Wage labour was reported as the seemly occupation by three-fifths (60.8 %) of households. It was followed by *Dalit* caste based occupation with 16.32% and agriculture with 16.16%. Remaining 6.72% households expressed their mix responses in this regard. As compared to district/ecological belts, Kailali has highest percentage (72.20%) of wage labor which is followed by Doti district (56.56%) and Bajhang with 48.21%.

**Land Entitlement:** Land is one of the key livelihood assets in an agrarian society. Specially, land entitlement provides command over asset or resource and s/he can derive socioeconomic gain for producing livelihood outcome. In general, there are about one-third (30%) landless households. Landless is an aggregate of households with no land entitlement. This percentage is highest in Doti (39.5%) followed by Bajhang (24.61%) and Kailali (24.56%). Chi-square test (value 14.603 and  $p=0.001$ ) shows a significant relationship between ecological variation and land ownership. It means that land ownership varies with ecological belts. The percentages of landlessness in the study area are higher than national average which is 24.44% landlessness in Nepal (UNDP, 2004).

Similarly, in case of caste dynamics, *Dalit* landlessness is 86.88 % against *Non-Dalit* landlessness (13.11%). Chi-square test with value 26.765 and  $p$  value 0.000 indicates that relationship between caste and land ownership are significant. Caste membership determines land ownership.

In three sampled ecological belts, women land entitlement is only 4.1% against men's land entitlement (95.70%). This women's land ownership is less than national average (about 8 %) (CBS, 2002). Looking at disaggregated data by ecological belts, Kailali, Doti and Bajhang have 5.57, 2.00 and 4.61% women's land ownership respectively. This lower level of percentage of women entitlement as compared to men is because of male dominating society i.e. patriarchy as described by Nosheen *et al.* (2008).

## Livelihood Options and Social Institutions

This section begins with an overview of livelihood of people; and then it describes briefly few social institutions that regulate livelihood options in the study area.

### Overview of Livelihood Options:

*a) Livelihood Options:* Livelihood options denote a wide range and combination of activities and choices that people make/undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals or outcomes. These activities include productive activities, investment strategies and productive choices etc. These strategies are composed of activities that generate means of survival. The categories and sub categories of activities that are potential component of livelihood strategies. Further, these strategies have been understood as dynamic process. People combine activities to meet their various needs at different levels and on different geographical or economic levels.

Generally they adopt a wide range of activities in mixed or diverse ways. When respondents were asked 'which one was the main activities for their livelihood?' more than two-thirds (66.66 %) households said farming activities. In farm activities, they simply do crop production, vegetable farming, and livestock rearing. But, all these are in subsistence level. It was followed by off-farm activities (29.44%) In off-farm activities, rickshaw pulling, small shop, wage labourer, migration to India, and carpentry were pertinent examples. In case of caste based occupation (5.76 %), black smithy,

leather work, tailoring, and gold smithy were the main vocations (Table 4).

*b) Coping Strategies:* Coping strategies simply means activities or ways people adopt in food deficit condition or livelihood crisis. In such a period, about three-fifths (about 60%) usually take loan from money lender (local land owner) and buy grains. Interest rate is generally 60-80% (sometimes 100%). It is followed by wage labourer. Occasional work is also a kind of wage labourer. But it differs from usual wage labourer. They work at buspark and office. Sometimes, they also work as domestic servants temporally in food deficit period. It is also interesting to note that farmers consider share cropping as a coping strategy in a sense that it can help to cope food deficit period for 2-3 months in a year.

Our qualitative observations also reveal that the most commonly adopted coping strategies are borrowing money and purchasing food on credit and migration. A practice of relying on less preferred food is widely adopted as coping mechanism. The increase in the number of people and spending less on non-food items is also indicator of worsening situation. Relying on less expensive food, wild food, skipping meals, intake of less foods are some other coping strategies.

*c) Food Sufficiency:* It is one of the good measures of livelihood outcome. It is understood as availability of food with own farm production in a year. Food sufficiency of three sampled district is 2.9 months in a year on an average. Kailali, Doti and Bajhang have

**Table 4. Livelihood options by ecological belts**

Ecological belts	Available livelihood options
Mountain District 'Bajhang'	Farming, Caste-based occupation (tailoring, black smithy, gold smithy, leather work, shoe making etc.), <i>Hallodo</i> (leather rope), <i>Chalno</i> (leather screener) & shoe repairing), Wooden pot making ( <i>thiki</i> )- <i>Chandara</i> caste, carpentry, Prostitution (sex profession), <i>Khalo</i> , <i>Haliya</i> , stone query, wage labour, fixed contract farming, seasonal migration to India, sand screening, and carrying soil for construction purposes. Jobs- school teacher, NGO activist, Employee of community managed electricity system, Livestock keeping-goat raising, business,
Hill District 'Doti'	Farming, Sharecropping, Wage labour at Silugadhi and Pipalla bazaar bus park, Caste-based occupations (tailoring, black smithy, gold smithy, playing musical instruments etc.), <i>Khalo</i> , <i>Mate Bandaki</i> (land mortgage, Stone query, Portering, <i>Haliya</i> , Seasonal migration to India, Pension, Carpentry, etc.
Plain District 'Kailali'	Farming, <i>Adhiya</i> (Share cropping), Contract Farming, Cutting and sale of firewood, Wage labourer, Wage labourer at brick industry, <i>Kamaiya</i> , <i>Haliya</i> , Caste based occupation (black smithy, gold smithy, tailoring), Share rearing livestock (goat <i>adhiya</i> ), Seasonal labour migration to India (Luwaghat, Utrachal-working there at road construction and portering), <i>Haliya</i> , Business, <i>Mate Bandaki</i> (rare), Stone query, Screening sand for construction, Alcohol (beverage) making and sale (locally), <i>Dyari Majduri</i> (Wage labourer)

(Field Study, 2007-08)

food sufficiency up to 2.6, 2.5 and 3.5 months in a year respectively. F-test reveals that food sufficiency ( $p=0.001$ ) varies across the ecological belts. In terms of caste, *Dalit* have 2.4 months in a year. But, *Non-Dalit* has double of *Dalit* i.e. 4.01 months in a year. Statistically, it is highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ).

**Social Institutions in relation to Livelihood Options:** This section makes an inventory of locally prevalent social intuitions which relate to livelihood option. Eleven of them are mentioned below:

a) *Khalo System (Pratha)*: Threshing floor is called *Khalo* in Nepali. *Khalo Pratha* operates in two ways: i) wage labour system; and ii) caste based occupation. In former one, poor people work as wage labourer and they are paid in kind especially grain. They have to go to threshing floor to collect *Khalo* (grain). In later one, *Dalit* provide service related to their caste based occupation (e.g. iron, gold, cloth, and leather or shoemaking) to *Non-Dalit* and even to *Dalit* and in turn, they get remuneration in kind (i.e. *Khalo*).

b) *Rithi System (Pratha)*: *Rithi Pratha* is closely associated with *Khalo Pratha*. *Dalit* think *Non-Dalit* as *Rithi* (or patron) in accordance with caste system and caste hierarchy and *Rithi* provides grain (in the form of *Khalo*) and in turn *Dalit* gives services to *Non-Dalit* such as, black smithy, gold smithy, cobbling or leather work, and tailoring. Now-a-days only poor *Dalit* provides such services for their sustaining livelihoods. It is very similar to patron-client relations.

When family size is large, *Dalit* households are separated among sons/brothers, and they share household property separately. In the mean time, they also divide *Non-Dalit* settlement (on household basis) for *Khalo* and remuneration as property among the brothers. This ways of dividing *Non-Dalit* households are only for their subsistence livelihoods. This practice is being inherited from generation to generation. *Khalo Pratha* is closely associated with *Rithi System* due to its ways of procedure

c) *Balighare System (Pratha)*: *Balighare Pratha* is very similar to *Khalo Pratha*. It is related to mode of payment in caste based occupations of *Dalit*. It is found in Kailali. It seems like patron-client relation. But, *Dalit*, who adopt this occupation, usually do not go to threshing floor as in *Khalo Pratha*. Rather, they visit to each household to get remuneration (or to collect grain).

d) *Pulo System (Pratha)*: *Pulo Pratha* is also very similar to *Khalo* and *Rithi Pratha* But it is different in a sense that mode of payment is done directly as a unhusked *Pulo* crop (i.e. one or two bharis or bundle of paddy) to agricultural labourer in *Khalo Pratha*. It is found in Bajhang district.

e) *Adhiya System (Share Cropping)*: Share cropping itself implies sharing or dividing cost and benefit equally. It is a kind of land tenancy in which people utilize other's land and cost and benefit of crop production is equally divided. It varies from place to place.

Generally land owner (leaser) provides land to poor people (lessee) to cultivate land to produce crop. It is the way by which land poor households can enhance their access to land for utilization. Under share cropping, the cost is fully shared by share cropper except chemical fertilizer and seed. Benefit (product and by-product) are equally divided by land owner and share cropper. In addition, share cropper is supposed to do extra household activities of land owner such as, paddy milling, house cleaning and repairing, disposal of farm yard manure, house cleaning, kitchen garden work, fire wood cutting and collection etc. But, it differs across places, ethnicity, and caste groups etc.

f) *Contract Farming*: Contract farming is latest and a new form of land tenancy in the region in which land owner (lessor) and leasee mutually agree to fix certain amount either in cash or kind regarding benefit (sharing of produce). In this case, leasee has to invest to crop production. Contract is done for one to three years.

g) *Land Mortgage System*: Land mortgage system is land tenancy system in which land owner lease out (rent out) land to lease for relatively longer period of time. Certain quantity of grains is fixed in negotiation of both parties depending upon soil fertility and productivity. In general, written agreement is done and this kind of contract is done on particular auspicious days of certain months (e.g. Shreepanchami in month of January or Nagpanchami in the month of month of June-July. Reason behind this is that it allows both parties to invest cash and land to elsewhere. The land remains under land mortgage (also called *Mate Bandaki*) until land owner return borrowed cash to leasee. Its purpose is of two folds: i) It gives an opportunity to have access to land for only possession for sustaining livelihood (through creating livelihood opportunities); and ii) Land can also be utilized in safety measures in crisis period such as, for medical treatment in case of sickness, educating children, for wedding ceremony, or any other investment. It is a kind of informal way of keeping land as collateral for getting loan.

h) *Daily Wage Labour System*: It is an informal ways of hiring labourer in the farm and off-farm activities. It regulates employment opportunity generated in local level. There is some sort of relation and interaction between the employer and the employee. The wage labour rate is different between men and women.



Accordingly, men get higher wage than women as men are generally considered as physically stronger and they can carry and accomplish relatively heavier tasks.

i) *Caste System and Caste Hierarchy*: Caste as an institution and system, it is hierarchical differentiation of ritual status and it is attributed to dominant ideology of the pure-impure dichotomy (ILO, 2005). Hoefer (2004) mentions that the caste structure is based on Hindu Varna System which divides people into four categories according to their occupational activities viz., the *Brahmin* (learned people, priest), the *Chhetri* (warriors), the *Vaishya* (trader and agriculturist), and the *Sudra* (people in menial services). Originally, it had merely meant the type of work which any one could do but gradually it became a hereditary idea. It is not only basis of social stratification and hierarchy but it is also division of occupation. Consequently, it has greater significance for livelihood.

j) *Kamaiya*: It is a kind of bonded labour system which is characterized by semi-slavery, debt bondage, unfair wage, and physical exploitation and discrimination. Being landless and even homeless, they are bound to adopt traditional system for their subsistence livelihood. It operates as institutions. It is related to Tharu community, one of indigenous people. It is found in five terai districts of Nepal namely, Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur.

k) *Haliya*: It is bonded labour system which fundamentally very similar to *Kamaiya*. It is way of earning and securing their subsistence livelihood. They have some commonality like semi-slavery, debt bondage, physical and psychological exploitation and discrimination. But, it is found in hill origin people especially in *Dalit*. So, they have additional caste based discrimination. Hence, socio-economic factors such as, class, caste and gender (in case of women) operates in determining definite pattern and interaction in society.

Above mentioned informal social institutions have some kinds of relationship (either fostering or hindering) with livelihood options. Few illustrations are presented as below:

Wage labour is an important livelihood option for land poor households and they are paid in kind in the form of *Khalo*. In fact, it is regulated by *Khalo Pratha*. For example, in Doti, people generally work for at least seven days (i.e. 2 days for tillage, 1 day for transplanting, 1 day for weeding, 1 day for harvesting, 1 day for threshing, and 1 day for storage) and they are paid grain in kind equivalent to NRs 150 (about US dollar 2). It is less than usual rate (i.e. NRs 100). It is their compulsion for them to adopt due to lack of productive resource/land (landlessness) and no

availability of other livelihood options in an agrarian society.

Under this *Khalo Pratha*, they are adopting caste based occupation and they have to go to threshing floor (*Khalo*) to collect *Khalo* (grain) at the time of harvest. In fact, they are paid lower wage rate. However, they are not in position to bargain due to lower or no land holding. This system is also called *Balighare Pratha* in Kailali and also in eastern part of Nepal. It seems unfair wage and semi-disguised forms of employment.

*Haliya* and *Kamaiya* are also found and also strongly tied up with livelihood of agricultural labourer. It is characterized by semi-bonded, semi-slavery, unfair wage, economic exploitation and social discrimination. These two institutions appear in society to varying forms and intensity. Basically, *Haliya* and *Kamaiya* are landless and even sometimes they are homeless. Due to dispossession or lack of ownership of resource, they fall at bottom of agrarian structure and they look vulnerable to ensure their basic need and livelihood. Along with this structural cause, caste system makes them weaker as mentioned before.

Share cropping is also considered as a source of livelihood and it ensures food sufficiency for 2-6 months depending upon family size. Being land poor households, they have to rent in master's land and they are supposed to undertake extra household's work as mentioned earlier. If they do not follow master's instruction, there are possibilities of ad hoc eviction from share cropping and it may lead to loss of livelihood. Under *Adhiya* system, they have to do hard work for their livelihood. But, they are not getting good economic return. Rather, they are highly tied up with land owners. Due to unavailability of any other viable livelihood options, their whole socio-political affairs are controlled by land owners despite their interest and preferences. Furthermore, it is interesting to note women headed households are considered physically weak and are not preferred to get such livelihood options (share cropping). It is only due to gender differences especially patriarchal norms and practices. They do not keep bullock or oxen to plough and women are also not allowed to plough culturally. Despite these, women's engagement is more in land owner's household. They have to provide additional services to household spheres like cleaning houses, washing kitchen utensils, working at *Bari*/kitchen garden to please their masters.

*Khalo Pratha*, *Haliya Pratha*, *Adhiya* system does not seem only contributing livelihood of land poor households, but these are also social institutions that shape lives of land poor households. There is also a kind of influence and control over those landless

households by land rich households. Landless households seem suffering from unfair payment i.e. partially paid and under employment. In fact, it is against their interest. Furthermore, it is also noticed that share cropping does not seem gender friendly because women headed households (de facto) are not preferred to provide access to land for share cropping. In same line, studies undertaken by Khan and Maan (2008), and Siegmann and Sadaf (2006) in Pakistan also indicated that lack of ownership makes women powerless and affects women's further empowerment. As land is a structural variable, land holding pattern creates social structure and landless households are always at bottom and they are supposed to undertake various activities for their livelihood (also termed as livelihood options) despite their interest and satisfaction. Based on such structure, these institutions are being regulated.

## DISCUSSION

Being an agrarian society, land based livelihood options are prevalent in Nepal. However, land poor households are devoid of such productive assets and hence, they are dependent on subsistence agriculture in different ways and forms. Those land poor households do enhance their access to land by share cropping, land mortgage (*Mate Bandaki*), contract farming etc. In addition, they also work as agricultural wage labourer in farming.

The land poor households cannot get employment in farming around the year, and they also do wage earning in non-agricultural sectors like building and road constructions. But these opportunities are severely limited in rural areas. People, who reside nearby forest also cut and sell firewood and timber for earning their livelihoods. In addition to this, migration to city centre of Nepal and different parts of India is also common in Far Western Region. It has become the most important economic support to this region.

As explained earlier, migration to India is an important livelihood strategy due to two reasons: i) agricultural production is insufficient; and ii) an absence of other viable alternative sources of income. They cope with these conditions with remittances (Solvía *et al.*, 2003). They work there as watchmen in a colony or *bazzar*, and women and children work there as housekeepers. Migration to India is closely related to indebtedness of people. This earning from India is first used for paying debts and then spent for livelihood.

*Dalit* people, who have their skills on caste based occupations like black smithy, gold smithy, tailoring and leather work, provide services to *Non-Dalit* and *Dalit* clients. In turn, they are paid in kind or cash

depending on situation and system. Hence they are adopting such livelihood options under *Khalo Pratha*. Research done by Solvia *et al.* (2003), and Dahal *et al.* (2002) also found that discriminated situation of women and *Dalit* are problematical. Landlessness, marginal and small land holding, and food deficiency for more than six months are typical economic features of *Dalit* in Nepal. Their livelihood strategies are controlled through traditional institutions, and clientele system. A traditional patron-client relation still exists between *Dalit* and *Non-Dalit*.

Aforesaid livelihood options do not exist in isolation. These are regulated by informal social institutions such as share cropping, land mortgage system, contract farming, *Khalo Pratha*, and *Haliya Pratha*. Land poor household's livelihoods are highly shaped, and regulated, by these social institutions and structural constraints. Those people do not have greater influence and control in the process and they are bound to face exploitation and discrimination done by land owners. Though share cropping mechanism evolves around principle of mutual interest, the power relation between land owner and share cropper appear in different forms. It is because of agrarian structure determined by land holding pattern or land ownership. In this regard, Sen (1981) also argues that devoid of land entitlement makes them to fall under trap of poverty and also brings various socio-economic deprivations. Aforementioned various cases also depict existence of multidimensional inequality i.e. caste and gender (Khan and Maan, 2008). Such membership restricts the deprived from accessing livelihood options and opportunities existing in society. In reference to caste membership, Müller-Böker (1986), through her article entitled 'Interpretation of Cadastral Maps and Land Registers- Examples from Kathmandu Valley and Gorkha' states that all *Birta* land is granted to high castes people i.e. Chhetri, Thakuri and Brahmin. All other castes are excluded from receiving *Birta* land. It is also observed that absolute majority of land lords are from those higher castes. Hence, this social hierarchies and caste system are endorsed by possession and ownership structure of land.

Formal and informal institutions (understood here as rules of game) (North, 1990; Eniminger, 1997; Solvia *et al.*, 2003) are crucial in influencing rural people's livelihood strategies. There were various local institutions, namely, *Riti Bhagya* system, *Nalo Khane*, *Dhin Dhengi*, *Haliya*, *Padima*, *Rin Khane*, *Mate* (Cameron, 1997; Solvia *et al.*, 2003). By virtue of ways of employing and modes of payment, these institutions seem possessing of feudal characteristics. In same trend, Byres (2009) noted that, under feudalism, peasantry is viewed as a single class. All sections of



peasantry have in servile condition i.e., tied to the land, subject to an array of feudal restriction, with surplus appropriated via extra economic coercion. In feudalism, there are subject to increase exploitation. That bound together them in hostile conflict against feudal lords. In analysis of differentiation of the peasantry, there are three strata i.e. rich peasantry, middle peasantry and a poor peasantry. Rich peasantry hire labour especially at peak season and this is from absolutely landless peasants. There is possibility of class struggle within peasants (rich and poor peasants).

Scoones and Wolmer (2003) have given emphasis on poor people's livelihood in which there is complex institutional arrangement and key relationship between livelihood, power and politics. Scoones (2009) also argues that poor people's livelihood is very complex that one should be able to understand locally embedded context and place based analysis. Therefore, it is essential to rethink, retool and reengage, and draw productively from other sources of inquiry and experience to enrich and reinvigorate livelihood perspectives for new contemporary challenges. Based on this critical perspective, livelihood option has interwoven structural and complex relationship with prevailing and existing (aforesaid) social institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, we would like to state the key role of social institutions (formal and informal) to shape and re-shape livelihood options as given by Scoones (1998) and Davies (1997):

"Institutions may be formal and informal, often fluid and ambiguous, in different forms. Power relations are embedded within institutions forms, making contestation over institutional practices, rules and norms always important. Institutions are also dynamic, continually being shaped and reshaped over time" (Scoones, 1998).

"Institutions are social cement which link stakeholders to access to capital of different kinds to the means of exercising power and so define the gateways through which they pass on the route to positive or negative (livelihood) adaption" (Davies, 1997).

Aforesaid empirical observations are in line with above quoted statements. Hence, informal institutions look discriminatory and exploitative. Accordingly, it restricts or constraints accessibility of livelihood resources and respective livelihood options. It has negative effect on an ability of an individual or household to pursue availability of livelihood options. During possible combination and trade off among access to resources,

institutions (social norms or rules of game) and livelihood outcome, social relationship, institutional forms and structure (formal and informal) and power dynamics appears in different forms and intensity such as unfair wage, disguised forms of employment, socioeconomic exploitation, debt trap etc

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